

# Playing Publicly

Public-Commercial Collaboration and the Future of Public Service Media

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## ABSTRACT

As younger audiences increasingly gravitate toward interactive, platform-native environments, public service media (PSM) face a mounting challenge: how to remain visible, relevant, and valuable in cultural spaces dominated by commercial infrastructures. Among the most significant of these are gaming platforms (GPs) such as Roblox and Fortnite - systems that are not only among the most widely used media platforms globally but also sites of participatory culture, social interaction, and identity formation. This thesis investigates how European PSM engage with GPs to create new forms of public value and examines the strategic, institutional, and legal tensions that shape this engagement.

While gaming has historically been marginalized in public media discourse, it now presents both a threat and an opportunity. This research responds to an understudied intersection of public media studies, platformization, and game studies by asking: How do public service media leverage gaming platforms to create public value, and what structural tensions shape this process? To address this question, the study adopts a qualitative, interview-based methodology grounded in Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) multidimensional public value framework. Ten semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with practitioners from public broadcasters, game developers, legal experts, and media strategists across Europe. Thematic analysis was used to map institutional logics, strategic rationales, and barriers to platform-native innovation.

The findings reveal that PSM initiatives on GPs are more prevalent than expected, driven largely by the imperative to engage younger, digitally fluent audiences. Yet these efforts remain fragmented, short-term, and often misaligned with the affordances and expectations of gaming platforms. Key structural constraints include legislative fragmentation, risk-averse funding cultures, and internal skepticism about gaming's legitimacy as a public service format. Particularly salient is a tension between outcome achievement and trust and legitimacy: while PSM seek to expand reach and relevance, they remain wary of compromising editorial autonomy through partnerships with commercial platforms. Audiences, meanwhile, increasingly question the legitimacy of institutions that fail to appear in the cultural spaces they inhabit.

Still, the study also identifies signs of institutional adaptation and collaborative experimentation. The Eurovision activation on Roblox, co-funded by nine public broadcasters, exemplifies the potential for cross-border innovation - even as it exposes the fragility of such efforts in the absence of structural support. More broadly, the findings suggest that GPs can serve as testbeds for reimagining public service in participatory, data-driven, and transnational contexts.

This thesis argues that the future legitimacy of PSM will hinge on their ability not only to participate in emerging cultural infrastructures, but to shape them through ethically grounded, platform-native interventions.

**KEYWORDS:** *Public Service Media, Gaming Platforms, Public Value, Media Innovation, Platformization*

## Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical Framework.....	3
2.1 The Transition from Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media.....	3
2.2 Public Value as a Framework for Evaluating PSM Initiatives.....	4
2.3 Considerations for Incorporating Video Games into PSM.....	6
2.4 Platformization.....	8
2.4.1 Platformization and the Gaming Industry.....	9
2.5 Platform Dependence.....	11
2.6 AI in the Gaming Industry.....	12
2.7 Strategic Tensions in Public Value Creation.....	13
3. Research Design and Methods.....	14
3.1 Research Design.....	14
3.2 Validity and Reliability.....	15
3.3 Expert Selection.....	16
3.4 Data Collection Process.....	17
3.5 Operationalization.....	18
3.6 Data Analysis.....	18
3.7 Researcher Positionality.....	20
3.8 Ethical Considerations.....	20
4. Results.....	22
4.1 Responding to Platformization and Audience Shifts.....	23
4.1.1 Generational Change and the Rise of Interactive Media.....	23
4.1.2 Gaming as a Strategic Imperative for PSM.....	24
4.2 Strategic Experimentation and Early Integration.....	25
4.2.1 Platform-Based Activation and Commissioning Practices.....	26
4.2.2 Proprietary Development and Internal Infrastructure.....	27

4.2.3 Public Value Through Engagement.....	28
4.3 Constraints on Institutionalization.....	29
4.3.1 Overcoming Organizational Resistance and Legacy Attitudes.....	29
4.3.2 Dealing with Resource Constraints and Investment Risk.....	30
4.3.3 Navigating the Complex Landscape of Legal Fragmentation and Regulatory Ambiguity.....	31
4.4 Collaborative and Ethical Pathways Forward.....	33
4.4.1 National and International Collaboration.....	33
4.4.2 Navigating Platform Logics and Commercial Norms.....	35
4.4.3 Designing for Ethical and Accessible Engagement.....	37
4.5 The Future of PSM in Gaming.....	39
4.5.1 Preconditions for Meaningful Engagement.....	39
4.5.2 The Potential of Games as Public Value Carriers.....	41
5. Discussion and Conclusion.....	44
5.1 Revisiting the Research Question.....	44
5.2 Patterns of Engagement: Motivations, Constraints, and Strategies.....	44
5.3 Strategic Tensions in Public Value Creation.....	45
5.4 Institutional Blind Spots and Platform Logics.....	46
5.5 The Role of Collaboration.....	48
5.6 Future-Proofing PSM.....	49
5.7 Limitations and Future Research.....	50
5.8 Concluding Remarks.....	51
References.....	53
Appendix A.....	58

# 1. Introduction

As younger generations increasingly spend their time in interactive, platform-mediated environments, public service media (PSM) face an existential challenge: how to remain visible, relevant, and valuable in spaces that were not designed for them.

With digital consumption habits shifting away from linear media formats, video games have evolved from a niche hobby into a dominant cultural and economic force. With over three billion users worldwide (Bankhurst, 2020), with nine of the ten largest gaming markets located in European Broadcasting Union (EBU) member states (Newzoo, n.d.), they are not only among the most popular forms of entertainment but also one of the most influential modes of storytelling, socialization, and meaning-making in contemporary society.

This thesis explores how PSM across Europe engage with gaming platforms (GPs) to create new forms of public value. While PSM have long played a central role in promoting civic cohesion, cultural diversity, and educational access, their traditional modes of operation - rooted in linear, supply-driven broadcasting - are poorly suited to the affordances and logics of interactive digital platforms. GPs such as Roblox and Fortnite are not just content hosts but complex socio-technical infrastructures that reward co-creation, persistence, and platform-native engagement. These affordances both enable and constrain public service innovation, raising fundamental questions about editorial autonomy, institutional legitimacy, and audience trust.

Although isolated cases of PSM experimentation with games exist, there remains little academic research on how these efforts are strategically framed, operationally executed, or evaluated through the lens of public value. Much of the existing literature focuses on educational games or gamification within public institutions, overlooking the platform-mediated, commercially dominated environments in which gaming now unfolds. Moreover, public value itself remains a contested and multidimensional concept - especially in relation to emerging technologies. This thesis responds to that gap by applying Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) public value framework to interrogate the tensions, trade-offs, and institutional frictions that characterize PSM efforts to engage with GPs.

Situated at the intersection of media governance, platform studies, and cultural policy, this study investigates the motivations, strategies, and constraints of European PSM organizations as they navigate gaming spaces. Based on a series of expert interviews, the thesis identifies key barriers to innovation, including legislative fragmentation, internal biases, and infrastructural dependency. At the same time, it highlights emerging forms of cross-border collaboration and a growing recognition within

PSM systems that gaming is not merely a promotional tool but a legitimate site of public service intervention.

By critically analyzing how public value is imagined, negotiated, and operationalized on gaming platforms, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates about the future of PSM in a platformized media ecology, following the central research question: How do public service media leverage gaming platforms to create new forms of public value?

The research offers both theoretical insights and practical recommendations, contributing to broader discussions on the future of PSM in an interactive digital landscape.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 The Transition from Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media**

In a media landscape marked by the rapid decline of linear media consumption and the widespread adoption of on-demand entertainment, public service broadcasters (PSBs) have been compelled to restructure and adapt to new forces shaping the industry. Since the mid-2000s, PSBs have been undergoing a transition towards PSM. Bardoel and Lowe (2007) argue that this transition necessitates a shift from a supply-driven (push) model to a demand-driven (pull) model (p.17). This shift repositions the audience as active partners rather than passive recipients of content. As evidenced by the Swiss referendum on broadcasting contributions (Stadler, 2018), public broadcasters are still widely valued for their role in supporting underrepresented content, including regional programming and minority representation. The challenge for PSM lies in balancing public demand with their obligation to represent diverse voices, even when demand-driven models might not naturally prioritize minority interests.

Since the rise of commercial broadcasters in the 1980s, the legitimacy and efficiency of PSB - and later PSM - have been questioned by commercial entities and politicians (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018). PSM are either criticized for market distortion due to excessive success or for inefficient use of funds resulting in limited reach. Despite these critiques, public referendums, such as the 2018 Swiss vote, have reaffirmed the relevance of public broadcasters, particularly in their role as providers of politically and socially significant news. However, these referendums have also signaled the necessity for PSBs to adapt to modern consumption habits, including a reduced focus on traditional radio and television channels and an increased presence in digital spaces (Tieschky, 2018). This aligns with Bardoel and Lowe's (2007) assertion that renewing the public service ethos is essential for justifying the continued existence of PSM (p.14).

The EBU - the world's largest alliance of PSM - echoes this view, acknowledging that PSM remits must be contextualized nationally but suggesting four guiding principles to anchor the debate across member states (Figure 1): breadth, platform neutrality, future-proofness, and impartiality (Burnley, 2017, p.5).

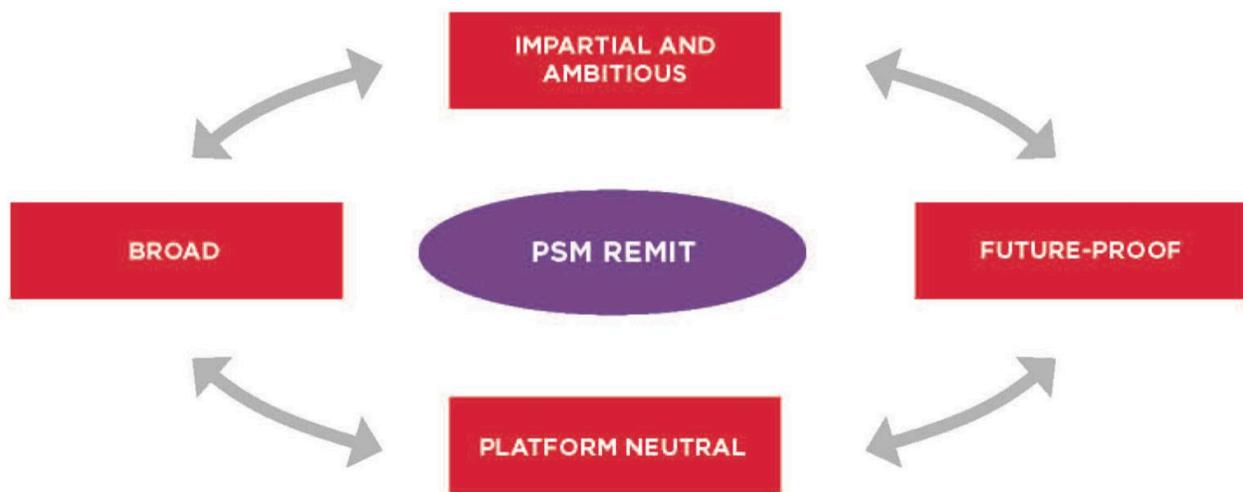
According to the EBU, breadth refers to the range of content genres delivered to “inform, educate and entertain” the public. Platform neutrality refers to the constant accessibility of content on all common platforms. By future-proof the EBU means the ability to innovate and adapt to market

dynamics. Lastly, impartial and ambitious refers to PSM as a source of quality content and impartial information.

These principles underscore the need for PSM to be accessible, pluralistic, and forward-looking - attributes increasingly associated with digital and interactive media spaces. Thus, the shift from PSB to PSM lays the institutional foundation for experimenting with new forms of public value creation, including engagement on gaming platforms.

**Figure 1**

*The EBU's four PSM remit principles for a cohesive debate at the national level.*



**2.2 Public Value as a Framework for Evaluating PSM Initiatives**

The shift from PSB to PSM entails more than a change in platforms or formats, but rather reflects a deeper institutional negotiation over the continued relevance, legitimacy, and utility of public media in a platformized society. To assess whether PSM can successfully navigate this transition, this thesis employs public value as an evaluative and analytical framework.

Public value offers a societal perspective on organizational purpose. Rather than focusing on internal performance metrics or commercial success, it emphasizes the extent to which institutions serve the collective interests of the public. Crucially, it is not a fixed or universal concept, but one shaped by cultural, political, and technological contexts. As Meynhardt (2019) argues, public value is

“rooted in shared experience,” generated through continuous interaction between institutions and the societies they serve (in Lindgreen et al., 2019, pp. 5–14).

This processual nature makes public value particularly well-suited for analyzing PSM in dynamic and underexplored domains - such as gaming. Since the public service remit is increasingly being renegotiated in relation to digital habits and expectations, a framework that accounts for negotiation, plurality, and evolving legitimacy is required. This is reflected in the EBU’s four PSM remit principles by acknowledging the necessity to keep PSM future-proof through innovation. If audiences increasingly engage with interactive entertainment, PSM can only fulfill their public service mandate by actively participating in the production and distribution of interactive media.

