

Pekka Nordlund

# **APPEALS OF VIDEO GAMES IN GAME REVIEWS**

The Differences Between Long- and Short-form Reviews

# ABSTRACT

Pekka Nordlund: Appeals of Video Games in Game Reviews: The Differences Between Long- and Short-form Reviews

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This thesis study examines the key differences between long- and short-form written video game reviews, and how the reviews cater to the proposed information needs of their readers. The study designs and conducts a qualitative content analysis, applying the theoretical framework of “appeals” of video games identified by Lee et al. (2017), and further complemented by Cho (2019), adding to the body of research on video game reviews and recommendation and advisory services from the perspective of their audiences.

The study examines thirty written video game reviews from two Finnish magazines: the Finnish Defence Force reservists' magazine *Reserviläinen*, and a Finnish game culture magazine *Pelit*. Fifteen individual short-form reviews were selected from *Reserviläinen*, and their long-form counterparts from *Pelit*. The study is informed by the contextual differences between the publications, considering their contents through both the concepts of the *implied reader* (Iser, 1974) and the *implied player* (Smith, 2006). The emphasis of the analysis is on examining the material found only in either of the reviews, addressing their key differences.

The analysis suggests that the short-form reviews address multiple appeals of video games, and consider the reviewed titles rather holistically, while also addressing both the implied reader and the implied player, offering concise value statements regarding the reviewed titles. Furthermore, the study suggests that the content found only in the long-form reviews rather provides a more comprehensive exploration of the similar aspects found in the short-form reviews. In addition, the longer format affords to address more of the appeals, more personally, and more interconnectedly. The study proposes that the appeals emerge relating to three *dimensions*: the more subjective *personal experience*, the *game world and narrative*, and the games' contextual situatedness within the *game cultures and the game industry*, relating to other media and highlighting the cross-media appeals of video games. In addition, this study suggests that the games' *accessibility* could be considered as an additional, and meaningful appeal and could be applied by the recommendation and advisory services as an additional access point for video games, while also being valuable to consider in game development.

Keywords: video games, game review, recommendation, appeal, qualitative content analysis

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

## **Preface**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

With an ever-growing number of video games around, and extensive media coverage on them, from discussing gaming cultures and the industry to reviewing games as products, the thought of increasing our understanding of how the reviews cater to our information needs proposes an important venue of study. Considering video games as “experience goods”, of which consumers are not able to “ascertain product quality prior to actual consumption” (Boatwright et al. 2007), their reviews offer a distinct standpoint in providing further understanding on how the authors address the games and their audiences. I have personally been overwhelmed by the abundance of games and information relating to them. As an avid consumer of both, I have often found myself wondering, after reading up on a potential game to play, which kind of material would inform me the best on whether the game would appeal to me or not.

While video game reviews have been studied throughout the years in the field of game studies, the research focus has been mainly on understanding their structure and contents (e.g., Zagal et al. 2009; Thominet, 2016), and their expression of player experience, providing game developers taxonomies and heuristics for game design (e.g., Bond and Beale 2009; Bedwell et al. 2012). The prior studies have examined game reviews in various contexts. These range from expert reviews (game journalists) to user generated content, with diverse sources including magazines, internet sites, video streaming platforms, review aggregation sites, and digital distribution services like Steam.

However, the prior studies have not considered game reviews from the point of view of their audiences, or their information needs. They have also not examined the content differences between different review lengths and contexts considering the reviewed titles. Much of the research has also focused on studying player generated content. Moreover, the studies on game reviews have not sufficiently investigated reviews from non-game related sources.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to fill the gaps by examining written video game reviews from a new perspective. By conducting qualitative content analysis on both long- and short-form game reviews and applying the framework of “appeals” of video games, proposed by Lee et al. (2017), and complemented by Cho (2019), this study aims to provide further understanding on how written game reviews address their readers, and what the key differences are between a long- and a short-form game review. Furthermore,

this study will examine game reviews from both a Finnish Defence Force reservists' magazine *Reserviläinen*, and a Finnish game culture magazine *Pelit*, broadening the field of game review research to cover more non-game related sources.

The research questions of this thesis study are:

(Q1) What are the key differences between the short-form and long-form reviews?

