

Stretch and Challenge 3.42

Interview a family member or friend who is an *Archers* fan. Find out how long they have been listening, why they listen, and whether they engage in social interaction relating to the show.

Top Tip

Make notes on the way in which listeners might identify with the characters and situations in the *Archers* episode you have studied.

The Helen and Rob storyline in particular led to some remarkable audience responses:

- A 'Helen Titchener Fund' was set up by an *Archers* fan, which raised thousands of pounds for Refuge, a domestic violence support charity.
- In September 2016 the 'Solidari-tea' campaign received 35000 tweets in the weeks surrounding the trial and was nominated for the Best Socially Responsible Initiative at the 2017 'Social Buzz' Awards.

Theoretical perspectives on *The Archers* audiences: Uses and Gratifications

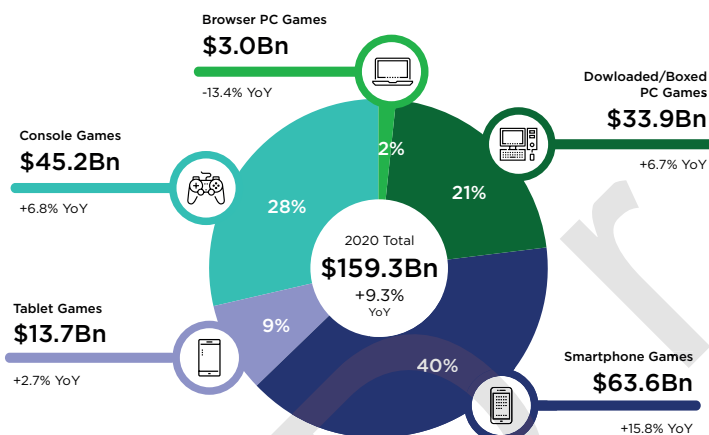
Audiences might find pleasure in the familiarity of *The Archers*, for example if they have grown up with the programme. It can offer escapism and entertainment, especially as the soap opera genre constructs a 'parallel world' that runs alongside 'real' life. The programme also offers information and an insight into farming and rural issues.

Listeners might identify with individual characters and situations. Many *Archers* listeners are active audience members who engage in social interaction on Twitter, Facebook and fan forums.

Video Games

You will study video games in relation to audience and industry issues. The set product is *Fortnite* and you will explore pages from the website, chosen by your teacher. Extracts from the game may be considered to explore relevant aspects of industry and audience.

Video gaming is a very significant media industry and has had a higher **turnover** than the Hollywood film industry in recent years. This is an interesting media area to explore in terms of audience, as video games are very popular and accessible and offer audience interaction to determine the outcome of a game or narrative. There has also been a lot of debate about the possible negative effects of video games.



A graphic from Newzoo showing the growth of the video games industry, which generated \$159.3 billion globally in 2020.

Key Term

Turnover

A business term for the amount of money a company takes from sales of products.



The video games industry and the importance of new technologies

The video games industry has been steadily growing in recent years and saw a large rise in 2020, as video gaming as a pastime increased in periods of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Video games make substantial amounts of money and Newzoo predicts that 2021's global games market will generate revenues of \$175.8 billion.

Video games were traditionally played on a computer or games console, but tablets and smartphones are now very popular platforms. Mobile gaming is a fast-growing part of the industry, as it has the potential to appeal to a larger audience than more conventional gaming. People with a smartphone can access games easily and conveniently at any time, and many smartphone games are also free to play. These factors have arguably made gaming more democratic and available to a much wider range of people, as a large investment in specialist gaming equipment is not required.



The Nintendo Gameboy was a popular handheld console in the 1990s.

In 2021, smartphone games generated significantly more income than any other individual type of game and accounted for over 45 per cent of the games market according to Newzoo.com. *Fortnite Battle Royale* is an example of a free-to-play game that can be played on a mobile phone. Video games companies make money from free-to-play games through elements such as advertising and **in-game purchases**.

New and developing technologies are vitally important to video gaming and have driven developments in the industry. **Augmented reality**, used in games such as *Pokémon Go*, allows producers to make advancements in the games and experiences that they create for audiences. Virtual reality is an evolving technology used in some video games to immerse the player in a fictional environment where they feel as though they are in the world of the game. This requires specialist equipment such as a VR headset. Epic Games, the producers of *Fortnite*, developed the Unreal Engine in the 1990s, a 'real-time 3D creation tool'. It is used to create video games, animations and effects for film and television, and has been a significant technological development for this company.