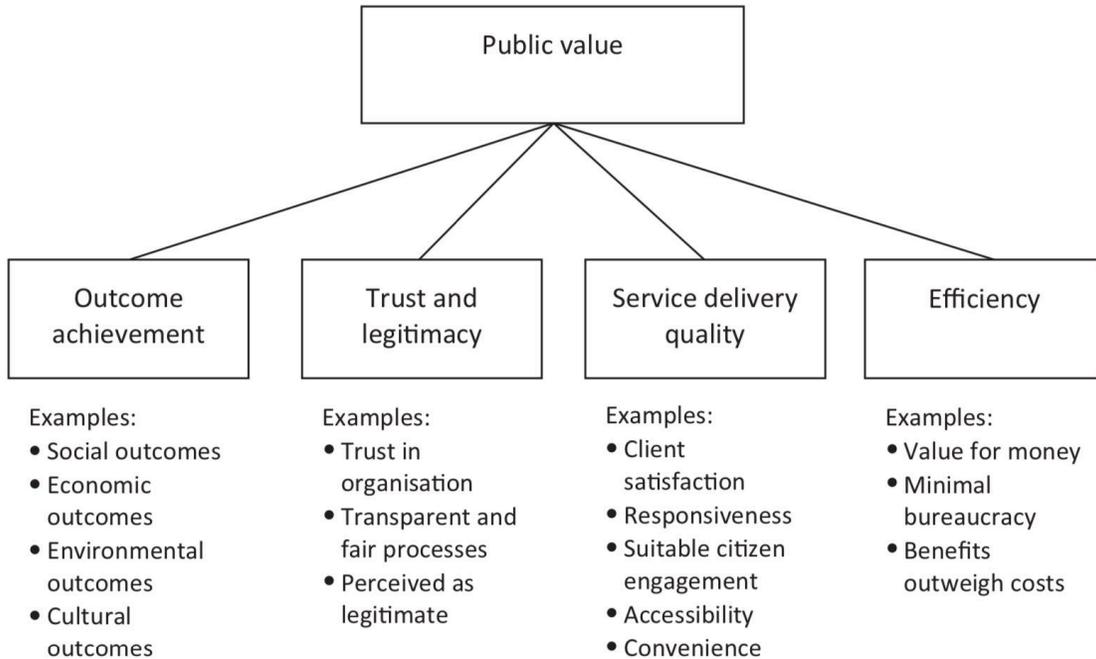
Assessing the success of a public service initiative is inherently complex due to the abstract and context-dependent nature of public value. Various methodologies have been proposed to evaluate public value contributions. One such approach is the Public Value Scorecard (PVSC), introduced by Meynhardt (2019) as a management tool to help organizations measure their societal impact from a public value perspective (in Lindgreen et al., 2019, p.14). The PVSC is structured around five key questions that guide organizations in assessing their contributions to society, focusing on usefulness, decency, political acceptability, positive experiences, and profitability (p.15).

Similarly, the British government uses a framework consisting of four pillars to assess public value (HM Treasury, 2019, p.9). The pillars proposed by the British government consist of questions revolving around the pursuit of goals, the management of inputs, user and citizen engagement, or the development of system capacity. The disparity between the PVSC and the British government alone demonstrates how much the different evaluation approaches vary.

Given the challenges posed by fragmented and incompatible measurement systems, scholars have attempted to establish integrative frameworks for public value assessments. To structure this analysis, the thesis adopts the framework proposed by Faulkner and Kaufman (2017), who identify four interdependent dimensions through which public value can be empirically assessed (Figure 2) (p.77). The four dimensions are outcome achievement, trust and legitimacy, service quality, and efficiency. Outcome achievement revolves around the question whether an initiative achieves its intended societal goal, such as education, inclusion, or cultural enrichment. Trust and legitimacy observes the degree to which the initiative maintains public trust and institutional credibility. Service quality focuses on meaningful, engaging, and user-relevant experiences. Lastly, efficiency observes the way in which a delivery makes prudent use of public resources.

**Figure 2**

*Faulkner and Kaufman's four dimensions of public value.*



These dimensions provide an analytical lens through which the following sections will be critically examined. Each trend introduces new opportunities and tensions for public value creation. For example, while gaming platforms may enhance audience reach (outcome achievement), they may simultaneously compromise editorial autonomy (trust and legitimacy), or introduce new cost structures (efficiency).

By foregrounding public value in this way, the framework does not simply evaluate whether PSM should engage with gaming, but probes how such engagement aligns, or clashes, with their core mandate. This forward-facing model ensures that the remainder of the theoretical framework is not merely descriptive, but grounded in a normative, operationalizable structure of public service obligations.

## 2.3 Considerations for Incorporating Video Games into PSM

As PSM shift towards a more demand-driven model, they must also reassess contemporary media consumption patterns to stay future-proof. Younger generations are increasingly shifting towards more interactive, non-linear types of media, including video games. Although it is difficult to pin-point developments to specific generations, a gradual shift in media consumption habits was documented by Twenge et al. (2019) in the evaluation of long-term studies measuring media consumption habits of adolescents across the U.S. from 1976 to 2016 (p.335). Unsurprisingly, the report shows a clear decline in the consumption of legacy media, such as linear television and magazines, and a stark increase in the consumption of digital media (pp.330-331). Since being measured in 2008, time spent by adolescents playing video games had increased by 58.8% until 2016, whereas time spent watching linear television had decreased by 17.3% in the same time period, and by 26.8% since 1991.

A stark incline was also noted in the use of social media. While 53.7% of adolescents reported to use social media almost every day in 2009, that number rose to 80% in 2016.

These observations are highly relevant as media consumption patterns are mainly determined during childhood and adolescence and remain stable throughout one's life (Laor & Galily, 2022, p.3). This is, in part, due to the element of "Fresh Contact", which describes the consumption preference towards the type of media popular during the consumer's childhood and adolescence, leading to each generation consuming more of the medium with which it grew up (p.7). Therefore, interactive media, such as video games, are likely to increase in relevance over time.

PSM have seemingly understood the relevance of social media and have not only expanded their presence to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, but have adapted their content to native formats of social media platforms in order to more effectively appeal to users (Hendrickx, 2023, p.1810). Such formats include short video segments (p.1811) as well as live video streaming formats popular on platforms like twitch (Müthing & Severin, 2025; Tagesschau, 2024), a streaming platform primarily used for streaming video game content.

While the adoption of social media has occurred seamlessly and comparatively swift, the shift towards more interactive media has been rather slow. Yet, given that PSM function as mediators between societal demand and commercial interests, it would be a strategic misstep to overlook these evolving consumption habits, especially in light of the rapidly rising number of gamers. As of 2020, there were reportedly more than 3 billion gamers engaging in some kind of gaming on a regular basis (Bankhurst, 2020), with nine of the ten largest national gaming markets by gaming revenue represented within the EBU and its associate members (EBU, n.d.; Newzoo, n.d.). To maintain their role as relevant

public service communicators, PSM must stay attuned to these trends and integrate interactive formats into their offerings, also to adhere to the PSM remit principle of platform neutrality.

From a public value perspective, the integration of video games into PSM strategies directly engages all four dimensions of Faulkner and Kaufman’s framework. The shift in youth consumption habits foregrounds the need for outcome achievement: if PSM fail to reach younger audiences in their preferred media environments, they risk losing long-term societal relevance. At the same time, the immersive and participatory nature of games holds promise for delivering high service quality, offering more engaging and user-centric experiences than traditional linear formats. There are precedents of PSM initiatives utilizing games and their affordances (GreenGuardiansVR, n.d.), but these potentials are constrained by significant efficiency challenges - namely, the high development costs and limited institutional capacity of PSM to produce games at scale. From production to marketing, developing a blockbuster title can easily cost hundreds of millions of dollars (Tassi, 2023; Totilo, 2023; Totilo, 2025), dwarfing the annual budget of some PSM. Finally, the cautious approach many PSM adopt reflects concern over trust and legitimacy: entering a commercially saturated and entertainment-driven space like gaming may raise questions about mission drift or the dilution of public service values. These tensions underscore why gaming must be treated not merely as a format shift, but as a strategic question of how PSM can uphold their remit within evolving digital cultures.

A possible solution to this issue could be the utilization of gaming platforms (GPs) like Fortnite or Roblox. To better understand the emergence and affordances of GPs, it is important to look at the cross-sector industry trend that gave rise to the phenomenon. Platformization.

## **2.4 Platformization**

Platformization has reshaped the digital media landscape, with platforms emerging as dominant intermediaries in content distribution. Poell et al. (2021) define platforms as “data infrastructures that facilitate, aggregate, monetize, and govern interactions between end-users and content/service providers” (p.5). Unlike traditional media organizations, platforms do not primarily produce content but serve as facilitators, leveraging network effects to attract users and content creators alike (Hendrikse et al., 2022, p.63; Nieborg et al., 2022, p.35).

The expansion of platforms has led to the platformization of various industries, resulting in increasingly centralized digital ecosystems controlled by private corporations (Nieborg et al., 2022, p.44). PSM have already responded to this shift in the video streaming sector, exemplified by

Germany's ARD and ZDF launching a joint streaming service to compete with commercial platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video (ARD, 2023).

However, major technology firms have recognized that the future of media extends beyond streaming. In 2018, Netflix explicitly identified Fortnite as a key competitor, stating that they “compete with (and lose to) Fortnite more than HBO” (Netflix, 2019, as cited in Gómez-García et al., 2023, p.1). This recognition led to the launch of Netflix Games in 2022 (de Zilwa, 2023, p.411), while Apple introduced Apple Arcade to integrate gaming into its ecosystem (Siahaan, 2023, p.47). Disney already has a rather extensive history of missteps in the gaming industry (Clark, 2016), but has announced a new deal in early 2024 to collaborate on a shared gaming ecosystem with game developer Epic Games (Bloom, 2024; Disney, 2024). The deal looks to combine Epic Games' development expertise with Disney's rich cosmos of IPs.

#### **2.4.1 Platformization and the Gaming Industry**

Not only have recent years seen companies traditionally outside game development enter the market with platform-based services, platformization has also fundamentally altered game production, from development to distribution. Game development has traditionally followed certain production logics, mainly publishing logic (Kerr, 2017, p.68), where game publishers have acted as gatekeepers, similar to film studios and music labels, limiting support and distribution to games deemed financially viable. Technological progression has lowered barriers to entry, allowing Indie and DIY developers to bypass large publishers (Keogh, 2015, p.). This has led to a resurgence of DIY and Indie games, diversifying the gaming landscape. Simultaneously, long-standing digital distribution services like Steam have transformed into fully-fledged social and interactive platforms, incorporating trading, modding, and user-generated content (UGC) (Thorhauge, 2024, p.1964). These changes have constituted a gradual shift in the industry, away from the traditional publishing logic to the emerging platform logic. Kerr (2017) argues that platform logic is reshaping the industry by shifting away from one-time game sales toward ongoing content distribution and engagement models (p.78). This is evidenced by season passes and the introduction of new subscription based distribution services like the Microsoft GamePass (Singer & D'Angelo, 2020, p.2). Although gaming is inherently ill-suited for such subscription based distribution models due to the high development costs, these developments have moved UGC to the center of game development and of the gaming industry.

The focus on UGC is especially evident in gaming platforms (GPs) like Roblox, Minecraft, and Fortnite. Similar to platforms like YouTube, GPs are heavily reliant on networking effects initiated

through UGC, facilitating interactions between and within gaming communities and content creators. GPs offer simplified and modular development tools embedded in the main game (Garst, 2023). These tools resemble Unreal Engine 5 (UE5) and Unity, but are less technical, resulting in mainstream accessibility to game and level design. The simplicity of the tools allows all users to create, share, and play mini games with other players, earning GPs the title of “YouTube of gaming” (Garst, 2023; Singer & D’Angelo, 2020, p.5). As this development unfolds, GPs like Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft have resurfaced with player numbers in the millions.

Furthermore, Roblox and Fortnite added enterprise features throughout past years, allowing for the creation of branded metaverse experiences (Blackwood, 2023; Cucco, 2022; Lee, 2024), and marking the beginning of the platforms’ transition into metaverse platforms (MPs). The metaverse is a “post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multiuser environment merging physical reality with digital virtuality” (Mystakidis, 2022, p.1). While most people think about Meta’s own MP Meta Horizon, other platforms, like Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft are, in fact, much more developed than the Meta platform, but are often overlooked as MPs as their origins lay in gaming. For that reason, and to emphasize the focus on gaming related features of these platforms, the thesis will continue to refer to such platforms as GPs, whilst acknowledging current developments. Yet, while GPs are evolving into metaverse platforms, the continued use of the term ‘gaming platforms’ in this thesis reflects their core functionality, which remains rooted in game-based interaction.

In contrast to traditional game development, developing content for GPs does not require elaborate production pipelines due to the simplicity of built-in creation tools, allowing for the modular assembly of levels. With such low barriers to entry, PSM could utilize such development tools and leverage GPs and their reach to engage with gaming communities. A precedent for this approach can be found in KRO-NCRV’s Roblox initiative, demonstrating that gaming platforms can serve as viable distribution channels for public service content (KRO-NCRV, 2024). Such projects illustrate how PSM can harness gaming environments to engage younger audiences and uphold their public service mandates in an increasingly interactive digital landscape, serving the PSM remit principle of platform neutrality.

Platformization fundamentally reshapes the conditions under which PSM can create public value. On one hand, gaming platforms such as Roblox and Fortnite offer access to vast user bases and lower barriers to content creation through built-in development tools, enhancing both outcome achievement and efficiency. By leveraging existing infrastructures, PSM can distribute interactive content more broadly and cost-effectively. However, this comes at the cost of trust and legitimacy, as

PSM become dependent on commercial platforms whose algorithms, monetization logics, and content moderation practices are opaque and profit-driven. Moreover, the user-driven design and engagement incentives of these platforms raise questions about service quality, particularly in terms of editorial standards, accessibility, and long-term user value.

While platformization offers new modes of distribution, it simultaneously threatens to erode the distinctiveness of public service content if not critically managed. Thus, navigating platform logics requires a careful balance between reach, integrity, and institutional autonomy. Furthermore, while GPs may offer a viable pathway for PSM to reach audiences in interactive environments, their integration into public service strategies raises critical concerns about platform dependence and content sovereignty.

