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BUS227
INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

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UBISOFT

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BUSINESS ANALYSIS OF THE COMPANY

Ubisoft is an international French video game company with the mission to "Enrich players' lives by creating memorable and meaningful gaming experiences" (Ubisoft, 2024a). They are responsible for many successful brands such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Prince of Persia* and *Just Dance* (Ubisoft, 2024b), with *Assassin's Creed* and *Just Dance* having sold 155 million and 80 million units worldwide (Ubisoft, 2023). In Q3 of the 2023-24 period, Ubisoft generated €606.4 million in worldwide revenue, emphasising their global recognition (Ubisoft, 2024c).

Despite it's entrenched international reputation, Ubisoft competes with many rivals. Data published by Yahoo (2023), highlights the market capitalisation of $53.69, $35.69 and $67.06 billion USD for Nintendo, Electronic Arts (EA) and Activision Blizzard. Like Ubisoft, they have their own iconic brands, with Activision Blizzard being renowned for the *Call of Duty* and *Diablo* brands (Activision Blizzard, 2024) — *Call of Duty* has generated 425 million lifetime unit sales (Game World Observer, 2022). However, Ubisoft's differentiation is in inclusive representation and accessibility. For example, the recent entry to the *Assassin's Creed* brand, '*Mirage*', was praised for it's historically-grounded portrayal of Arab culture and medieval Baghdad (Allnutt, 2023; Rogers, 2023). Additionally, '*Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown*' portrayed Persian culture and provided Farsi dubbing, which received a positive reception from Iranian's (Gerken, 2024; Gordon, 2024). See Appendix A for a detailed comparison.

1.2 INTRODUCTION OF THE TARGETED PRODUCT

The decision to introduce *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* (PoP) to the Iranian market, particularly to the capital city of Tehran due to having the highest provincial share of GDP in Iran (Iran Open Data, 2021) is most pragmatic for Ubisoft's international marketing plan. According to Statista (2023), Iran's video games market is forecasted to reach $930.60 million USD, and by 2027 are expected to reach 14.7 million users. Moreover, the plan to distribute PoP to Tehran aligns with the goals of Iran's Computer & Video Games Foundation (ICVGF) (2016), signalling regulatory support. Additionally, video games that aren't developed and published domestically in Iran, lack official presence because they are smuggled and sold to avoid legal barriers presented by economic sanctions (France-Presse, 2021).

Regarding the targeted product, PoP is the most impactful and relevant console title of the *Prince of Persia* brand and Ubisoft's games for the Iranian market. In tandem with receiving positive reviews for representing Persian culture and providing language accessibility features (Gerken, 2024; Gordon, 2024), Ubisoft's Q3 sales report for 2023-24 commended it for "its best-in-class level design and the engaging and deep combat gameplay" (Ubisoft, 2024d). In sum, this subverts the negative portrayal Middle Eastern cultures and languages commonly have in video games (Daiiani and Keogh, 2022), and would be attractive for the Iranian market.

Figure 1. *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown PS5 (PlayStation 5) physical copy, front and rear* (Shiralizadeh, 2024a).
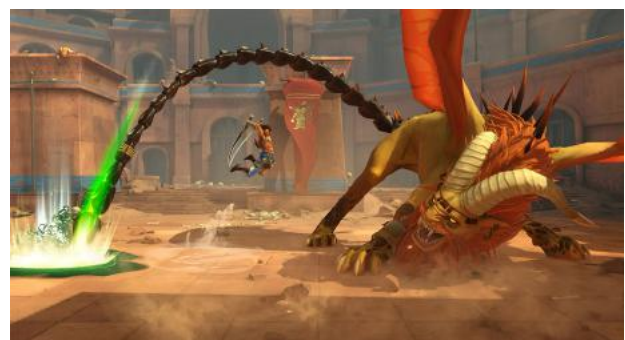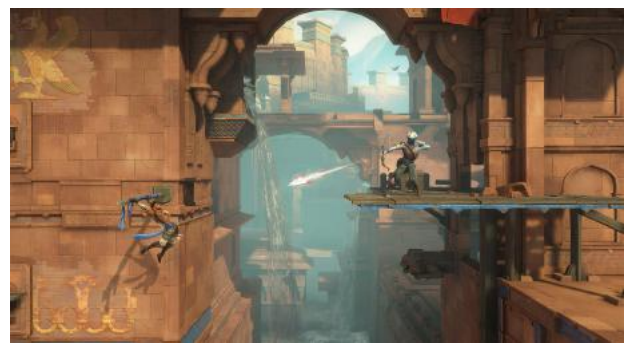
Figure 2. *A series of in-game promotional screenshots from Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* (Ubisoft, 2024e).