Quickfire 3.51

Why do you think smartphones have become a popular way for people to play video games?



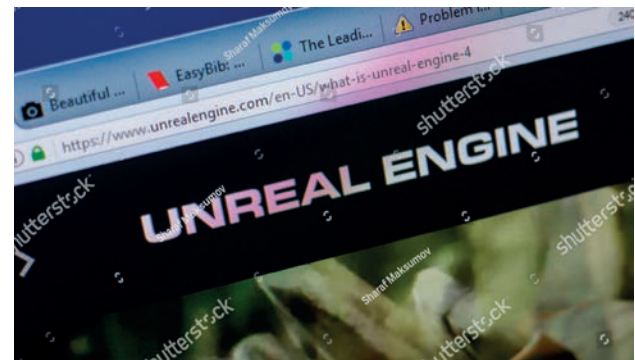
Key Terms

In-game purchase

Where players buy extra content or features from within the game; these may enhance the playing experience or allow gamers to access extra features.

Augmented reality

Technology that allows pictures of virtual objects to be overlaid onto images of the real world, for example on a mobile phone screen.



Quickfire 3.52

Can you think of another vertically integrated media organisation that you have studied?

Key Terms

Horizontal integration

Where one organisation buys other companies in the same sector that produce similar products. This can allow the organisation to strengthen or increase their range of products and reduces competition.

Metaverse

A 'virtual' online space where people can meet to play games or socially interact.

Epic Games

Fortnite was created by Tim Sweeney at Epic Games, a very large games company. In 2012, Epic received a significant investment from the Chinese entertainment company, Tencent, which now owns a 40 per cent share of Epic Games. According to *PC Gamer* this allowed Epic to make a dramatic move away from creating paid-for games and adopt a different business model of free-to-play games.

Along with producing games such as *Fortnite* and *Infinity Blade*, Epic also sells games made by different producers via its website 'store'. This is an example of vertical integration, as Epic Games is involved in different stages of the production and distribution process. Epic also owns other game developer companies, including Psyonix, and acquired Tonic Games Group in 2021. This is an example of **horizontal integration**. Tim Sweeney stated on the Epic website that the company is aiming to develop the **metaverse**, and that Tonic Games will help them to achieve their creative goal in building 'powerful games, content and experiences.'

Epic Games' Unreal Engine is used to create *Fortnite*, although Ryan Brucks, Principal Technical Artist at Epic Games, stated that '*Fortnite's* world is still largely crafted with love by hand by our designers.' ('Building Worlds in *Fortnite* with Unreal Engine' on YouTube).

Tonic Games created the popular game *Fall Guys*, and was acquired by Epic Games in 2021.

The *Hunger Games* films were hugely successful and are based on a similar concept to *Fortnite Battle Royale*.

The set product: *Fortnite*

Fortnite Save the World, a paid-for survival and building game, launched in July 2017, and *Fortnite Battle Royale* was released in September the same year. There is also a Creative mode of the game that allows users to design their own content. *Fortnite Battle Royale* is the most popular, free-to-play, mode of the game. Battle games have become popular in recent years. These include *Player Unknown's Battlegrounds* (2017) which, it is argued, influenced *Fortnite*, and *Apex Legends* (2019). They are based on the idea of fighting to survive, as the winner is the last remaining player in the game. This concept has been explored in other media forms including *The Hunger Games*, a very popular series of dystopian films based on books by Suzanne Collins, where young people compete against each other and fight to the death.



Fortnite's genre is described on the Epic website as 'action/shooter/first person', however the visual elements are bright and colourful, and the violence is less graphic than in many games in this genre. There is also an element of building, where players find materials to construct shelters, which might be familiar to players of games such as *Minecraft*. These factors potentially widen the audience to include younger players, while the hybrid nature might attract fans of different types of game. *PC Magazine* identified the uniqueness of *Fortnite* in comparison with other battle games in a review in November 2020: 'Fortnite's bright, fun graphics and novel construction mechanics are highly welcome in a genre that seems to have increasingly turned down dark and suspenseful paths.'

The *Battle Royale* mode of *Fortnite* is a cross-platform game that can be played across different games consoles, tablets and smartphones. This is convenient and increases the social aspect, as gamers can play with people who are using different platforms. The game can be downloaded from the Epic Games website and from sites such as the PlayStation store. It is not currently (September 2021) available to download from the Apple store, due to a dispute between Epic Games and Apple.