## **2.5 Platform Dependence**

Adopting GPs, however, comes with risks and uncertainties. Leveraging GPs would mean conceding ownership over the gaming infrastructure and, ultimately, the created gaming experiences. Further, all prominent GPs are currently owned and operated by U.S. companies, leaving their operability vulnerable to commercial and national interest. As seen with the example of DeepSeek and TikTok, seemingly independent commercial actors can be easily instrumentalized to further national interest (Rhoden-Paul, 2025; Roeloffs, 2025). Granting tech firms unprecedented influence over the type of content consumers are exposed to (Stowell, 2024), subjecting platform users to opaque algorithms and platform policies.

For that same reason, however, the integration of public service content into GPs is not merely an opportunity but a legal necessity. Rodríguez-Castro et al. (2023) argue that public intervention in digital media environments is crucial for maintaining media pluralism and ensuring democratic access to content (p.439). Further, PSM can utilize game engines to build their own platforms.

Alternatively, PSM may be able to establish public-commercial partnerships and operate GPs as white label platforms. PSM could develop a platform, similar to Roblox and Fortnite, which could then be used for all PSM projects. This could happen in the form of an EBU collaboration, reducing costs for developing partners. For social media, many PSM have already suggested the development of a PSM algorithm to suggest content that would otherwise not be pushed by an attention driven algorithm. This would enhance content and external plurality, furthering the PSM remit principles breadth, and impartiality and ambitiousness. It would further grant PSM access to the functionalities and capabilities of GPs without being dependent on commercial servers.

Platform dependence intensifies the structural tensions between public service values and commercial infrastructure. While platforms offer scalable reach and operational efficiency - thus supporting the efficiency and outcome achievement dimensions - they simultaneously compromise trust and legitimacy. Reliance on privately governed, often foreign-owned platforms subjects PSM to opaque algorithmic governance, content moderation standards misaligned with public service ethics, and potential vulnerabilities to political or commercial manipulation. This erodes institutional independence and undermines editorial sovereignty, which are core to maintaining public trust. At the same time, limited control over user experience and data flows challenges service quality, especially when public content must compete with entertainment-driven or algorithmically optimized alternatives. Proposals for white-label platforms or EBU-wide collaborations signal an awareness of these trade-offs and the need to reassert public infrastructure within the digital ecosystem. Ultimately, platform dependence is not just a technical constraint - it is a governance dilemma that cuts to the core of what it means to serve the public in a platformized environment.

## **2.6 AI in the Gaming Industry**

The effects of platformization are enhanced by technological progress, especially developments in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). AI and the video game industry are historically closely intertwined. The relationship started in the 1980s with the release of the arcade game Pong and has since developed into a symbiotic relationship. While video games have benefitted off of the developments in AI by gaining access to increasingly sophisticated artificial opponents, video games have served as a testbed for AI by offering simulated real-life scenarios (Togelius, 2016, pp.6-7). Recent developments in AI have allowed for the technology to leave behind its mechanical function and be utilized in the development of video games, mainly in the form of procedurally generated content (PCG) (Cairns, 2023). While this has sparked outrage among artists and actors, raising questions concerning intellectual property rights (Dinsdale, 2023), it also means that video game production has become much more accessible and affordable, requiring fewer resources and smaller production teams.

Ultimately, the integration of AI into game development presents both opportunities and challenges for public value creation. On the one hand, AI-driven tools - particularly in PCG - can significantly enhance efficiency by reducing production costs and enabling smaller teams to create complex, interactive experiences. This technological leverage may lower entry barriers for PSM and support broader outcome achievement, especially when AI enables content personalization or the rapid

adaptation of educational formats. However, these benefits are tempered by unresolved questions around trust and legitimacy. The use of AI in creative processes raises ethical concerns about transparency, labor displacement, and intellectual property, which can conflict with the normative expectations placed on publicly funded institutions. Furthermore, while AI may support scalability, it does not guarantee service quality. PCG or AI-assisted content risks feeling generic or lacking in cultural specificity, which are central to PSM's mandate. As such, the adoption of AI must be accompanied by critical governance mechanisms that align technological innovation with public service ethics.

## **2.7 Strategic Tensions in Public Value Creation**

The preceding sections have demonstrated that while GPs offer promising avenues for PSM to fulfill their remit in a digital, interactive media environment, they also introduce significant tensions across the four dimensions of public value. Platformization and AI-driven development can enhance efficiency and enable greater outcome achievement by expanding reach and reducing production costs. Simultaneously, the participatory affordances of gaming platforms hold the potential to improve service quality, fostering engagement through co-creation and interactive storytelling.

Yet, these benefits are counterbalanced by risks to trust and legitimacy, as PSM become entangled in infrastructures governed by commercial interests and opaque algorithmic systems. Moreover, tensions between dimensions frequently emerge - efficiency gains may compromise editorial control; outcome achievement may demand engagement strategies that clash with traditional content standards; and trust-building efforts may slow innovation.

These tensions are not merely theoretical - they shape the strategic decisions PSM must navigate as they seek to maintain relevance in a rapidly evolving media ecosystem. By applying Faulkner and Kaufman's multidimensional framework, this thesis not only identifies these tensions but uses them to guide its empirical investigation. The following chapter outlines the qualitative research design through which these dynamics are explored, drawing on expert insights from across the public service and gaming sectors to assess how PSM can operationalize public value on interactive platforms.

### **3. Research Design and Methods**

Building on the theoretical foundation outlined in the previous chapter, this study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how PSM navigate the challenges and opportunities of public value creation on gaming platforms. Guided by Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) multidimensional framework, the research seeks to understand how PSM actors interpret, prioritize, and operationalize the four dimensions of public value - outcome achievement, trust and legitimacy, service quality, and efficiency - within the constraints of platformized and interactive media environments. The following sections detail the rationale for this approach, the sampling strategy, and the analytical procedures employed to ensure methodological rigor and conceptual alignment.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To access this multidimensional perspective, the study relies on semi-structured expert interviews. Expert interviews enable access to rich, detailed, and practice-based knowledge “that is otherwise difficult to generate” (van Audenhove & Donders, 2019, p.182). Given the exploratory nature of the research and the limited academic work on the intersection of PSM and gaming platforms, expert interviews with both internal PSM stakeholders and external industry experts provide an appropriate empirical entry point, offering context-rich insights into institutional strategies, technological affordances, and normative trade-offs.

In-depth interviews are particularly well-suited for this purpose, as they allow the researcher to adopt the role of a student seeking to understand the informant's expertise (Johnson, 2011, p.5). The selected experts possess specific forms of knowledge - namely process knowledge and context knowledge - that cannot be easily accessed through other data collection methods (van Audenhove & Donders, 2019, pp.183-185). Process knowledge refers to insights into industry practices and institutional constellations, typically held by individuals in strategic or managerial positions. Context knowledge, on the other hand, pertains to the situational and organizational factors that shape decision-making processes. Both types of knowledge are best accessed through direct engagement with individuals actively involved in relevant developments. uniquely positioned to reflect on how emerging practices and technologies align - or clash - with institutional mandates and public service goals.

To accommodate the dynamic and under-researched nature of the topic, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the methodological instrument. Unlike structured interviews, which adhere to a fixed set of questions, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the sequencing of

questions and enable follow-up prompts to explore emergent themes. For example, questions related to funding constraints or platform choice provide insight into tensions between efficiency and service quality, while discussions around audience reach or content legitimacy reflect concerns over outcome achievement and trust. This format also facilitates clarification and elaboration of responses, thereby enhancing the depth and richness of the collected data (Brennen, 2017, p.29). In this way, the research design directly supports the analytical goals of the study, ensuring that empirical findings are consistently interpreted through the public value lens.

### **3.2 Validity and Reliability**

When conducting empirical social research, it is important to ensure that the research conducted is of sufficient quality, following a certain logic (Yin, 2018, p.78). To do so, a number of “tests” should be used. Specifically, the study should be tested on its reliability and validity.

Validity refers to the extent to which the study accurately captures the social phenomena it seeks to understand (p.81) - in this case, the strategic and institutional logics through which PSM actors engage with gaming platforms to generate public value. To strengthen validity, the study is anchored in a clearly defined theoretical framework - Faulkner and Kaufman’s (2017) four-dimensional model of public value - which guides the formulation of interview questions, the thematic structuring of data, and the interpretation of findings. This alignment between theory and method ensures that the study addresses its core research objective: to explore how PSM operationalize outcome achievement, trust and legitimacy, service quality, and efficiency in the context of gaming. In addition, iterative engagement with the data enhances internal validity; all transcripts are revisited multiple times to identify evolving patterns and ensure that emerging themes are grounded in participants’ statements rather than researcher assumptions (Silverman, 2011, p. 377).

Reliability concerns the transparency and consistency of the research process, enabling others to trace the analytical steps that led from raw data to findings (Yin, 2018, p.82). To ensure reliability, the research process has been systematically documented, including a detailed account of expert selection, interview procedures, and the data analysis strategy (Silverman, 2011, p.360). All interviews were transcribed verbatim to minimize interpretive distortion and analyzed using low-inference descriptors (p.365). A coding protocol - aligned with the four public value dimensions - was developed and applied consistently across cases to ensure analytical comparability. A digital archive of transcripts and analytical memos has been maintained to allow for independent review and verification, reinforcing the study’s transparency and methodological coherence (Yin, 2018, p. 258).

### 3.3 Expert Selection

Given the exploratory nature of this study and its focus on institutional and strategic processes, expert interviews were selected as the primary data source. Experts were identified through purposive sampling based on their involvement in gaming-related initiatives within PSM organizations or their expertise in gaming platform development and industry practices. Access to these individuals was facilitated through collaboration with the EBU, the researcher's academic supervisor, and relevant professional networks.

The sample was constructed to ensure coverage across the four dimensions of Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) public value framework. Internal PSM experts - such as project leads, digital strategists, and innovation managers - offer insights into institutional goals and operational constraints, particularly in relation to outcome achievement and efficiency. Their perspectives help illuminate how PSM evaluate the success and viability of gaming initiatives in terms of reach, resource use, and strategic alignment.

In parallel, decision-makers involved in editorial policy and content governance contribute crucial reflections on trust and legitimacy, including how gaming initiatives are vetted, justified, and communicated internally and externally. Their input helps assess whether public service values are preserved in gaming environments, especially when operating on third-party platforms.

To complement these internal views, external experts such as independent game developers and platform specialists were interviewed to provide industry-facing insights into service quality. These participants help contextualize what constitutes engaging, high-quality, and meaningful interactive content on platforms like Roblox or Fortnite - benchmarking PSM efforts against established industry norms.

By triangulating perspectives across these domains, the expert sample supports a multidimensional analysis of how PSM actors navigate tensions and trade-offs in pursuing public value through gaming. A detailed overview of participant profiles is provided in the table below (Table 1).

**Table 1***Complete List of Experts*

Name	Company	Position
Wesa Aapro	Yle	Metaverse Lead
Thomas Dauser	SWR	Director of Innovation Management
Lydia Mossahebi	BBC	Head of Digital Media Platforms and Planning
James Reeve	BBC	Executive Director for Youth Audiences
Daniel Stolz	SWR	Senior Innovation Manager
Sarah van der Land	NPO	Lead of the Experiment Team
Lotte Vermeire	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	PhD Researcher, Policy Advisor
Dr. Axel von Walter	Graf von Westphalen	Partner
Hidde Westerwoudt	XOLBOR	Co-Founder
Yaniv Wolf	KRO-NCRV	Team Lead of Innovation Concepts

To ensure anonymity, the experts were randomly assigned the aliases Expert 1 - 10, and relevant information that could be used to trace the experts to their specific role was anonymized and rephrased.

### 3.4 Data Collection Process

Data was collected through semi-structured expert interviews conducted between March and June 2025. Interviews were held either face-to-face or via digital conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom), depending on participant availability and geographic location. All interviews were recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure fidelity and analytical depth.

A standardized interview guide was used across all sessions to ensure comparability, while still allowing for the flexibility to probe context-specific insights. The guide was structured around thematic clusters derived from the theoretical framework, with open-ended questions targeting each of Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) public value dimensions. For instance, questions about project goals and success criteria explored outcome achievement, while prompts related to platform selection and audience trust probed issues of trust and legitimacy. Discussions around technical capacity and budget constraints

addressed efficiency, and inquiries into user experience, accessibility, and design quality informed the dimension of service quality.

To facilitate authentic and detailed responses, interviews were conducted in a conversational style, enabling participants to reflect critically on institutional practices and sector-specific dynamics. Follow-up prompts were used to clarify ambiguous statements and uncover implicit reasoning behind strategic decisions. This dialogic approach was particularly valuable for surfacing tensions between competing public value goals - such as balancing audience engagement with institutional independence - that might not emerge through more structured methods.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview environment and protocol were designed to foster openness and minimize social desirability bias, particularly given the researcher's positionality as a student (see Section 3.7). A complete version of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

### **3.5 Operationalization**

The operationalization of the research is grounded in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Key theoretical concepts were translated into thematic areas that informed the development of the semi-structured interview guide. Each thematic area is addressed through open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed, reflective responses from participants while maintaining enough flexibility to explore emergent insights during the interviews.

The interview guide is structured around core constructs discussed in the literature. For instance, questions related to the PSM remit are informed by the principles articulated in Burnley's typology (2017, p.5), while inquiries into the creation of public value draw on Faulkner & Kaufman's (2017) multidimensional framework. Similarly, concepts such as platformization and technological affordances, such as the role of AI and other infrastructural shifts, underpin questions related to industry dynamics, distribution logics, and platform governance.