2. INTERNATIONAL MARKET SELECTION

2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS FOR THE SELECTED FOREIGN MARKET

According to Hollensen (2020, p. 239), the value of possessing thorough knowledge of a foreign market solidifies its emphasis to managers and parties involved in the marketing plan, and ensures decisions are informed.

Political and Legal Risks. There are certain factors Ubisoft must be vigilant about. Iran's tensions with and sanctions imposed by the USA (Garst, 2020) has no major impact on the plan, but poses a repetitional risk. Furthermore, Iran's internet restrictions impact the plan's coordination. Additionally, Iran's Computer and Video Games Foundation has a regulatory framework for the video game market (ICVGF, 2016).

Economic. According to Statista (2023), Irans video game market is expected to reach 14.7 million gamers by 2027. In 2017, data showed 23 out of 79 million are gamers, indicting significant market growth (Code, 2017). Consumer spending for video games in Iran reached $5.24 million USD in 2020-21; a positive indicator for Ubisoft's plan (Financial Tribune, 2021).

Trade Barriers. Iran's video game market comprises of 'smuggled' games and hardware, indicating no official presence of foreign companies (France-Presse, 2021) - a significant competitive advantage. However, Iran's blacklisted banking system can impact Ubisoft's entry to the market (France-Presse, 2021).

Technological and Environmental. A study identified 71.7% of Iranians play games on consoles (Khoshsaligeh and America, 2020, p. 198) - positive, since PoP is multi-platform. Iran's unstable Internet infrastructure (The New Arab, 2024) can impact the feasibility of the plan.

Social and Cultural. Research has shown demand for game localisation and representing Persian culture positively (Daiiani and Keogh, 2022) - a forte of PoP. This is accompanied by Iranians demanding diverse games, akin to the games in western countries (Kemp, 2023).

In sum, this analysis paints an optimistic picture for Ubisoft's international marketing plan. It identifies strong economic prospects for Iran's video game market, in tandem with demand for localised games that positively portray Iranian culture. This aligns with the ICVGF's framework that could counteract Ubisoft's reputational risks, due to the culturally-celebratory nature of the product. However, political tensions and sanctions limit methods of entry for Ubisoft into Iran, prompting focus on alternatives. Furthermore, Iran's weak internet infrastructure can directly impact communication strategies and consumer experience.

2.2 INTERNATIONAL MARKET SEGMENTATION, TARGETING AND POSITIONING

According to Papadopoulos and Martín Martín (2011, p. 135), segmentation for developing countries is challenging due to limited data. Consequently, targeting the Iranian market presents hurdles for market segmentation. However, the study conducted by Khoshsaligeh and Ameri (2020, p. 196) involving 756 Iranian "avid video gamers" provides credible insight into the Iranian video game market.

Iran's video game scene is male-dominated, with 60% of players aged 12-18 (p. 197). Console gaming is popular for 70%, while 61.8% and 43.6% favour online and mobile respectively (p. 198). Economic sanctions and interest limitations, seen in section 2.1, is highlighted by the 75% who buy games on disc (pp. 198-199).

86.1% prefer original games, with 40% playing over 20 original games (such as *Call of Duty*, *Just Dance* etc.). *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* (PoP) accommodates this preference with English and Farsi options,

a feature 45% of gamers welcome (p. 200), while a significant portion appreciate games in their native language (p. 202). Moreover, over 60% welcome localised gaming, particular in the 'adventure genre' - a forte for PoP (pp. 200-201). See Appendix B for more details.

As outlined in Appendix B, the prime segment for Ubisoft to target in the Iranian video game market is 12-18 year olds that play on consoles, with an interest in adventure games. They are open to playing original games with English language support, albeit appreciate accessibility features such as subtitles in their local language. This segment aligns with the characteristics and features of PoP, since it offers adventure gameplay, cultural relevance to the Iranian market and language accessibility features.

Henceforth, the unique selling proposition for Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown (PoP), in relation to rival offerings in the minds of consumers, is it provides an original gameplay experience encompassing positive cultural representation and localised accessibility. Based on the characteristics of the prime target segment, PoP is an attractive offering.