Fortnite Battle Royale has become an enormously successful cultural phenomenon. Key points about the game include:

- There are different ways to play, including solo, duo and squad. Up to 100 people can play together and communicate via the chat function.
- The main idea of the game is survival: players are dropped onto an island and need to find a way to survive, and 'eliminate' other players.
- There are regular updates to the game and new elements are sometimes introduced, for example *Party Royale*. This non-competitive area of *Fortnite* launched in May 2020 with a 'live' premiere, and is described on the *Fortnite* website as 'an experimental and evolving space' where users can relax, play mini-games or join their friends to watch concerts and films. This widens the potential audience to people who are interested in a social experience.
- The game is structured into chapters, each of which has a number of seasons. Chapter 1 ended on 13 October 2019 when the world of *Fortnite* disappeared into a black hole: the game could not be played and content from the *Fortnite* social media channels was deleted. This created a huge amount of discussion and speculation among fans and was widely reported in the news, demonstrating the cultural significance and influence of the game. *TechRadar* commented on the unique success of this event: 'It turns out that the one thing more talked about in gaming than playing *Fortnite* is the game being unavailable. How many games can dominate the conversation two years from launch?'
- Chapter 2 launched two days after the end of Chapter 1, when a great deal of publicity and anticipation had been generated. Each season lasts for a number of weeks, and the start of a new season generates new marketing material. Chapter 2, Season 8, 'Cubed' launched in autumn 2021 with the announcement, 'A new war takes shape' and a trailer on the website. This resembles the familiar structure of a book or long-form television series. It allows the producers to provide continuity and introduce new elements to maintain interest in the game.



Quickfire 3.53

How might the success of films such as *The Hunger Games* influence other media forms such as video games?



Stretch and Challenge 3.43

Research the different modes of *Fortnite*: *Save the World*, *Battle Royale* and *Creative*. Consider how these might appeal to both new and experienced gamers.



Quickfire 3.54

Why do you think the producers of *Fortnite* created the 'black hole' event at the end of Season 1?



Top Tip

Research the latest updates to the game on the *Fortnite* website. Make notes about how these offer audiences new features.



Quickfire 3.55

What is the term that describes the way in which two organisations work together to cross-promote a product?

Industry issues: funding

Fortnite Battle Royale is free to play and makes money for the producers in different ways, including:

- Microtransactions: Users can buy 'V-bucks' with which to make in-game purchases of items such as 'emotes' and costumes, and also to buy the Battle Pass which allows access to further add-ons and rewards. In-game purchases can generate a lot of income for a company. According to a 2019 article on Forbes.com, over \$1 billion of *Fortnite's* \$2.4 billion revenue (in 2018) came from the sale of in-game items.
- Crew subscriptions: Players can pay a monthly fee to become members of the *Fortnite* Crew, which includes bonus content as well as the Battle Pass and a monthly allowance of V-bucks.
- Merchandise and licensing deals with different companies for products, such as toy weapons and characters from *Fortnite*.

The launch and success of *Fortnite***Quickfire 3.56**

Why do you think the marketing of *Fortnite* included a cinematic trailer?

The promotional campaign for the launch of *Fortnite* was created by Fearless Media, a digital marketing and advertising agency, and targeted existing gamers. According to Fearless Media, the campaign reached 150 million users across different gaming sites. An original cinematic trailer for the game can still be viewed on the *Fortnite* YouTube channel.

Quickfire 3.57

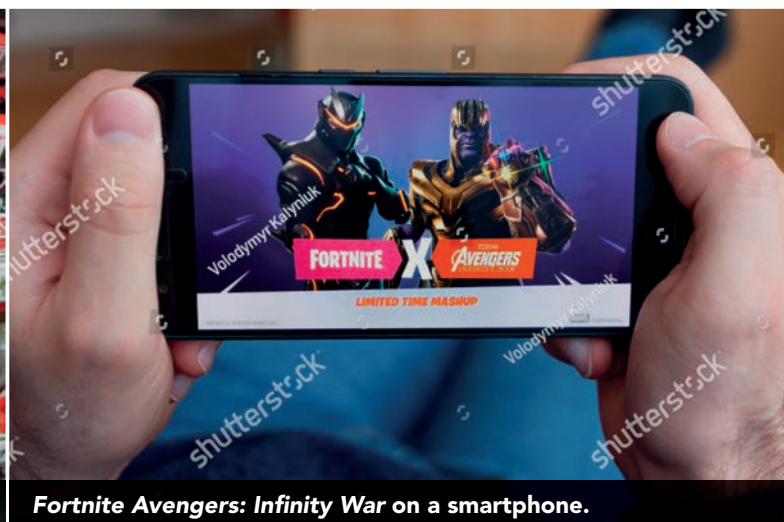
Why might a game's revenue drop in the years after a successful launch?