To ensure reliability and consistency across interviews, the guide follows a standardized structure. Nevertheless, its semi-structured nature allows for adaptive probing, enabling the researcher to pursue relevant topics that arise organically during the conversation. The complete interview guide is included in *Appendix A*.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected through semi-structured in-depth expert interviews a qualitative textual analysis using inductive thematic analysis as the primary tool for data analysis will be conducted. Qualitative analysis is particularly well-suited for explanatory and exploratory research, as it allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of complex phenomena (Boeije, 2010, p.120). It also enables an exploration of both explicit and implicit meanings of the data collected in the interviews. As it is the aim of the research conducted within this thesis to explore how PSM can utilize gaming platforms to generate new forms of public value, qualitative analysis is the most appropriate method for uncovering these patterns and gaining insight into considerations and issues surrounding the implementation.

More specifically, an inductive thematic analysis approach will be employed. Thematic analysis refers to the identification, analysis, and interpretation of “patterns of meaning” (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p.298). An inductive approach is chosen over a deductive one, as the analysis will be driven by data derived directly from the verbatim transcript, not by predetermined themes grounded in theory. This is due to the fact that little research exists on the topic and allows for a more organic extraction of themes from the data itself, ensuring the analysis remains closely tied to the content.

The process of identifying themes will follow a structured and iterative approach. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is carried out in several phases (p.87). Initially, the researcher familiarizes themselves with the data, gaining an overall understanding of its content. Following this, the data undergoes open coding, which involves “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing” the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2007, as cited in Boeije, 2010, p.96). In this stage, relevant features of the data that pertain to the research question were identified and marked for further analysis.

After the open coding, the next phase involved axial coding. This phase focuses on identifying relationships between the categories and subcategories that emerged during open coding, helping to create a more cohesive understanding of the data (Boeije, 2010, p.108). Axial coding entailed identifying patterns of causality, context, and consequences among the open codes to form a more integrated view of how the themes emerged in the data. By examining these connections, deeper insights into considerations and issues surrounding the implementation of gaming platforms into PSM can be uncovered.

Finally, the themes and relationships identified during open and axial coding will be cross-referenced and analyzed to ensure consistency and coherence in the interpretation of the data, following which selective codes will be determined representing overarching themes from the data. This iterative process, from open coding to selective coding, will allow for a nuanced and in-depth understanding of themes related to considerations and issues regarding the implementation of gaming platforms by PSM.

### **3.7 Researcher Positionality**

In qualitative research, the position of the researcher is not a neutral backdrop but an integral part of the knowledge-production process. Holmes (2020) defines a researcher's positionality as a combination of their ontological and epistemological assumptions, their views on human nature and agency, and their values and beliefs, which are shaped by factors such as political orientation, religion, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and social class (pp.1-2). This study is shaped by my position as a graduate student with academic and personal interests in both PSM and video games. My affinity with interactive media and belief in the importance of gaming for reaching younger audiences inevitably influence how I approach the topic, select interview themes, and interpret data. As Johnson (2011) argues, a researcher's basic assumptions can influence the framing and interpretation of findings (p.4). Therefore, underlying assumptions - such as the view that PSM risk long-term irrelevance if they neglect gaming platforms - inform the analytical lens I bring to the study.

At the same time, my status as a student introduces a formal power asymmetry in the interview setting. I approached interviews in the role of a listener and learner, asking open-ended, sometimes naïve questions to create space for expert reflection. This stance helped elicit candid responses but also required ongoing reflexivity to avoid over-identifying with participant perspectives, particularly when interviewees confirmed pre-existing views. Throughout the research process, I maintained reflective memos to document my assumptions, shifts in understanding, and potential interpretive biases.

Recognizing this positionality enhances the transparency of the research and underscores that findings are co-constructed within a specific relational and institutional context

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical rigor was prioritized throughout the research process. All interview participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the study's aims, data handling procedures, and their

rights as participants. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were informed they could withdraw at any point without penalty. Verbal and/or written consent was obtained before recording.

Participants were offered the option to remain anonymous, and identifying information has been withheld in transcripts and reporting where requested. Data was stored securely and accessed only by the researcher. Given the professional positions of the interviewees, care was taken to avoid reputational risk by anonymizing sensitive institutional references and avoiding overly specific attributions.

As Johnson (2011) notes, the interviewee's awareness of the researcher's goals can significantly shape their responses (p.3). To mitigate the risk of social desirability bias - particularly given the researcher's student status - interviewees were explicitly encouraged to share critical reflections, uncertainties, and institutional challenges. The semi-structured format supported this aim by fostering a conversational tone rather than a performance of expertise. These safeguards ensured that ethical responsibilities were not treated as procedural formalities but as active components of the research design.

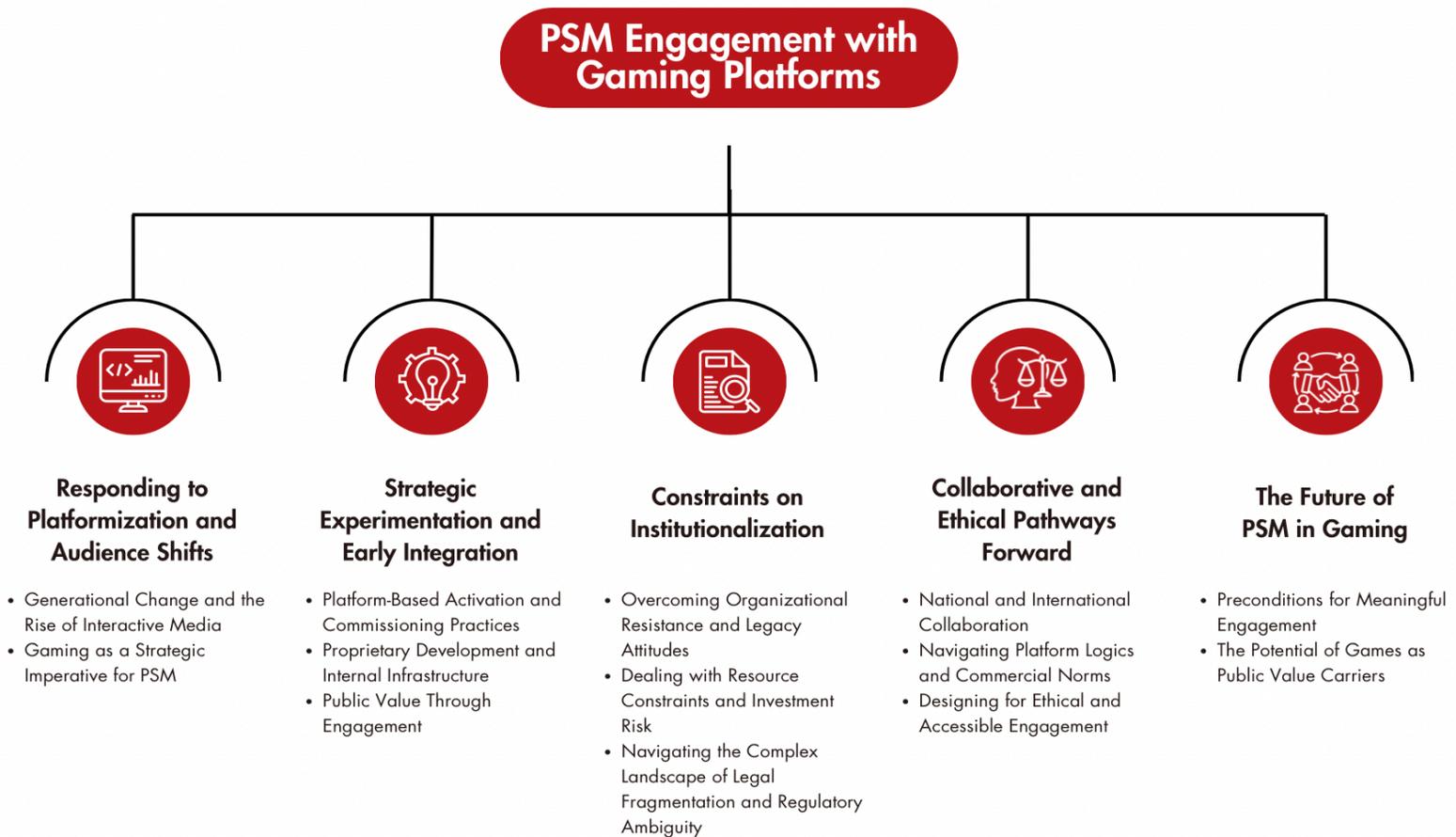
## 4. Results

This chapter presents the empirical findings generated through ten semi-structured expert interviews, analyzed using thematic coding and interpreted through the lens of Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) public value framework. The analysis reveals a fragmented but evolving landscape in which European PSM organizations are cautiously experimenting with GPs to engage younger audiences and explore new modes of public value creation. While there is growing institutional recognition of gaming's cultural relevance, efforts are often constrained by legal ambiguity, internal resistance, and platform misalignment.

Based on the coded data, a conceptual model was developed to synthesize the key dynamics that shape PSM engagement with GPs (Figure 3). This model identifies five interrelated domains: (1) Responding to Platformization and Audience Shifts, (2) Strategic Experimentation and Early Integration, (3) Constraints on Institutionalization, (4) Collaborative and Ethical Pathways Forward, and (5) The Future of PSM in Gaming. Together, these domains capture both the immediate tensions and long-term trajectories at stake in the evolving relationship between PSM and GPs.

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual Model of PSM Engagement with GPs.*



## 4.1 Responding to Platformization and Audience Shifts

This section explores the ongoing transformation of PSB into a more dynamic and participatory model of PSM. It highlights how this evolution is reshaping organizational goals and audience relationships in the digital age.

### 4.1.1 Generational Change and the Rise of Interactive Media

The ongoing generational shift in media consumption poses a critical challenge to PSM. As younger audiences increasingly turn away from linear formats toward non-linear and interactive media, PSM must adapt or risk becoming obsolete. Expert 3 articulates this clearly: “for years, we have [...] been observing a profound shift in media usage - away from linear consumption, such as traditional

linear radio and television, towards non-linear usage on the internet.” This trend is particularly pronounced among those under 50 and has, according to Expert 3, reached a “tipping point” in 2024, with online content now surpassing television in daily reach among the general population.

This transformation is not merely technological but deeply generational. Expert 7 emphasizes that “we're gonna see a generation who expects their content to interact with them,” highlighting that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are growing up in ecosystems shaped by social platforms, AI, and gaming. Unlike previous generations characterized by passive consumption, these audiences demand interactivity. As Expert 7 puts it, “Gen Alpha in particular [...] is an interactive generation,” often engaging with media through gaming or short-form social video rather than long-form content.

For PSM, this implies a fundamental reorientation. Expert 1 underscores the demographic risk: “our large audience is basically dying,” pointing to the heavy reliance on older viewership. The strategic imperative is clear - “we have to generate new audiences and be attractive to new audiences.” Similarly, Expert 3 notes that “[our company’s] central strategic goal [...] is to grow non-linearly,” aiming to increase reach among those under 50 by shifting focus toward platforms where these users are active.

This generational realignment also reveals the growing relevance of gaming. Experts consistently describe gaming as both a dominant platform and a cultural default for younger audiences. As Expert 1 observes, “the data shows us that for kids, gaming is like a default. They demand interaction.” Importantly, this is not limited to children. Expert 3 frames it as a “societal phenomenon,” noting that “half of all our population, across all age groups and genders, plays games.” The notion that gaming is confined to youth is outdated - “those who grew up with Atari 20 or 30 years ago don’t simply stop gaming, but carry this media usage with them.”

For PSM to fulfill their platform-neutral public value mandate, they must respond to these usage patterns. As Expert 3 asserts, “if it is our mandate to reach everyone, then we must reach people where they are - and take seriously their media usage.” This is not about “blindly following a trend,” but about leveraging gaming as a tool to continue delivering valuable, educational, and culturally relevant content. In this context, gaming is framed not as an end in itself, but as an affordance - a way of reimagining PSM’s democratic and educational role within an interactive media environment.

Moreover, the absence of early audience touchpoints risks long-term disengagement. Expert 7 warns that “if you don't have any touch point at all for an audience, will they come back to you when they're older?” Gaming, in this sense, is viewed as a “top of the funnel mechanism” to build brand affiliation early and ensure PSM remain relevant across the life course. Failing to do so may not only

weaken public trust but also threaten the legitimacy of PSM's remit. As Expert 3 optimistically concludes, "gaming will be able to make a substantial contribution to reaching target groups that we can no longer reach through other means - and thus also offers the opportunity to draw broader attention to us."

The generational media shift requires PSM to embrace interactive formats, especially gaming, as strategic entry points into younger audience segments. Doing so is vital not only for audience growth but for upholding their public service mission in an evolving digital ecosystem.

#### **4.1.2 Gaming as a Strategic Imperative for PSM**

As media consumption habits shift towards non-linear, interactive, and platform-based forms, gaming is emerging as a strategic vector for PSM to remain relevant - especially among younger, hard-to-reach demographics. As Expert 3 observes, "we already reach 23% of people in [our area] every day through an online product," surpassing the reach of traditional television at 22%. This inflection point illustrates the urgency of adapting to the evolving digital ecosystem, where online presence alone no longer suffices; instead, visibility must extend to the platforms where emerging audiences are most active - often gaming spaces.