3. STRATEGIC PLAN

3.1 COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

The Iranian video game market is dichotomous; original games are both officially and unofficially traded in the market (Elmjouie, 2016; France-Presse, 2021). For example, a Ubisoft game like *Assassin's Creed Mirage* would be pirated in the market, limiting original features and localisation opportunities, according to Elmjouie (2016). Therefore, this competitive analysis examines Iranian video games that are officially traded on the market.

A strong competitor of 'Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown' (PoP) would be '*Garshasp: The Monster Slayer*' (2011), developed by Dead Mage and published by Digital Dragon. It draws upon Persian mythology to craft a narrative around saving Persia from evil monsters (Dead Mage, 2012). Its gameplay, featuring simple combat, exploration, and platforming, resembles that of PoP. Despite attempts made to emulate a game experienced in the western markets, technological constraints hindered its realisation (Rossignol, 2011). This is where Ubisoft excels, making PoP a captivating choice for Iranian gamers. Despite their similarities, Ubisoft's PoP stands out due to its superior branding and graphics, especially given its release in January 2024.

Another contender is '*Quest of Persia: Nader's Blade*' (2009), developed and published by Puya Arts. Like *Garshasp*, it explores Persian lore and combat gameplay to appeal to the Iranian market. However, it lacks the graphics and effective product positioning of PoP. As mentioned, PoP is a product of Ubisoft, a foreign company. The absence of legally traded foreign games in the market enhances the appeal of PoP to its prime target segment, thanks to its superior features, fidelity, and culturally immersive gameplay. Refer to Appendix C for an overview.

However, developers and publishers, such as Puya Arts and Digital Dragon, are arguably more knowledgeable of the Iranian video game market, and can distribute their games without significant political

and economic resistance as established in section 2.1. Therefore, Ubisoft's competitive capabilities in the market, in terms of their distribution strategy may be affected.

Figure 3. *Garshasp: The Monster Slayer* (2011).

Figure 4. *Quest of Persia: Nader's Blade* (2009).

3.2 ENTRY MODE SELECTION FOR THE FOREIGN MARKET

According to Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 1990) and Root (1987), as cited in Pan and Tse (2000, p. 536), entering overseas markets poses innate risks due to environmental factors. Therefore, they encourage a incremental entry approach to accumulate experience and confidently increase resource commitment. With this in mind, this section evaluates indirect exporting and strategic alliances as Ubisoft's entry mode into Tehran and the Iranian video game market.

Ubisoft's entry to the market can be through indirect exporting. Since the environment analysis in section 2.1 highlighted the economic sanctions Iran faces, this approach appears effective due to Ubisoft's limited involvement — mitigating negative public-relation risks. Unfortunately, this leads to a lack of control over the marketing mix (Hollensen, 2020, p. 429). Given the radical nature of entering the Iranian market, this is suboptimal considering control over the marketing mix endorses an impactful penetration in the Iranian market. This makes indirect exporting inappropriate.

Alternatively, Ubisoft can form a strategic alliance with a local entity. A benefit of a strategic alliance is the acceleration of market entry because of the local entities skills and knowledge of the market (Hollensen,

2020, p. 462). This warrants Ubisoft to trust a local entity with promoting the product and ensuring it appeals to their prime target segment. Henceforth, leveraging the expertise of the local entity frames a strategic alliance as the favourable alternative to indirect exporting, because the marketing mix can be controlled and enhanced. However, a drawback is the cultural differences of involved parties (Hollensen, 2020, p. 462), which can be overcome through cultural adaptability and intelligence (The Economic Times, 2023). Therefore, Ubisoft should establish a strategic alliance.

After analysing local entities in Tehran from their social media accounts — refer to Appendix D for a comprehensive analysis — Ubisoft should establish an alliance with XPS Game. Their 13,500 follower count and ability to receive 3,600 likes, 640 comments and 78,100 views on average per post, indicates their popularity and knowledge within the market (xps.game, 2024a). They sell a range of video games and consoles, and advertise their physical outlet and products using comical 'shorts' and engaging content, complimenting Ubisoft's positioning in the market.

Figure 5. *XPS Game company logo (xps.game, 2024a) and sample Instagram post (xps.game, 2024b).*

4. THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING MIX

4.1 PRODUCT STRATEGY

The product strategy for Ubisoft's plan is loosely informed by Fan and Tan's (2015, pp. 60-62) domain and cultural specificity matrix, particularly low domain, high cultural specificity. *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* (PoP) doesn't innately require significant adaptations. It's USP, culturally inclusive and locally-accessible, positions itself as the perfect game for the targeted segment. Moreover, it complies with the ICVGF's regulatory framework.