The game was an immediate success, gaining 10 million players in the first two weeks after its launch. *Fortnite's* following has continued to grow and, in May 2020, the game's official Twitter page announced that it had over 350 million registered players. According to Den of Geek, *Fortnite* generated \$1.8 billion in 2019, which was less than its income in 2018, but demonstrates that the game is still extremely successful following the initial interest generated by the launch.

One factor in the success of *Fortnite* is the integration of characters from other successful media franchises, such as *Star Wars* and the Marvel films. In May 2018, for example, *Fortnite* released a version called the 'Infinity Gauntlet Limited Time Mash-up', a crossover with the hugely successful film *Avengers Infinity War*. According to Brandwatch, this collaboration generated 1.2 million



Fortnite memorabilia in a toy store.



Fortnite Avengers: Infinity War on a smartphone.

mentions on social media in the first two days following its release. This example of synergy is potentially beneficial to both products and shows how media organisations can potentially harness the power of the audience to spread the word on social channels. The 'buzz' that these collaborations generate on social media may also raise awareness of the game among audiences who are not existing gamers. Film fans, for example, might be interested to see how their favourite characters are incorporated into the game.

Another way in which *Fortnite* reaches a wide audience is through **e-sports**. The *Fortnite* World Cup was first held in 2019. The event received considerable media attention and was streamed on *Fortnite*'s Twitch channel.

There are now many professional gamers who are employed by media organisations. Business Insider explains the importance of these gamers to products such as *Fortnite*: 'Epic works with an ecosystem of professional gamers to keep the game at the forefront of the online conversation.'

A very successful professional video game player, Tyler 'Ninja' Blevins, was included in the Pioneers category of *Time*'s list of 100 most influential people in 2019. He rose to fame playing *Fortnite* and, it is argued, was influential in building a fan base for the game. Celebrity players, such as the musician Drake, also help to raise the profile of the game.

Fortnite has hosted various events, including a film festival and 'live' concerts, which offer a range of different experiences to engage wide and diverse audiences. An example of these live events is the Ariana Grande *Rift* tour in August 2021. These were a series of scheduled virtual 'shows' in the game that were publicised on the official *Fortnite* website and social media channels through:

- 'Teaser' trailers and regular posts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook in the run up to the event and during the tour. Players were encouraged to attend with friends and undertake 'Rift Tour Quests' to unlock rewards in advance of the shows.
- In-game purchases, such as Ariana Grande costumes and emotes.
- A news item on the website including a message for new players, explaining how to download the game and take part.

This 'live' event is likely to have attracted new and wider audiences to the game, for example, Ariana Grande fans.

Key Term

E-sports

Electronic sports, video gaming competitions that often have high prize money.

Quickfire 3.58

What is a 'fan base' for a media product?



Fans watch the 2019 *Fortnite* World Cup finals in New York.



Ariana Grande, a very successful singer and songwriter, at the 2016 Grammy Awards. Her *Rift* tour featured as a *Fortnite* live event in 2021.

Quickfire 3.59

What are the advantages of a YouTube channel to video games producers?

Activity 3.20

Study the homepage of the *Fortnite* website and answer the following questions:

- What are the main elements of the homepage?
- What *Fortnite* products are featured?
- Can you identify examples of collaborations with different products or celebrities?
- Make notes summarising three recent posts that promote different aspects of the game.
- Give three examples of opportunities for audiences to interact with the website.
- Look at one of the other pages on the menu bar, such as 'Crew' or 'Competitive'. Make notes and think about why this page has been included on the website.