Gaming, in this context, is not simply an entertainment trend but a central media environment. Expert 8 notes a generational departure from social media and YouTube, especially among younger users gravitating toward platforms like Roblox: "We are seeing [...] audience segments that are dropping away from social and YouTube [...] and are focused a bit more on gaming [...]. They are very social spaces anyway." These shifts necessitate a strategic recalibration of PSM engagement. Expert 1 compares platform adoption to social behavior: "If that cafe is Instagram, you go there. And if that cafe is Roblox, you go there." This metaphor underscores the logic of platform-native engagement: to remain visible, PSM must follow audiences into their digital habitats.

Roblox, as a case in point, is not approached by PSM as a destination for mass migration but as a site for soft branding. Expert 4 clarifies: "We are not trying to get as many kids to our Roblox world, but we want the kids that are on the Roblox platform already to get in contact with our public broadcaster." In contrast to commercial strategies based on promotion and conversion, PSM initiatives prioritize presence over extraction, aiming to foster brand awareness rather than drive immediate platform loyalty.

This aligns with a "top of the funnel" approach to audience development. Expert 3 highlights how their organization adapted a legacy TV brand - traditionally associated with older audiences - into

an interactive, AI-driven chatbot game to reintroduce the IP to younger users. These gamified extensions function as alternative access points into the broader PSM ecosystem, introducing youth to public value content in more native formats.

Crucially, games are not seen as replacements for core offerings but as auxiliary mechanisms to sustain the public service mandate. Expert 8 notes, “We’re experimenting with how we do that within gaming,” yet video content remains the primary medium for public service delivery. The logic is not to compete directly within the gaming industry but to strategically embed public service touchpoints in participatory spaces.

Ultimately, gaming is not conceptualized as an end in itself, but as a conduit - an ambient, supportive layer through which PSM can extend reach, build familiarity, and cultivate future trust. “We want people to be watching our programming on [our streaming platform],” Expert 8 admits, but gaming is instrumental in ensuring audiences even arrive there. As such, gaming is becoming not just an experiment but a strategic imperative for public media navigating the post-linear era.

## **4.2 Strategic Experimentation and Early Integration**

This section examines the institutional rationales behind engaging with gaming platforms. It outlines how PSM organizations align such efforts with broader mandates, from youth engagement to public value creation.

### **4.2.1 Platform-Based Activation and Commissioning Practices**

PSM engage with gaming content through varying institutional and legal frameworks, shaping their ability to collaborate with commercial actors. While some face regulatory constraints, others operate with greater flexibility. Expert 8 explains: “We commission all of our programming external to us [...]. News is produced in-house. But aside from that, all of our programmes are commissioned out [...]” This commissioning model enables access to specialized knowledge and creative diversity without requiring in-house game development capacity. As Expert 8 highlights, “It benefits us entirely because it means that we are able to work with a real diverse array of producers. [...] So I think it really has the benefit of us getting that diversity in creativity and production.”

This externalization model circumvents the skills gap commonly cited as a barrier for PSM. However, the ability to outsource development does not resolve all challenges. As Expert 7 warns, “Gaming [...] is a very high risk endeavour,” due to high development costs, technical complexity, and long production cycles. Games may require over a year to produce, limiting responsiveness. Expert 8

notes: “The commissions [...] can take up to a year, sometimes 14 months. In TV terms, that's a long turnaround.”

Against this backdrop, GPs such as Roblox and Fortnite offer strategic alternatives. These platforms enable cost-effective, low-risk development of interactive experiences while tapping into large, pre-existing user bases. As Expert 7 puts it: “We can go into places like Roblox and Fortnite at a vastly lower cost, vastly quicker, but also have an inbuilt audience [...] So you know it de-risks going into those experiences.”

The affordances of GPs - shared technical infrastructure, embedded audiences, and streamlined deployment - allow for rapid iteration and creative experimentation. “You can build a quite complex game in a couple of months,” Expert 7 adds, “because all the back-end work is done for you. [...] There's a huge [...] benefit there.”

The platform logic aligns with audience-centric strategies. Expert 1 remarks that “if you have an event in Roblox you have lots of reach [...] more than other things,” prompting considerations such as hosting a junior song festival on the platform. Expert 7 reinforces this by noting that “we can be confident that if we go into Eurovision Roblox [...] we can bring over a million plus users inside a week.”

However, not all PSM have maintained consistent engagement with gaming. Expert 4 observes a decline in recent years due to cost and maintenance burdens: “It used to be a bigger role. [...] The last years, I see it declined [...] because it's very cost and time intensive.” Yet platforms like Roblox are shifting this calculus, reintroducing gaming as a viable tool for public engagement. “That's also why we got involved [...] in Roblox and we started to experiment on this platform,” Expert 4 concludes.

#### **4.2.2 Proprietary Development and Internal Infrastructure**

While leveraging existing GPs like Roblox or Fortnite offers cost-effective access to audiences, a more autonomous approach involves the internal development of proprietary infrastructure. A few PSM organizations have already begun to host games on self-developed engines. As Expert 8 outlines, their organization uses a tiered model: “We have three different levels of those, like three different types of games. [...] Two of those are game engines that we have developed ourselves [...] originally in conjunction with external parties.” These engines are used to commission re-skinned versions of gameplay templates - providing scalable content that can be thematically adapted to current brands or topics.

This modular approach allows for a high volume of repeatable, audience-tested gameplay with reduced production time and cost. Expert 8 highlights: “We commissioned for those [game engines], the turnaround time might be a few months, it's a lot easier to work with them.” These games are typically embedded within children’s websites or apps, reinforcing institutional control over content delivery and safety. As Expert 1 stresses: “We prefer to be on our own platforms because then we know that it's safe and we know that we can recommend our own content.”

However, this model is limited to well-funded PSM organizations capable of absorbing the initial development costs. Proprietary infrastructure requires significant investment, both technically and organizationally, making it inaccessible to smaller or less autonomous PSM actors. Moreover, even resource-rich institutions may face regulatory limitations that prohibit internal development or hosting. As a result, internal game engines remain the exception, not the norm.

Additionally, even with proprietary infrastructure, issues of audience acquisition and platform visibility persist. Simply controlling the infrastructure does not guarantee user engagement - particularly among younger audiences already embedded in commercial ecosystems. Thus, despite the strategic appeal of internal platforms, commercial GPs are likely to remain central in the short-to-medium term.

A potential middle ground lies in cross-institutional collaboration - sharing infrastructure, knowledge, and risk. This cooperative model will be explored in the following section.

#### **4.2.3 Public Value Through Engagement**

Central to PSM’s involvement in gaming is the pursuit of public value, albeit interpreted through varying objectives depending on target audience and content. As Expert 8 explains, gameplay objectives differ across domains: children’s programme-based games primarily aim to strengthen brand awareness, especially on platforms like Roblox, while educational games focus more on meaningful time spent with public service content. As such, gameplay becomes a vehicle for both identity reinforcement and substantive engagement: “We want the [media company] to be well used and well loved by this audience group” (Expert 8).

This dual logic - brand immersion and educational intent - underpins most game design strategies in PSM. Programme-based games tap into established audience behaviours: “We know that the audience, when they love a show, they want to immerse themselves in it” (Expert 8). Educational games, by contrast, are subject to stricter guidelines regarding screen time and learning outcomes. Yet, both types aim to build trusted, engaging experiences that reflect PSM’s broader mission.

Crucially, the metric of time spent on platforms is interpreted not just quantitatively but qualitatively. Expert 7 contrasts the fleeting attention on social media with the more sustained and participatory engagement seen in gaming: “Roblox say the average user spends 90 minutes a day on its platform [...] 8 to 15 minutes of play time [per session]” (Expert 7). This deeper temporal engagement, especially when embedded in interactive environments, is framed as a potent vector for public value.

Expert 3 articulates this potential most clearly: “It’s not just about attracting people [...] it’s about using the mechanisms and possibilities of games [...] to foster greater understanding, more empathy, and perhaps a more lasting impact.” Gaming, in this view, offers not only a content delivery method but a space for experiential learning and emotional resonance - core to public service remits.

Yet, the promise of immersion is not without cognitive risk. As Expert 1’s academic research shows, increased interactivity can result in diminishing returns, particularly in collaborative or decision-based tasks: “There’s what we called an inverted U curve [...] too much to do, and we found that the 3D static environment for that task helped better.” Thus, greater immersion does not automatically equate to greater understanding. Instead, careful alignment between platform affordances and pedagogical objectives is essential.

This critical awareness is echoed in evolving commissioning strategies. Expert 8 notes a strategic pivot away from conventional games toward more flexible, interactive experiences: “What [our educational platform] as a platform needs more of is interactivity [...] it’s got a really high rinse and repeat [value] which the platform currently doesn’t have, but our commercial competitors do.” Here, public value is rearticulated through design fit: the ability of interactive systems to meet user expectations, sustain engagement, and enable repeated learning encounters.

Ultimately, PSM must calibrate between immersion and intention, leveraging games not as an end in themselves but as dynamic interfaces through which public value - whether educational, cultural, or affective - can be meaningfully realized.

### **4.3 Constraints on Institutionalization**

This section investigates the implications of partnering with commercial platforms, focusing on the tensions between editorial control, economic constraints, and the need for technological reach.

#### **4.3.1 Overcoming Organizational Resistance and Legacy Attitudes**

While gaming is a widespread and growing cultural phenomenon, its integration into PSM strategies is hindered by persistent institutional resistance. Despite the clear strategic value of gaming

as a medium for audience engagement, many PSM organizations remain hesitant - often due to legacy attitudes and structural conservatism.

A core obstacle is the ongoing stigma associated with video games. As Expert 3 notes, gaming still carries “a somewhat sleazy image,” often reduced to stereotypes about violence or excessive use. This framing overshadows its cultural legitimacy: “Less emphasis is placed on the fact that games are also cultural assets - recognized cultural assets - and that they also offer opportunities to convey valuable content.” These negative connotations inhibit internal buy-in and make it difficult for gaming initiatives to be perceived as aligned with PSM’s public value mission.

Consequently, one of the core challenges is developing internal awareness of gaming’s dynamism and legitimacy. Expert 1 emphasizes the importance of proof over persuasion: “Show, don’t tell.” Incremental initiatives - such as Roblox events - can yield measurable success, serving as internal advocacy tools. When such projects demonstrate “more reach than other things” (Expert 1), they create data-backed momentum. This is echoed by Expert 7: “Success breeds success.” Once visibility and numbers are established, gaming becomes easier to justify within legacy systems.

Quantitative and qualitative audience insights further support this internal shift. Expert 8 stresses the importance of data to persuade decision-makers, particularly with younger audiences whose media habits are native to interactive formats: “A generation of audience that doesn’t see gaming as a separate hobby [...] has been quite an educational piece that we’ve had to do with the business.” In this context, audience research becomes a strategic instrument - not only for design but also for institutional legitimation.

However, even compelling evidence faces structural barriers. PSM organizations often rely on hierarchical investment mechanisms that prioritize conservative, low-risk decisions. Expert 1 describes this tension via a maritime metaphor: while innovation labs may act as agile “speed boats,” final decisions rest with risk-averse investment managers on the “big ship.” These managers, according to organizational theory, are structurally inclined to safeguard stability over experimentation - creating a systemic disincentive for novelty.

Nonetheless, attitudes are evolving. Internal gatekeepers who were initially skeptical, such as the manager of ZAPP, have revised their positions in response to demonstrated success. Expert 3 contextualizes this attitudinal shift within broader cultural changes across media organizations, where once-marginalized forms such as animation or comics are increasingly embraced for their narrative potential. However, cultural and institutional receptivity still varies by national context. As Expert 3 notes, “In Germany [...] we’ve had more reservations up to now. I believe that will change.”

In sum, the challenge is not merely technological adoption but organizational transformation. The integration of gaming into PSM hinges on a dual shift: epistemic (recognizing games as legitimate formats for public value) and structural (revising investment logics and decision-making hierarchies). While momentum is building, sustained internal advocacy, demonstrable success, and strategic framing remain necessary to overcome legacy attitudes.

#### **4.3.2 Dealing with Resource Constraints and Investment Risk**

In addition to cultural resistance, PSM efforts to engage with gaming are constrained by financial limitations and structural investment logics. Game development is inherently costly, and public broadcasters operate under strict budgetary controls that prioritize operational continuity over experimentation. As Expert 3 explains, "In real terms, the revenue from the broadcasting fee is declining," exacerbated by inflation and the pressure to maintain presence across an expanding range of platforms. This necessitates difficult trade-offs: "[...] we have to assess whether a platform is relevant and important enough that we absolutely need to have a presence there." Gaming, while potentially valuable, is not treated as a strategic category in its own right but as part of broader digital transformation agendas.

Consequently, funding decisions are subordinated to overarching efficiency goals. Expert 1 outlines a rapid innovation model using short cycles (6–8 weeks) to test technological ideas. These are assessed not only on audience fit but also on economic viability, particularly in light of severe budget cuts: "The metrics are focused on are we going to be more efficient because we have to cut down on 175 million or so." This efficiency imperative marginalizes initiatives - like gaming - that lack immediate, quantifiable returns or are seen as outside PSM's core remit.

The ambiguity surrounding the institutional identity of PSM exacerbates this hesitation. As Expert 1 reflects, "Are we [...] a technology company, [...] a management company, or [...] a media company?" While some view PSM as hybrid entities, capable of adapting to platformized environments, they lack the capital to build proprietary platforms - unlike tech giants such as Roblox or Google. The core issue is not technical capacity, but investment structure: "One of the challenges is funding and yeah, creating different investment structures for that."

Legal frameworks further constrain innovation. As Expert 3 notes, internal debates frequently emerge around the legality and purpose of gaming investments: "Can we still afford this? Does it make sense to invest money there, especially given the legal constraints that may limit us and potentially diminish the gaming experience?" These constraints include limits on commercial features (e.g.,

merchandise distribution) that are typical in gaming ecosystems, making PSM less competitive or appealing to younger audiences familiar with commercial interactivity.