However, to cater further to the segment and localised approach, Ubisoft can make product packaging modifications. Similar to what they did for *Assassin's Creed Mirage*, by modifying the cover art to appeal to the Arab market, Ubisoft should do the same for PoP. While retaining core branding elements such as the brand word-mark, the instalment name provides a localised touch. See figure 6.

Figure 6. *Assassin's Creed Mirage Arabic Cover* (2022) a*nd an originally designed concept cover art for Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown in Farsi* (Shiralizadeh, 2024b).

4.2 PROMOTION STRATEGY

As section 3.2 highlights, Ubisoft will establish a strategic alliance with XPS Game to facilitate their entry into the market. Therefore, to promote and raise awareness of PoP's entry to the market, both Ubisoft's Middle East and XPS Game's Instagram accounts will be utilised. This is because a recent survey discovered, 46.5% of Iranians use Instagram, out of platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp (Aslani, 2024), hence making Instagram an effective platform to promote the game. For example, both social accounts can publish announcement posts of their strategic alliance to develop interest. Subsequently, XPS Game can showcase gameplay encompassing PoP's accessibility features like the Farsi dubbing to appeal to their current audiences.

4.3 PRICE STRATEGY

Original games such as, EA Sport's *Fifa* or Activision Blizzard's *Call of Duty*, are consistently highlighted for not being legally traded on the Iranian market. Consequently, their prices would be significantly less, compared to prices in a foreign country, such as the UK. Iranian customers will purchase these games because they are cheaper and yield higher profits for sellers, due to lower transaction costs. This creates unfair competition between local games traded on the market, such as *Garshasp*. However, former chief business officer at the ICVGF proposes 'foreign' games to be sold significantly lower than their abroad prices (Elmjouie, 2016). This approach would be more competitive and considerate towards purchasing power in the Iranian video game market.

4.4 DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

Ubisoft's distribution strategy for introducing *Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* (PoP) into Tehran and the Iranian video game market will involve a two-level channel. Ubisoft will distribute copies of PoP to XPS Game in Tehran, which will then be sold to the consumer. Since the sole intermediary is XPS Game, distribution would be more efficient and Ubisoft can develop close relationships, fostering trust and collaboration.

5. CONCLUSION

Ubisoft's international marketing plan is a step in the right direction for revamping the Iranian video game industry, in conjunction with maximising Ubisoft's financial performance by introducing a culturally-celebratory and accessible product to the market. Despite Iran being under economic sanctions which has deterred foreign interest and investment, Ubisoft's radical decision to explore the market has fruitful potential.

Moreover, Ubisoft's commitment to "Enrich[ing] players' lives by creating memorable and meaningful gaming experiences" (Ubisoft, 2024a), is at the core of this plan. The current lack of diversity and accessibility within the Iranian video game market, positions Ubisoft as the provider of value and 'meaningful' experiences for their targeted segment. Section 2.2 confirms the importance of localised experiences as a distinct need for the target segment — a core feature of PoP.

Critically speaking, it's highly likely PoP is already unofficially traded on the market. Thus, the plan's risk of failure is possible. However, the unofficial version of PoP would fail to deliver an original experience and provide necessary accessibility features that gives the game it's USP (Elmjouie, 2016). Hence, the presence of the original PoP game coupled with Ubisoft's brand presence in the market, following the pricing strategy in section 4.3, could mitigate the impact of this.