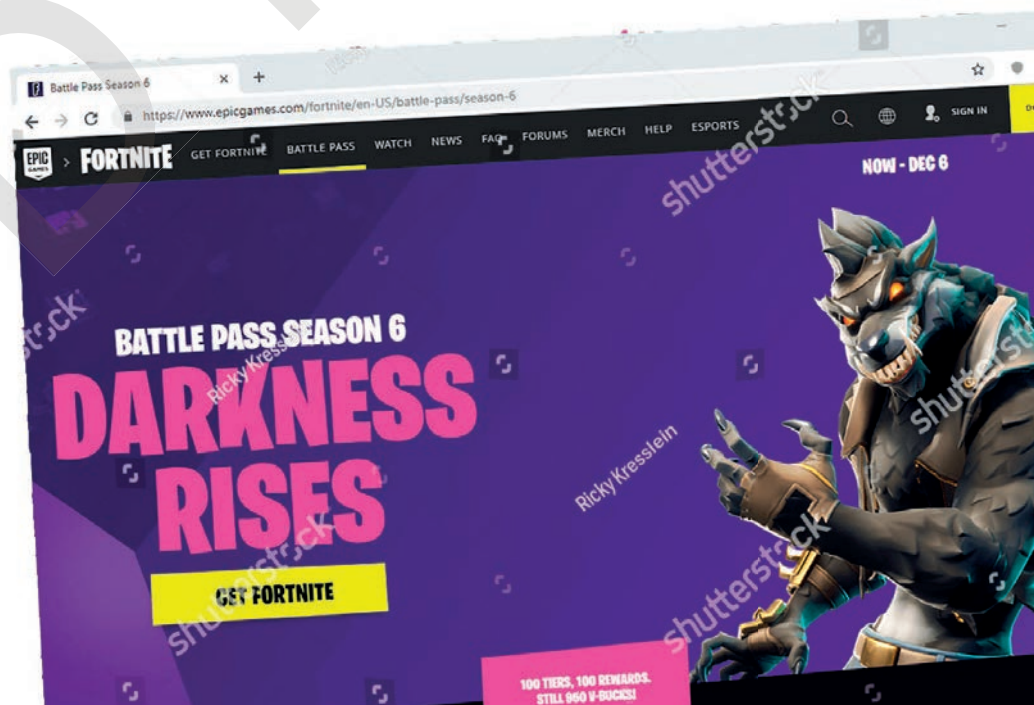
Studying the *Fortnite* website: industry and audience

The *Fortnite* website, and linked social media, is an important way for the brand to reach its audience. The website includes information and updates about the game and links to content and social media channels that might enhance the audience's experience of the game.

The official *Fortnite* YouTube channel includes 'reveals' of the latest *Fortnite* products, streams of *Fortnite* e-sports competitions and 'behind the scenes' footage. *Fortnite* also regularly updates its Twitter, Facebook and Instagram pages.

The *Fortnite* website encourages audiences to engage with the product in different ways, for example:

- The homepage involves the user through the use of bright, animated graphics and the use of imperatives and exclamatives, such as: 'Watch trailer' and 'Play free now!'
- A range of 'posts' highlight the latest news and developments in *Fortnite*, for example the introduction of new characters or a future special event. The linked pages typically include elements such as animations or images and the use of direct address to engage the audience.
- Some posts, such as the 'Save the World Homebase Status Reports', further immerse users in the world of *Fortnite* by addressing them in role, for example, 'Attention commanders...'
- The menu bar includes links to pages for each mode of the game (*Battle Royale*, *Creative* and *Save the World*) and to other features, such as competitions and merchandise.
- A link is included to the Epic Games website and a range of other games for purchase, increasing the potential for commercial success.



How are video games regulated?

Video games are classified in Europe using PEGI (Pan European Game Information) ratings. The Video Standards Council Rating Board is responsible for rating video games and apps in the UK, using the PEGI system. The PEGI ratings work in a similar way to BBFC age certificates, for example a game with a PEGI rating of 7 is suitable for children aged seven and over. The ratings are determined by factors such as levels of violence, bad language and how frightening the games are. They also identify games that include in-game purchases, and the PEGI website explains how these can be controlled.

Fortnite is rated PEGI 12 for 'frequent mild violence' and in-game purchases using real money. The PEGI website states (about *Fortnite Battle Royale*): 'Violence consists of you using whatever weapons you can find or make to defeat the other players with damage being dealt by numbers and life bars. The players disappear in a blue light when defeated.'

The lack of blood and gore is one reason why *Fortnite* has a lower age rating than other games in the same genre. Some concerns have been raised about the chat feature in the game, as players can interact with people who might be complete strangers and in a different age group. Common Sense Media, a US organisation that informs parents about safe use of technology recommended that *Fortnite* was suitable for people aged over 13, suggesting that, with parental guidance and controls, it offers a 'tween-friendly' alternative to first-person shooter games.