Institutional variance across PSM systems also plays a critical role. Expert 1 contrasts their organization's limited flexibility with another that was able to repurpose video budgets (up to €200,000) to fund gaming projects on Roblox. While seemingly minor, such reallocations can significantly impact creative output. Expert 8 similarly highlights how broader organizational mandates - like educational reform - can generate more permissive environments: “[Our media company] is making quite a big commitment to delivering that education in an interactive way [...] I appreciate we're quite different to how some of the other public service broadcasters work.”

Ultimately, engaging with gaming is not simply a matter of creative vision but of navigating restrictive funding regimes, risk-averse institutional cultures, and divergent legal contexts. These structural limitations are fundamental to understanding both the potential and the inertia of gaming in PSM. The next chapter will examine how legal frameworks shape these constraints and mediate the affordances of digital formats.

### **4.3.3 Navigating the Complex Landscape of Legal Fragmentation and Regulatory Ambiguity**

The constraints limiting PSM engagement with gaming are not only financial but also deeply embedded in legal and regulatory frameworks. As outlined in Chapter 2, while organizations such as the EBU promote shared values, the scope of national public service remits is ultimately determined by domestic legislation. This results in widely divergent mandates - some expansive and innovation-oriented, others narrowly defined and restrictive. Such legal asymmetries complicate not only national strategies but also transnational collaboration within the European PSM ecosystem.

Expert 3 illustrates these structural limits by referencing the German context: “Even under the new Interstate Broadcasting Treaty reform, there is still a negative list [...] This list still includes game offerings.” Although public broadcasters may technically develop games, a mandatory reference to an existing broadcast program is required. This conditionality significantly narrows the scope for stand-alone or exploratory formats and reinforces a broadcast-centric logic that sits uneasily with platform-based and interactive media.

Importantly, this restriction is not uniform across Europe. As Expert 3 notes, “In other countries, the legal requirement of a direct link to a broadcast does not exist.” France, for example, has historically recognized non-linear cultural forms - such as comics and games - as valid vehicles for public service content. As a result, French PSM actors have pursued gaming more proactively. Yet,

these projects rarely enter the German market due to contextual mismatches in legal and cultural expectations. Expert 3 describes this situation as “a kind of schizophrenia,” revealing frustration with what is perceived as anachronistic legal rigidity.

Legal fragmentation also affects platform engagement. Expert 1 notes that commercial features common in gaming environments - such as in-game purchases or merchandise - are often restricted: “[...] we are very strict that [...] these platforms can't sell different things or can't use our data or our name to monetize.” These limitations are not just internal policy choices but reflect divergent national regulatory environments. For instance, Belgium is described as more permissive in facilitating public-commercial cooperation than the Netherlands.

Some PSM systems, however, benefit from broader legal leeway. As Expert 7 explains, “We are government regulated and through our Charter [...] we are fortunate that we can play in any spaces.” Expert 8 adds that their organization's educational remit legitimizes experimentation in interactive media: “[Our educational platform] is part of it, and that broadens the scope.” These institutional flexibilities enable more ambitious and audience-centric projects, especially in digital learning.

Despite the restrictive legal architecture in some jurisdictions, Expert 3 maintains that creativity is still possible within existing boundaries. The key lies in interpreting the “broadcast reference” requirement not as a limitation but as a design constraint. “It’s not sufficient to simply use a show’s brand [...]. There needs to be a concrete connection to a specific program and its content.” Even within this constraint, games can be made accessible to audiences unfamiliar with the linear format, thereby extending public value beyond the traditional broadcast paradigm.

In sum, legal fragmentation and regulatory ambiguity present significant obstacles to cross-national alignment and innovation in gaming. Yet, these do not fully preclude engagement. They demand strategic navigation, legal literacy, and adaptive design practices. As audience behaviors shift toward interactive formats, even the most restricted PSM actors are compelled to experiment within their means. The following section explores how collaborative strategies - both national and transnational - can mitigate these structural barriers and enable more ambitious gaming initiatives.

#### **4.4 Collaborative and Ethical Pathways Forward**

This section identifies structural and organizational conditions that support or hinder collaboration between PSM and commercial game developers.

#### **4.4.1 National and International Collaboration**

The integration of gaming into PSM portfolios often requires collaboration, particularly given the limited resources and regulatory constraints under which many PSM operate. From a public value perspective, collaboration - both nationally and internationally - can enhance efficiency by pooling resources, improve service delivery quality through shared expertise, and bolster outcome achievement by enabling broader audience engagement across platforms. However, these collaborative efforts also raise tensions regarding trust and legitimacy, particularly when involving commercial actors or navigating platform dependencies.

##### **National Coordination and Resource Pooling**

Within national contexts, many PSM organizations operate under umbrella structures that coordinate funding while leaving content development to individual regional broadcasters. This decentralized model encourages program diversity and localization - aligned with the public remit - but also limits resource availability for resource-intensive formats like games. As Expert 4 notes, their broadcaster initially developed an educational game on Roblox at the request of the umbrella organization but eventually pushed for centralization as they did not “want to be the Roblox experts for the whole national public media. That’s their role.”

This redistribution of responsibilities reflects an effort to optimize internal efficiency by consolidating expertise and infrastructure at the national level. Expert 3 echoes this logic, explaining that regional broadcasters are now exploring how to coordinate more effectively on gaming initiatives by defining clearer divisions of labor - thus minimizing redundant efforts and increasing service delivery quality.

##### **International Collaboration and Shared Innovation**

Beyond national borders, international collaboration - particularly through the EBU - is increasingly seen as a strategy to distribute risk, pool knowledge, and co-develop innovative formats. Expert 3 highlights ongoing exchanges with Nordic broadcasters who are more advanced in platform-based engagement, describing a mutual learning dynamic:

“We explicitly benefit from their experiences [...] and this exchange goes both ways.”

One concrete example is an AI-based game developed by Expert 3’s organization and made available to other EBU members. This kind of collaborative production directly contributes to outcome

achievement by expanding the reach of educational content and enhancing its relevance through shared resources.

Expert 7 discusses the Eurovision Song Contest game, co-funded by nine broadcasters as a “test case.” This collective approach enabled experimentation at reduced cost - what they describe as a “leap of faith” - and thereby facilitated institutional learning while mitigating financial risk. As Expert 10 recalls, the initiative had an “embarrassingly small budget,” but still managed to reach a substantial user base, illustrating how strategic collaboration can yield disproportionate returns in terms of public service impact.

Nevertheless, multiple experts also raise concerns about the structural limitations of such efforts. Expert 10 laments the slow pace and bureaucratic fragmentation of EU-level projects: “It’s day and night. I’ve seen how passionate game developers get venture capital and just in a matter of months they have a demo. [...] We are not really agile.”

This institutional inertia threatens both efficiency and service delivery quality, and underscores the need for more flexible funding mechanisms. Expert 1 advocates for “a funding structure with a more sustainable and longer perspective,” noting that Europe’s dependence on U.S. and Chinese platforms also undermines trust and legitimacy in the digital public sphere.

### Collaboration with Commercial Actors

In parallel to intra-PSM collaboration, many organizations also partner with commercial actors - particularly for content production and platform implementation. As discussed in section 4.2.1, these partnerships are increasingly essential for navigating platform-specific affordances. Expert 8 describes close working relationships with Roblox and third-party developers, supported by internal product teams. Similarly, Expert 4 emphasizes the need to align content design with platform-specific expectations:

“We wanted to work with a company that specialized in this platform. They understand what kids want to do and how to tell a story.”

Such collaborations can enhance service delivery quality and outcome achievement, particularly when PSM lack internal game development expertise. However, they also introduce potential trade-offs with regard to trust and legitimacy. Commercial actors often operate under market logics that may conflict with PSM’s ethical standards and public service mandate. This growing tension between external expertise and internal values is explored further in the next section.

## Balancing Local Mandates and Transnational Strategies

Despite the strategic potential of collaboration, PSM must also remain attentive to their national mandates. As Expert 3 stresses:

“National markets often function very differently. That is, after all, our mandate - we receive the broadcasting fee to create content for people in Germany.”

This highlights a core dilemma: how to balance transnational cooperation for resource efficiency and innovation, with localized production tailored to distinct audiences. The need to reconcile these competing imperatives reflects a broader challenge in generating public value within a platformized, global media environment.

### 4.4.2 Navigating Platform Logics and Commercial Norms

Establishing a meaningful public service presence on GPs such as Roblox requires adapting to their inherent platform logics. These logics are shaped by commercial norms and user expectations that often diverge from the ethos of PSM. For PSM, navigating these dynamics poses a significant challenge to maintaining trust and legitimacy, while also raising questions about how to deliver efficient, engaging, and high-quality services in spaces governed by different rules of interaction.

#### Platform-Specific Design Norms

Experts with experience in platform-native development stress that success on GPs depends on adhering to certain gameplay conventions. As Expert 6 outlines, games must offer immediate accessibility, intuitive loops, and socially engaging mechanics:

“It needs to have a very simple and easy to get in gameplay loop... social features and roleplay are very needed on Roblox.”

Beyond gameplay, community interaction - via in-game chat, Discord servers, and content updates - is essential for long-term engagement. These elements support outcome achievement by increasing player retention and visibility within platform ecosystems. Retention mechanics, such as randomness or progression incentives, are not inherently exploitative, but reflect the platform’s competitive environment. As Expert 6 suggests:

“You don't necessarily need to have gambling mechanics, but you need some retention mechanics... [PSM] will start learning that they have to engage a little bit in it.”

This pragmatic shift - towards platform-conforming yet ethical design - is necessary for PSM to stay relevant where younger audiences are most active.

## Institutional Resistance and Value Misalignment

Despite this strategic necessity, internal and regulatory constraints hinder many PSM initiatives from fully embracing platform logic. Expert 6 highlights a core institutional tension:

“They want to be in control... very cautious about it... But I understand - if people are saying strange things, it could get blown out of proportion.”

Expert 10 expands on this, arguing that content managers and policymakers often fail to grasp the creative norms of metaverse environments, instead imposing outdated standards that can feel patronizing or restrictive. An illustrative anecdote involves a proposed Easter-themed Roblox experience, where symbolic death and respawn mechanics - common on the platform - were rejected by legal teams:

“In the metaverse, dying is fun... But how do you get European broadcasters to think that’s a fun idea? For them, all alarm bells go off.”

This tension illustrates the difficulty of aligning trust and legitimacy with platform-specific affordances. While public broadcasters must uphold ethical standards, rigid interpretations can result in creative paralysis and inefficiency, limiting their ability to innovate meaningfully within new spaces.

## The Need for Cultural Translation

Expert 10 proposes thinking in terms of a “dress code”: just as one dresses appropriately for a wedding, game developers must conform to the expectations of the platform’s culture. This metaphor underscores the need for service delivery quality through cultural fluency. Yet many policymakers lack sufficient platform literacy. Both Experts 1 and 10 advocate for a “show-don’t-tell” approach, in which demonstrated success gradually builds institutional understanding and support:

“The most effective way to combat this is showing success repeatedly.”

PSM must therefore pursue incremental, demonstrable outcomes that reconcile public service mandates with platform dynamics - generating legitimacy from the ground up.

## Audience-Centered Justifications

Despite internal hesitation, several experts emphasize the need to meet audiences where they are. Expert 8 notes that falling behind in digital learning and entertainment spaces has forced public broadcasters to re-evaluate:

“Duolingo is a really established and mature market and we've got a little bit left behind... we need to be in the places where the audience are.”

This pragmatic argument aligns with outcome achievement and underscores the public value of being present in everyday digital environments. However, as Expert 8 also cautions, this presence must be balanced with safety and ethical considerations:

“Safety is paramount... So we have to provide a great experience and then find other ways to bring an audience to it.”

This reveals a recurring tension: while service delivery quality demands platform-native engagement, trust and legitimacy remain the cornerstone of public value. PSM must continually negotiate this balance.

#### **4.4.3 Designing for Ethical and Accessible Engagement**

Engaging on GPs such as Roblox presents not only technical and strategic challenges but also deep ethical tensions for PSM. As these platforms are often optimized for data extraction, user retention, and commercial gain, PSM must balance platform participation with their commitment to safeguarding young users and upholding public values. This section unpacks how PSM aim to maintain trust and legitimacy while delivering safe, accessible, and ethically designed experiences.

##### **Upholding Ethical Standards in Commercial Ecosystems**

While PSM cannot control the broader platform environment, they adopt a values-driven stance within their own digital spaces. Expert 7 articulates this approach clearly:

“Whenever we go on to any third party platform [...], our accounts, our spaces, our activities should be a force for good [...] We can’t control the rest of the platform. All we can do is kind of advocate.”

Such positioning reflects a broader concern with trust and legitimacy, especially when engaging young users. Yet, as Expert 4 notes, ethical standards are not universally defined:

“You have to find out yourself [...] what you think is ethical [...] with your younger audience. And that’s really a tricky thing.”

The absence of clear normative guidance requires each PSM entity to interpret ethical behavior contextually - balancing creative ambition with child protection obligations.

##### **Implementing Safety Protocols and Design Constraints**

To ensure service delivery quality, PSM implement a range of technical safeguards. These include disabling chat functions, monitoring risk assessments, and working closely with platform

providers to understand safety mechanisms. Expert 8 recounts the extensive deliberation involved in launching a Roblox experience:

“We gave it an awful lot of thought. [...] We don’t have chats turned on. [...] We felt that it had too many risks associated for us at the moment.”