In terms of future prospects, this plan serves as a trial for Ubisoft to determine the overall viability of the Iranian video game market. If after a set period of time, PoP is successful and demand for original Ubisoft games grows, Ubisoft can introduce other games from their back-catalog or develop games for the market, boosting the competitive landscape of the industry. Albeit, they must ensure full adherence to the ICVGF framework to avoid local conflict and plan jeopardy.
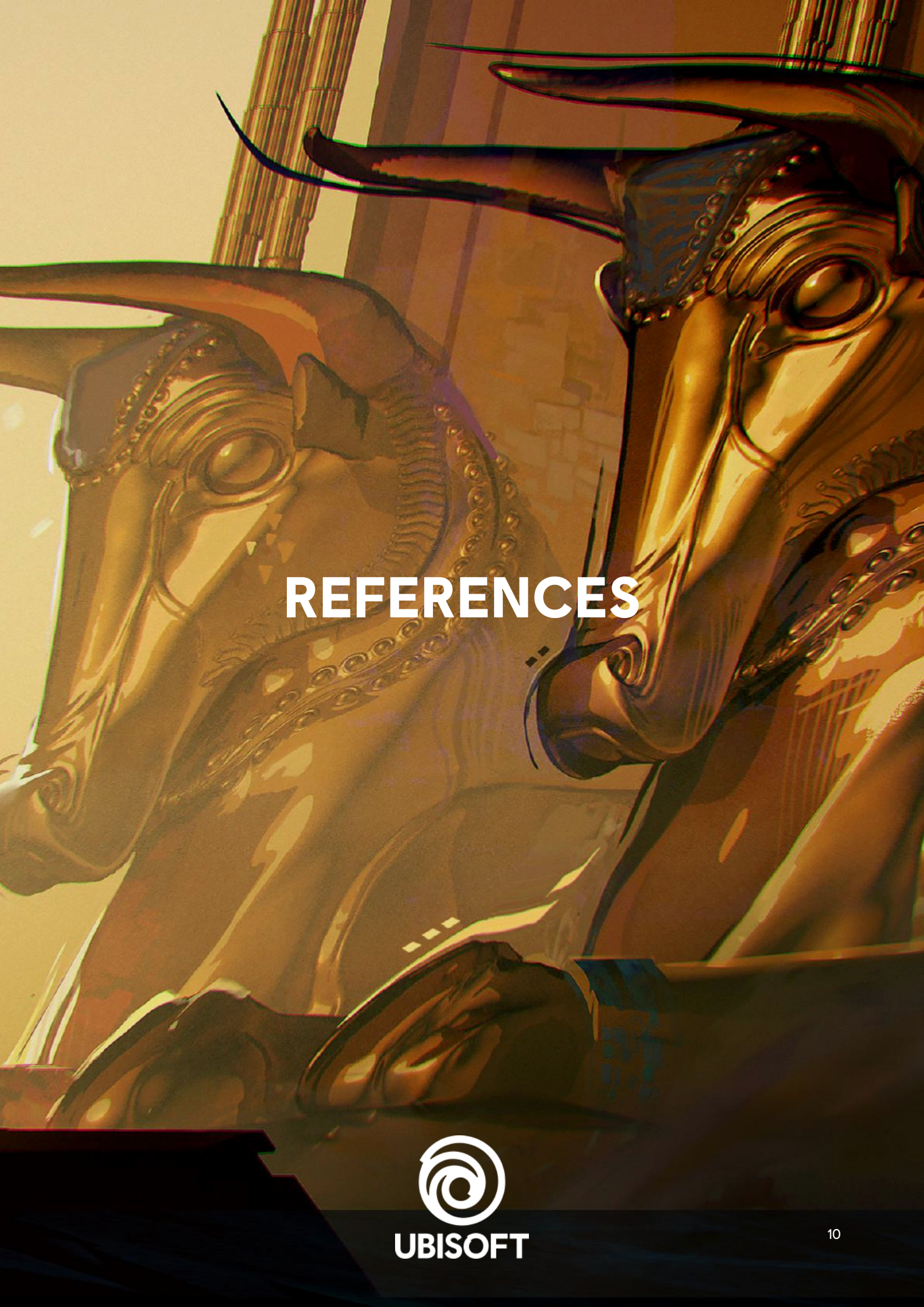
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A comparison of Ubisoft's competitors, focussing on their market capitalisation, core products/services, and brands.

Company	Market Capitalisation	Core Products	Brands
Ubisoft	$3.84 billion USD (Yahoo, 2023)	- Video games for consoles, mobile devices, PCs - Subscription service (Ubisoft +) - Action-adventure, role-playing and first-person shooter games	- Assassin's Creed (Since 2007) - Far Cry (Since 2004) - Prince of Persia (Since 1989) - Just Dance (Since 2009) - Watch Dogs (Since 2014)
Nintendo	$53.69 billion USD (Yahoo, 2023)	- Consoles such as the Nintendo Switch - First-party games - Family-friendly and wholesome games and experiences	- Super Mario (including Mario Kart, Super Mario Bros, etc.)(Since 1981) - The Legend of Zelda (Since 1986) - Pokémon (Since 1996) - Animal Crossing (Since 2001)
EA (Electronic Arts)	$35.96 billion USD (Yahoo, 2023)	- Video games for all platforms, console, mobile devices, PC - Focus on sports, simulation and action genres	- FIFA/FC (Since 1993) - Battlefield (Since 2002) - The Sims (Since 2000) - Star Wars (Since 2015) - Need for Speed (Since 1994)
Activision Blizzard	$67.06 billion USD (Yahoo, 2023)	- Video games for all platforms, console, mobile devices, PC - Focus on multiplayer online and live service games	- Call of Duty (Since 2003) - World of Warcraft (Since 2004) - Diablo (Since 1997) - Overwatch (Since 2016)

APPENDIX B

An overview of Ubisoft's international market segmentation of the Iranian video game market based on Khoshsaligeh and Ameri's (2020) data.