Epic Games' web page of Community Rules contains guidelines about standards of conduct expected within the games and the online experience. It tells players not to engage in behaviour such as bullying and discrimination, and includes links where users can report inappropriate behaviour. This shows that Epic Games monitors and responds to complaints, undertaking an element of regulatory control. The web page also outlines the parental controls that allow adults to make decisions about their children's use of the game, for example how they communicate with others and how to restrict in-game purchases. It says, 'We want Epic Games to be a safe and fun place for you to play games or hang with your friends. We need your help to keep it that way.'



Stretch and Challenge 3.44

Research the history of the Video Standards Council Rating Board on the VSC website: videostandards.org.uk/RatingBoard/about-history. Make notes on the key developments.



Audiences and video games

The global gaming industry has grown significantly in recent years and more people are playing video games than ever before. Gaming increased in popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic, when people stayed at home during periods of lockdown, and Newzoo predict that there will be 2.9 billion video games players in the world by the end of 2021. Video gamers come from different age groups, for example:

- people in their 40s and 50s, who might have played early video games when they were teenagers in the 1980s and 1990s
- people in their 20s and 30s – millennials – who grew up playing video games
- younger Generation Z audiences – digital natives who have grown up with technology.

The rise of the professional gamer, who might have their own YouTube and Twitch channels, has arguably widened the audience for video games, as many people enjoy watching other people play games, even if they are not keen gamers themselves.

The impacts of gaming

The question of whether the immersive nature of video games can have a negative influence on people's behaviour has been a hotly debated topic for many years. Some commentators argue, for example, that a person who plays violent video games might be more likely to commit violent acts. This view supports the **effects debate theory**, which argues that audiences are passive and might be influenced by the media products they consume.

The impact of video gaming on young people is of particular concern, as mentioned in the information about regulation on the previous page. Organisations including the NSPCC have issued advice to help parents ensure that their children play online games safely. Some concerns raised about *Fortnite* include the possible dangers of the open chat function and the potentially 'addictive' nature of the game, where people might play for very long periods of time and become immersed in the game to the exclusion of other interests, with potential harm to their behaviour and wellbeing.

Quickfire 3.60

Which audience theory supports the idea that video games might have a negative impact on people's behaviour?

Quickfire 3.61

What skills might people develop while playing games such as *Fortnite*?

Stretch and Challenge 3.45

Research different audience responses to *Fortnite*, for example newspaper or user reviews.



On the other hand, many people argue that gaming has positive benefits, such as developing creativity, spatial awareness skills and perseverance. Multiplayer games, for example, involve communication and teamwork. Newzoo has described video gaming as a 'universal language connecting people through a shared passion, common goals and unifying experiences.' This view supports **active audience theories**, suggesting that audiences interact with media products for a particular purpose. The Unreal Engine website, for example, includes lessons for teachers to use with students, exploring scientific concepts using *Fortnite Creative*.

The *Fortnite* audience

The game has successfully attracted a very large audience, and research suggests that players fall broadly into specific social groups. According to Statista, *Fortnite* is particularly popular with younger audiences: 62.7 per cent of players are between 18 and 24, and 22.5 per cent are between 25 and 34. Epic Games estimated that, in 2019, 65 per cent of players were male.

The game might also appeal to different audience groups, some of whom are not necessarily serious or committed video gamers, for example:

- Fans of the other brands that appear in *Fortnite*, such as the Marvel characters.
- People who do not normally play video games, who are encouraged to play by their friends or family. The huge amount of media attention may have inspired people to try the game.
- Fans of the artists who appear in *Fortnite*, for example Ariana Grande.
- A wider extended audience because it can be played across different platforms, including a phone.
- People who are not willing to pay and so are not (yet) keen gamers.
- People who enjoy games that do not require a major time commitment, as its play is versatile in terms of time and place.

TechRadar identifies how regular updates to *Fortnite* maintain the interest of players: 'These changes mean that the meta is in a state of constant flux, which may rile competitive players, but it keeps millions checking in on a regular basis to see what has changed.'

Theoretical perspectives: Uses and Gratifications

- The game provides entertainment for audiences and a sense of achievement when, for example, they successfully build a shelter. Players are likely to take pleasure in the competitive elements of the game.
- Social interaction is provided by the multiplayer aspect of the game. It also generates a huge amount of discussion in the media and so becomes a **watercooler topic** that players can contribute to. Players can also socially interact within the world of the game, for example, in the *Party Royale* mode.



Quickfire 3.62

Can you identify any ways in which audiences might personally identify with aspects of the game?



Key Term

Watercooler topic

A major event or topic that most people have heard about. It is widely discussed in society and in workplaces, where people might gather at break times and chat