This is echoed by Expert 3, who emphasizes the legal and ethical boundaries that guide platform participation:

“It must happen within a protected space [...] where we can ensure that what we do is legally secure, especially regarding copyright.”

Institutionally, PSM build internal infrastructure to support these objectives. As Expert 7 explains:

“We have child protection teams, we have policy advisors [...] We have robust risk assessments and [...] we keep re-evaluating as more news about them comes out.”

These procedural safeguards reflect the ongoing effort to operationalize trust and legitimacy without compromising creative delivery.

### Rejecting Dark Patterns through Value-Centric Design

Beyond platform safety, PSM also distance themselves from exploitative design practices common in commercial gaming. Expert 6 raises alarm over the infiltration of gambling-inspired mechanics:

“Some games are built around gambling mechanics. [...] Casino people come to children’s platforms.”

Against this backdrop, several experts defend PSM’s role in offering non-commercial, ethically grounded alternatives. Expert 3 positions this as a core public value contribution:

“We can make a difference [...] when it comes to creating ethically valuable games that aren’t solely driven by profit maximization.”

This includes refraining from dark patterns, avoiding in-app purchases, and resisting manipulative retention mechanics. Expert 7 reinforces this stance:

“We’re very careful to make it not like a gambling experience [...] We don’t want the experience to feel too anxiety based.”

Such design decisions enhance outcome achievement by providing safe and meaningful digital experiences, particularly for younger users.

## Balancing Accessibility with Funding Models

Despite ethical leadership, PSM face structural limitations in platform choice. To maintain free access, they avoid paywalled ecosystems. As Expert 8 explains:

“We don’t do any gaming that is on any paid for platform [...] we need to stick to Web and app based gaming.”

This commitment to efficiency - understood here as maximizing access while minimizing cost - can limit technological scope but reinforces the legitimacy of PSM as a public good. Platforms like Roblox become appealing precisely because they offer broad reach without financial barriers to entry.

## 4.5 The Future of PSM in Gaming

This section addresses the capacity of games to serve as vehicles for public value. It considers the educational, ethical, and expressive potentials of GPs in both formal and informal contexts.

### 4.5.1 Preconditions for Meaningful Engagement

The successful implementation of gaming initiatives in PSM hinges on a set of structural preconditions that go beyond organizational ambition. Experts underscore that in order to generate public value through GPs, PSM must operate within a supportive ecosystem characterized by strategic coordination, regulatory alignment, and institutional capacity. These are not only technical or financial concerns, but also deeply entangled with trust and legitimacy, service delivery quality, outcome achievement, and efficiency.

#### The Need for Shared Vision and Coordinated Infrastructure

A key barrier identified by several experts is the fragmented and ad hoc nature of current efforts across European PSMs. Expert 9 notes:

“There’s no connection, and someone’s doing this, and someone else is actually doing the same thing, but on the other side of the country, and they’re not aware of each other. [...] So I think definitely from a policy level, it would be great if there was [...] a way to share and have these learning networks.”

This lack of coordination hampers efficiency and leads to duplication of effort and wasted resources. At the same time, the absence of institutionalized learning mechanisms undermines service delivery quality, as innovation remains siloed and unsystematized.

## Establishing Frameworks for Legitimacy and Sustainability

Experts advocate for a unifying policy framework that can act as a catalyst for structured innovation. As Expert 9 argues:

“You need a clear vision and shared definitions [...] something like the digital competence models from the European Union. [...] If you don’t have a high-level vision, then you also won’t have funding, for example, then practices won’t be sustainable.”

By anchoring gaming initiatives within broader public strategies - particularly those targeting media and digital literacy - PSM can gain trust and legitimacy in their activities and secure long-term outcome achievement. Explicitly naming public broadcasters as stakeholders in such frameworks would ensure institutional recognition and facilitate targeted funding streams.

## Elevating Digital Literacy as a Foundational Enabler

Both Expert 6 and Expert 9 stress that digital literacy is a prerequisite for realizing gaming’s public value potential. Not only does it empower users to navigate GPs more safely and effectively, but it also helps dismantle enduring stigma surrounding games:

“If gaming is, for example, mentioned in a European vision, then it will stimulate innovation and cooperation on national levels, or even local levels” (Expert 9).

This shift in public perception is crucial for generating legitimacy and securing supportive legislation. When PSM and policymakers view games as instruments for public engagement and education - rather than as distractions or commercial luxuries - this reorientation can unlock new policy pathways and strategic investments.

### **4.5.2 The Potential of Games as Public Value Carriers**

Games are increasingly recognized not only as entertainment, but also as vehicles for immersive storytelling, education, social inclusion, and ethical innovation. PSM, while often constrained by limited budgets, are uniquely positioned to set normative standards for responsible game design and to leverage GPs for multidimensional public value creation. This section synthesizes how games can advance service quality, outcome achievement, trust and legitimacy, and even platform-level accountability within the broader digital media ecosystem.

## Educational Immersion and Classroom Integration

Experts highlight the untapped potential of games in educational contexts, especially when traditional formats struggle to maintain attention. As Expert 6 explains, technological advancements - including generative AI - could drastically lower production barriers for interactive documentary-style experiences:

“Maybe in the future, maybe with AI, you can make it way easier to do these games. [...] I think [there is] a great opportunity, especially in classrooms [...] to get their attention.”

Such games - whether narrative-based or quiz-driven - can foster collaborative learning and engagement, particularly when embedded in familiar environments like Roblox. Expert 6 describes a math game that reached 50 million users, underlining the scalability and impact potential of even modest initiatives:

“Everyone plays Roblox. [...] You could start this up, and everyone would be engaged in talking with each other and [...] helping each other. So I see great opportunities.”

These examples speak to service delivery quality and outcome achievement, particularly in domains such as media literacy, STEM education, and civic learning.

## Personal Expression and Social Inclusion

Beyond learning outcomes, GPs facilitate individual expression and identity exploration in ways that transcend physical and social constraints. As Expert 10 notes, platforms like Roblox allow users to dissociate from gender norms:

“Roblox doesn’t have gender. The character is a Lego block. [...] The next generation is representing themselves through avatars, which give them the freedom to [...] distance themselves from their [bodily image].”

This creative affordance contributes to trust and legitimacy by promoting inclusivity and emotional safety. It also reflects broader societal shifts in how identity is performed and perceived in digital spaces.

## Games in Digital Youth Work

Gaming can also serve as a medium for structured social intervention. Within Digital Youth Work, GPs are used to reach otherwise inaccessible youth populations and open channels for difficult conversations. As Expert 9 explains:

“They set up a Discord server [...] to also start conversations about more difficult topics, like [...] suicide. [...] [Gaming] is also a way of connecting to young people, and like this strategic tool that you can use.”

These practices underscore the civic and participatory potential of games, aligning with public service mandates to serve marginalized groups and support well-being.

### Norm-Setting and Industry Accountability

Even in a highly platformized and commercialized gaming environment, PSM can act as ethical anchors. Expert 3 argues that public service games, even with limited budgets, can introduce higher ethical standards in game development:

“Smartly using this niche also allows us to bring ethical standards into the industry. That includes production ethics.”

This is echoed by Expert 7, who recounts how their team’s advocacy led to improved accessibility features in Roblox:

“We actually saw a bit of Roblox changed [...] actually brought in additional accessibility features because we talked to them about it.”

Such examples illustrate how PSM can influence platform governance and push for outcomes aligned with public interest - albeit incrementally.

This chapter has examined how PSM can utilize GPs to generate new forms of public value, revealing both the strategic possibilities and the structural constraints inherent in this endeavor. Drawing on the transition from PSB to PSM, the findings show a shift toward participatory, demand-driven content models that align with gaming’s interactive nature. Expert perspectives illustrate that while platformization introduces dependencies on commercial intermediaries, it also affords scalable, immersive, and socially impactful formats that public broadcasters can appropriate to engage youth audiences. Applying Faulkner and Kaufman’s multidimensional public value framework, it becomes evident that gaming initiatives can advance educational, ethical, and democratic values - particularly when underpinned by institutional support, digital literacy, and coherent policy frameworks. Thus, games emerge not merely as a content extension but as a potential strategic vehicle for enacting PSM’s public mission within an evolving media ecosystem.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Revisiting the Research Question**

This thesis set out to explore how PSM leverage GPs to create new forms of public value. While the initial premise assumed a relatively linear trajectory of innovation, the findings reveal a more complex reality: the story of PSM in gaming is not primarily one of successful adoption, but of negotiation - of legal frameworks, institutional inertia, platform logics, and public legitimacy.

Rather than identifying a singular model of engagement, the research uncovered a heterogeneous landscape shaped by structural constraints, varying national policies, and internal cultural attitudes toward gaming. As such, the core question - how PSM leverage gaming platforms to create public value - must be understood not in terms of outcomes alone, but through the tensions, trade-offs, and asymmetries that condition those outcomes.

### **5.2 Patterns of Engagement: Motivations, Constraints, and Strategies**

The empirical findings reveal that most European PSM organizations are experimenting with gaming in some form, particularly on GPs such as Roblox or Fortnite. However, these efforts are primarily tactical rather than strategic - focused on creating brand awareness and establishing early audience touchpoints, rather than on developing gaming as a standalone vehicle for public value. Games are typically treated as a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves.

Despite assumptions of institutional conservatism, there is clear motivation among digital and youth-oriented units within PSM to explore gaming's affordances. What limits these efforts are not interest or competence, but structural and institutional constraints. These include rigid commissioning frameworks, outdated legal definitions of public service content, and a lack of internal recognition of gaming's legitimacy as a public format.

Engagement is further complicated by national disparities in legal remits. While the BBC, for example, benefits from a broad and innovation-friendly charter, German PSM remain restricted by legacy legislation that requires direct linkage to broadcast formats. These asymmetries fragment the European PSM landscape, stifle collaboration, and reinforce a reactive posture - where innovation occurs only under tightly defined, risk-averse conditions.

Nonetheless, a shift is underway. Many experts emphasized that younger audiences expect interactive, participatory experiences, and that PSM risk obsolescence without adapting to these

preferences. Gaming, in this view, is not just a trend, but an emerging norm of cultural engagement. The willingness to adapt is present - but so too are systemic barriers that prevent sustained, scalable innovation.

### **5.3 Strategic Tensions in Public Value Creation**

Applying Faulkner and Kaufman's (2017) four dimensions of public value - outcome achievement, service quality, efficiency, and trust and legitimacy - reveals persistent structural tensions in how PSM engage with gaming platforms.

Outcome achievement is the most frequently cited motivation for experimentation. Experts consistently referred to declining linear reach and generational media shifts as critical drivers. Expert 3 emphasized that "if it is our mandate to reach everyone, then we must reach people where they are," framing gaming not as a trend but as a public service necessity. Similarly, Expert 1 described gaming as a "top of the funnel mechanism" to initiate contact with younger audiences. Expert 8 reinforced this logic by explaining how program-based games are deployed to "immerse [users] in content they already love," reinforcing brand familiarity and guiding audiences toward core platforms. Yet while these initiatives may succeed in generating reach, their impact often remains limited due to the absence of long-term strategies and systemic prioritization within PSM hierarchies.

Efficiency figures prominently in decisions to engage with general-purpose platforms. GPs like Roblox are seen as cost-effective alternatives to proprietary game development. Expert 7 noted that "you can build a quite complex game in a couple of months" using platform-native tools, bypassing many resource constraints. Expert 4 explained that platform use allowed their organization to "experiment without overcommitting" in terms of budget and time. Nonetheless, these benefits are undercut by fragmented funding structures and a lack of collaborative infrastructure. While Expert 3 highlighted national efforts to pool resources, these are still nascent and hampered by legal inconsistencies and risk-averse investment logics.

Service quality remains contested. While games offer participatory and potentially educational affordances, realizing this potential requires deep platform literacy. Expert 6 stressed that games on GPs "need to feel native to the platform," with attention to social interaction, intuitive design, and iterative updates. However, PSM often lack the internal expertise to meet these standards, relying heavily on external partners. Expert 8 noted the benefits of commissioning experienced developers but admitted that even with technical capacity, "the rinse and repeat value" of educational content often lags behind commercial competitors. Moreover, Expert 1 cautioned that increased interactivity does not

always correlate with higher engagement quality, referencing studies showing an “inverted U” curve in learning outcomes for overly complex formats.

Trust and legitimacy emerge as the most constraining dimension. PSM express concern that engaging with commercial platforms could undermine their independence or expose audiences to harmful commercial logics. Expert 3 noted the persistence of internal biases against gaming as a format, often perceived as trivial or ethically dubious. Yet this institutional caution stands in contrast to evolving audience expectations. As Expert 10 pointed out, “the audience already moved on,” and PSM risk appearing out of step when absent from gaming environments. Interestingly, while PSM fear losing legitimacy by participating in GPs, stakeholders increasingly question their legitimacy for not doing so - pointing to a reversal in the traditional logic of institutional credibility.

These contradictions produce friction across all four dimensions. Efficiency gains may conflict with editorial sovereignty; outcome achievement through platform-native engagement may raise concerns about service quality or institutional dilution. Most strikingly, trust and legitimacy are invoked both to justify caution and to critique inaction - underscoring a fundamental asymmetry between organizational logics and public expectations. As the findings make clear, creating public value through gaming is not a matter of technical capability or cultural will, but of navigating strategic contradictions embedded in PSM’s institutional DNA.

## **5.4 Institutional Blind Spots and Platform Logics**

One of the clearest patterns to emerge from the interviews is the structural misalignment between public service institutions and the logic of the platforms they seek to engage. While many PSM recognize the importance of reaching audiences in interactive environments, their approaches frequently rely on broadcasting-era assumptions - resulting in projects that are technically present on gaming platforms but culturally and structurally out of place.