Demographic Variables		Psychographic Variables		Behavioural Variables	
Age	Dominant youth demographic; 60% of the market is aged between 12-18 years old.	**Preferences**	86.1% of gamers prefer playing original games that haven't been tailored to suit local preferences. Albeit, a segment of players prefer games in their local language.	**Platform**	Approximately 70% of gamers play on consoles.
Gender	Market is predominantly male-oriented.		Over 60% welcome a localised gaming experience, particularly if the genre is 'adventure'.	**Purchasing Behaviour**	Over 75% of gamers purchase games on discs over digital downloads.

APPENDIX C

A table examining *Garshasp: The Monster Slayer* (2011) and *Quest of Persia: Nader's Blade* (2009) - competitive products in the Iranian video game market.

Game	Release Year	Developer (D) and Publisher (P)	Features	Comparison with selected product
Garshasp: The Monster Slayer	2011	Dead Mage (D) Digital Dragon (P)	- Based on ancient Persian mythology, with the end goal of saving Persia from evil monsters - Gameplay is based on melee combat, exploration and platforming - Dynamic combat system, Persian Mythology-inspired world, cinematic environments, and platforming elements	- Similar narrative experience as Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown, and possesses cultural significance and references (something the market welcomes) - Gameplay styles are similar, albeit Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown is 2.5D, whereas Garshasp: The Monster Slayer is 3D - Ultimately, while there isn't much difference in gameplay mechanics and the experience created for the consumer, Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown rejuvenates the selection within the market. It is recent (2024), has better fidelity and is an original game from a foreign and reputable developer
Quest of Persia: Nader's Blade	2009	Puya Arts (D/P)	- Dynamic sword fighting with diverse characters and combos - Immersive environment with stunning visual effects - Engaging counterattacks and kill moves in a detailed narrative rooted in 16th century Persian history and culture	- Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown features a single character (Sargon) that demonstrates dynamic sword fighting skills and powers - a unique blend for the consumer - Akin to Quest of Persia, Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown also features an immersive environment set in ancient Persia, albeit the latter has improved fidelity - Both games hold cultural significance which provides a competitive edge in the Iranian market, however Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown positions itself effectively due to it's foreign development and branding.

APPENDIX D

A comparison of local entities based in Tehran, Iran that can facilitate Ubisoft's entry into the Iranian video game market.

Entity	Followers	Average Engagement Per Post (likes:comments:views)	What makes them suitable? If yes/no, why?
XPS Game (xps.game, 2024)	13500	3600 : 640 : 78100 On average, an XPS Game post will receive 3600 likes, 640 comments and generate 78100 views. This helps measure relevance and popularity with the market.	- Customers purchase from the entities physical store, situated inside a shopping centre - Sell video game consoles, accessories and video games - The entity communicates offerings sufficiently, uploading humours yet informative content which positively impacts their (the entity) perception towards the customers/market - Customers are able to contact the entity via Telegram and Instagram
GamePlay (gameplay_ir, 2024)	92100	1000 : 55 : 9600 On average, a GamePlay post will receive 1000 likes, 55 comments and generate 9600 views. This helps measure relevance and popularity with the market.	- Customers purchase from the entities online website and undisclosed physical store - Sell only video games and accessories - The entity doesn't advertise their stock, and instead focuses on industry insights, news, and community engagement posts. - No information on customer touch-points, apart from Instagram - Despite large fan base, the entities quality of content isn't reflective of their popularity
SE7VEN GAMES (se7en__game, 2024)	39800	604 : 43 : 21000 On average, a SE7EN GAMES post will receive 604 likes, 43 comments and generate 21000 views. This helps measure relevance and popularity in the market.	- Customers can purchase from the entities physical store - Sell video game consoles, accessories and video games - The entity communicates offerings sufficiently, with humorous skits, shorts, and informative product information - Customers can contact the entity via their physical stores, Instagram and Telegram

<u>Note</u>: *limited information and accessibility about local entities from the perspective of a foreigner, leads to analysis and deductions from their social media presence, notably Instagram. Data is from 09/04/2024.*