GPs such as Roblox or Fortnite are not simply distribution channels; they are ecosystems with distinct affordances. These include low-threshold development tools, high user interactivity, social embeddedness, modular scalability, and algorithmic visibility. As Expert 6 noted, platform success depends on “very simple and easy-to-get-in gameplay loops,” frequent updates, and social features like multiplayer or roleplay modes. These affordances foster persistent engagement, co-creation, and community identity - attributes central to the appeal and stickiness of GPs.

PSM, however, often fail to leverage these affordances effectively. Projects are frequently one-off, isolated experiences designed to showcase brand content rather than sustain community

interaction. Expert 4 emphasized that their organization “didn’t want to become the Roblox experts for the whole system,” indicating both capacity limits and a lack of strategic integration. Expert 10 similarly admitted that even when PSM create playable content, “we are not really agile,” often struggling to meet the tempo and design expectations of native platform users.

This disconnect is not merely tactical but institutional. Traditional PSM operate through centralized production pipelines, editorial oversight, and compliance-heavy governance models. In contrast, gaming platforms reward decentralized creation, iterative testing, and audience feedback loops. This fundamental divergence produces a structural mismatch: PSM seek to bring legacy production cultures into spaces that are fundamentally non-linear, participatory, and dynamic.

Moreover, platform-native success metrics - such as session duration, user-generated modification, or community retention - are often absent from PSM evaluation frameworks. As Expert 7 noted, “we’re still learning what engagement means in these spaces,” highlighting how unfamiliarity with platform metrics further limits the ability to design for sustained impact.

What results is a recurring cycle: PSM enter gaming spaces without fully adapting to their logics, projects underperform, and internal skepticism is reinforced. In this way, institutional blind spots are self-reinforcing. Without rethinking not just what is created, but how and why it is created, PSM risk relegating gaming to a peripheral experiment rather than treating it as a core site of public engagement.

Ultimately, navigating platform logics requires more than technical capability - it demands cultural literacy, institutional flexibility, and a willingness to engage with the norms of participatory media. One illustrative case is the Eurovision activation on Roblox, co-funded by nine public broadcasters. The project managed to attract over a million users in a single week, demonstrating the latent potential of coordinated, platform-native engagement. Yet, as Expert 10 pointed out, the initiative operated on an “embarrassingly small budget” and lacked the infrastructure to sustain momentum beyond the initial activation. While the event succeeded in terms of short-term reach, it also revealed the fragility of one-off experiments in the absence of systemic support, iterative design, and long-term strategic planning.

As the interviews suggest, public value on gaming platforms cannot be achieved through mere presence; it requires a form of embedded participation that most PSM are not yet structurally prepared to support.

## 5.5 The Role of Collaboration

Across the interviews, collaboration emerged as both a pragmatic necessity and a normative imperative. Given the resource constraints, legal fragmentation, and platform dependencies that shape PSM engagement with gaming, no single broadcaster can meaningfully pursue innovation in isolation. Experts repeatedly emphasized the need for shared infrastructures, cross-border funding models, and coordinated experimentation - also to offset the dominance of U.S.- and China-based platforms.

At the national level, collaboration is already being used to address asymmetries in capacity and expertise. Expert 4 described how their broadcaster, initially a pioneer in Roblox-based education games, pushed for national coordination to avoid becoming the de facto gaming department for the entire system. This redistribution of responsibility reflects a growing awareness that localized experiments must be scaled through structural support - whether via shared funding pools, commissioning templates, or centralized development teams.

Internationally, collaboration remains uneven but promising. The EBU is increasingly seen as a potential hub for cross-national innovation. Expert 3 highlighted ongoing exchanges with Nordic broadcasters, particularly around AI-based gaming tools and shared use cases. These informal knowledge exchanges allow for benchmarking and mutual learning, but they often lack the institutional support necessary for sustained joint development.

The Eurovision Roblox activation, discussed in Section 5.4, illustrates both the potential and the fragility of collaborative efforts. While it succeeded in reaching over a million users and demonstrated the viability of a transnational gaming initiative, it also revealed how such projects remain precarious - dependent on short-term enthusiasm, minimal budgets, and the absence of a robust shared infrastructure. As Expert 10 noted, “we’re not really agile,” drawing attention to the contrast with commercial game developers who iterate rapidly and scale ideas with venture capital - resources not available to most PSM.

Several experts called for the creation of a European PSM gaming platform or white-label infrastructure - an interoperable system that could serve national broadcasters while collectively reducing dependence on foreign platforms. Such a move could also bolster trust and legitimacy by reasserting public values in platform design, algorithmic transparency, and data governance. However, any such initiative would require harmonized legal frameworks - currently hindered by divergent interpretations of public service mandates and media law across Europe.

Ultimately, collaboration is not a panacea. While it can increase efficiency and expand reach, it also introduces its own governance dilemmas, particularly in balancing local mandates with

transnational goals. For collaboration to function as a meaningful vector for public value creation, it must move beyond ad hoc partnerships toward institutionalized structures capable of coordinating, funding, and iterating public service innovation at scale.

## **5.6 Future-Proofing PSM**

One of the most consistent themes across the interviews was the sense that PSM are locked in a reactive posture - perpetually trying to “catch up” to commercial innovation rather than define public-facing standards themselves. This strategic lag, driven by legal caution, institutional inertia, and fragmented infrastructures, positions PSM as followers in a rapidly evolving media ecosystem. The longer this dynamic persists, the more difficult it becomes for PSM to reclaim a leadership role in shaping digital public value.

Gaming platforms are not a passing trend; they are cultural infrastructures that mediate how younger - and increasingly older - audiences engage with content, identities, and communities. Ignoring or underutilizing these spaces risks deepening the relevance gap between PSM and the publics they serve. Yet merely occupying these spaces is not sufficient. As previous sections have shown, meaningful public value creation on gaming platforms requires platform fluency, ethical responsiveness, and structural commitment.

To future-proof their mandate, PSM must move beyond symbolic experimentation and embrace a strategic posture of anticipatory innovation. This involves three key shifts:

1. From adaptation to translation: Rather than merely adapting existing content formats to new platforms, PSM must learn to translate public service values - such as inclusivity, transparency, and democratic participation - into platform-native experiences. This includes designing for co-creation, social play, and educational interactivity in ways that resonate with platform cultures.
2. From institutional silos to cross-functional teams: Effective innovation in gaming demands interdisciplinary collaboration between editorial, technical, legal, and audience research units. The current compartmentalization within many PSM organizations limits their ability to develop cohesive, agile strategies. Building cross-functional teams focused on interactive formats would significantly increase institutional responsiveness.
3. From risk aversion to ethical experimentation: While caution is understandable given public accountability, excessive risk aversion undermines the very legitimacy PSM seek to preserve. As several experts noted, public media should be setting standards for ethical design,

inclusivity, and transparency in spaces dominated by commercial logic. This requires not just reacting to trends, but proactively testing new models for public value creation.

The rise of immersive technologies - such as xRealities (XRs), haptic interfaces, or AI-driven content personalization - will only accelerate these challenges. As gaming becomes increasingly multimodal and embodied, the stakes for public interest design grow higher. If PSM do not develop the infrastructure, mindset, and legal basis to operate in these spaces, they risk becoming permanently sidelined in future cultural and technological ecosystems.

Future-proofing, then, is not about keeping pace with commercial platforms. It is about reclaiming a normative role: using the affordances of gaming not just to entertain, but to educate, connect, and empower. This means making strategic choices now to ensure that PSM remain vital, visible, and valuable in the decades to come.

## **5.7 Limitations and Future Research**

As one of the first qualitative studies to examine how European PSM engage with gaming platforms to create new forms of public value, this thesis inevitably comes with certain limitations. These constraints do not detract from the analytical value of the findings but instead highlight avenues for further inquiry.

First, the study is limited in scope and scale. While the expert interviews provide rich insights from multiple national contexts and institutional roles, the sample remains relatively small and largely Western European. The absence of perspectives from Southern or Eastern European PSM restricts the generalizability of cross-national claims, particularly in relation to legal frameworks and funding structures.

Second, the research is time-bound. The findings represent a snapshot of current developments, many of which are in flux. Legislative changes - such as updated media acts or EU-level policy interventions - could significantly alter the strategic and legal landscape for gaming engagement in the near future. As such, longitudinal research is needed to assess how PSM strategies evolve over time and whether early-stage experiments lead to lasting institutional change.

Third, the analysis centers on institutional perspectives rather than audience reception. While interviewees frequently speculated about public expectations and user behavior, this study does not empirically investigate how audiences perceive or engage with PSM initiatives on gaming platforms.

Future research should examine the credibility, visibility, and perceived value of PSM in gaming environments through user-centered methods.

Additionally, the study has not explored the political economy of innovation in sufficient depth. As several experts hinted, legislative inertia and platform dependency may be shaped not only by public governance concerns, but also by lobbying efforts, procurement constraints, and broader competition policy. A closer look at the structural forces limiting PSM autonomy - including commercial gatekeeping, state aid restrictions, and platform monopolies - would offer critical insights into systemic barriers to innovation.

Finally, there is a pressing need to explore the role of emerging technologies in public service gaming. Tools such as haptic feedback devices (e.g., SenseGlove) or VR locomotion systems (e.g., Virtuix Omni) introduce new dimensions of embodiment and immersion that may affect the educational or civic potential of games. Research should examine how these technologies intersect with PSM values and mandates - and whether greater immersion leads to higher public value or merely new forms of spectacle.

In short, this thesis opens more questions than it answers - an expected outcome given the emergent nature of the field. But by mapping the tensions, constraints, and possibilities of PSM engagement with gaming platforms, it provides a foundation for deeper, broader, and more comparative research in the years to come.

## **5.8 Concluding Remarks**

This thesis has shown that gaming platforms are not simply a new distribution channel, but a contested cultural space - one that challenges PSM to rethink how public value can and should be created in a platformized media environment. While PSM actors across Europe have begun to explore these spaces, their efforts are constrained by structural, legal, and institutional frictions that often reduce gaming initiatives to isolated experiments rather than sustained strategic interventions.

Yet these constraints are not immutable. The findings demonstrate that motivation, capacity, and creativity exist within PSM systems; what is lacking is an enabling environment that supports risk-tolerant experimentation, cross-border collaboration, and platform-native thinking. Gaming can serve as a testbed for institutional renewal - forcing PSM to engage with participatory logics, new metrics of success, and emerging audience expectations.

Crucially, the legitimacy of PSM in the digital age will not be sustained by preservation alone. It must be earned through visible, value-driven engagement in the cultural forms and technological

spaces that define contemporary publics. If PSM fail to establish a meaningful presence in gaming, they risk not only missing younger audiences, but undermining their broader claim to public relevance.

To “play publicly” is therefore not a contradiction - it is a provocation. It invites PSM to take seriously the idea that games, like documentaries or news, can be vehicles for education, inclusion, and democratic participation. It suggests that public value is not medium-specific, but mission-driven - and that the next chapter of PSM will be written not just in broadcast studios, but across virtual worlds, code libraries, and digital communities.

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## Appendix A

### Comprehensive Expert Interview Guide

**Thesis Title:** *Playing Publicly. Public-Commercial Collaboration and the Future of Public Service Media*

**Research Partner:** European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

**Estimated Duration:** 45–60 minutes (modular/flexible)

#### 1. Introduction & Context

- Brief overview of the research project and public value framework
- Context: Increasing relevance of gaming platforms (e.g. Roblox, Fortnite) for PSM
- Ask for permission to share results & thank for participation.
- Personal background of interviewee and relevance of their role

#### 2. PSM Strategy & Institutional Engagement

- What role do gaming and immersive platforms currently play in your (organization's) public service strategy?
- Why has gaming (not yet) been adopted as part of your broader digital strategy?
- How are such initiatives justified internally (e.g. in budgeting, KPIs)?

#### 3. Public Value Creation in Gaming Contexts

- In your view, how can gaming contribute to public service values (e.g., education, participation, diversity)?
- How do you ensure that public service objectives are upheld on commercial platforms?
- Can you share an example of a game or interactive experience that achieved notable public value impact?

#### 4. Platform Use & Technological Considerations

- Which platforms (Roblox, Fortnite, etc.) have you worked with or explored? Why?
- How do development tools (e.g. Unity, UGC tools, AI) influence your capacity to produce content?

- Are there platform-specific risks (e.g. data privacy, algorithmic curation, commercialization)?

## **5. Collaboration Models: Public-Commercial Partnerships**

- How do you approach collaborations with commercial platforms or indie developers?
- What challenges arise when maintaining public service values in such partnerships?
- Are there promising cross-border or institutional initiatives (e.g. EBU projects)?

## **6. Policy, Legal & Ethical Frameworks**

- Are current media or platform policies supportive of gaming innovation within PSM?
- What legal or normative obligations apply when reaching young audiences via games?
- How do you address ethical concerns (e.g., safety, inclusivity, data use) in design and partnerships?

## **7. Audience Engagement & Generational Trends**

- What insights have you gathered about how younger audiences engage with games or metaverse spaces?
- How does your team balance entertainment, education, and interaction?
- What makes a game or experience resonate with youth in a meaningful way?

## **8. Futures Thinking & Strategic Outlook**

- What major shifts do you anticipate in how audiences engage with virtual environments?
- What would it take (strategically, structurally, or legally) for PSM to scale gaming initiatives?
- Where do you see the future of public service media in gaming and immersive media?

## **9. Closing & Further Resources**

- Are there any cases, initiatives, or experts you think are crucial to look into?
- Any final reflections on the potential or limits of gaming for public service media?