(Q2) How are the proposed appeals of video games present in written video game reviews?

(Q2) How do the reviews cater to the proposed information needs of the readers?

This study contributes to the body of knowledge of game review research and video game recommendation and advisory services, but also has practical implications for game developers, who could benefit from the findings in terms of furthering their understanding on player sentiments within game reviews.

The research suggests that both the short-form and the long-form reviews cover multiple appeal categories, highlighting that the short reviews consider the games rather holistically. While the long-form reviews afford to address more varied appeals, and more interconnectedly, they tend to expand on the similar elements examined in the short-form reviews, also relating the proposed appeals to various aspects of the wider gaming cultures and the video game industry. The study also proposes the appeal of accessibility to emerge from the reviews, adding to the appeals framework.

However, the thesis research has a relatively narrow scope, as the study examines game reviews written in Finnish. Furthermore, the study data corpus is also concise, consisting of a total of thirty reviews of two distinctly different lengths and contexts. What is also worth noting, is that qualitative content analysis is inherently susceptible to subjective interpretation, and the researcher is not an expert in utilizing the method. These limitations will inherently affect the generalizability of the study outcomes.

The thesis refers to expert reviews, which the study defines as reviews written by occupational journalists. The study also uses the terms player-written-, amateur-, and user

generated reviews interchangeably, referring to reviews written by non-experts. The study also refers to the term “gaming capital” defined by Mia Consalvo, describing the relation between gamers and their knowledge of video games (2007).

The first chapter of the thesis introduced the context of the study, providing the research objectives and questions, while also arguing for the value of the thesis study. The chapter also briefly discussed the principal findings and study limitations. Chapter 2 will continue to review the relevant literature of both the short history of video game reviews, and game review research relating to this research project. Chapter 3 will examine the research design thoroughly, detailing the theoretical framework employed and justifying the application of qualitative content analysis for the study. To address the magazine context, the chapter will introduce the concepts of the *implied reader* (Iser, 1972) and the *implied player* (Aarseth, 2007; Smith, 2006; Stenros, 2015), applied in the analysis framework. The chapter will also introduce the two publications the dataset was derived from, along with the details of how the dataset was defined for the thesis research. The chapter concludes by explaining the analysis instruments and process and offers an example of the preliminary analysis. Chapter 4 will encompass the study analysis and results, divided into categories proposed by the theoretical framework of the research. Chapter 5 will discuss the study outcomes, synthesizing the results and proposing further categorization for the findings regarding the appeals’ aspects of expression. The chapter will also propose that the appeal of accessibility emerges from the data, and it will conclude with further examination of the study limitations. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the thesis study, and suggests venues for future research.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing relevant literature for the study and evaluates how video game journalism is established as part of the broader context of journalism. The chapter defines the scope to western video game journalism for consistency, with sub-chapters 2.2 and 2.3 critically examining the review-oriented video game journalism offering an understanding of the genre, and its problematized nature. The aim is to provide a context for the study data and validity for the research. The discussion will keep the focus on game reviews, but also offers a more holistic understanding of the field where both the occupational ideology, and journalistic identity are being debated.

Sub-chapter 2.4 will review the relevant literature of game review research, providing examples of prior studies examining both the structure of game reviews, and how game reviews have been studied to answer more specific research questions. Sub-chapter 2.5 reviews the research applied in the analysis framework of this thesis study.

### 2.2. Reviews' Roots in Lifestyle Journalism

With the rise of consumerism in the '50s and '60s, journalism branched out to encompass a wider variety of leisurely topics, which would fill the increasing number of newspapers and magazines. Cole observes that the innovative new forms of newspaper production increased the page count drastically, leading the papers to be filled with what "could be described as features or reader services" (2005). These newfound services would be later characterized as elements of the journalistic sub-genre called *lifestyle journalism*.

Lifestyle journalism has been outlined as being market-oriented and soft compared to the hard political news (Hanusch 2012). One of its characteristics being, as Hanusch describes it, to provide "news you can use" (Ibid). Fürsich identifies three distinguishing journalistic dimensions within the sub-genre: *review*, *advice*, and *commercialism* (2012), situating video game journalism firmly within the realm of lifestyle journalism. Time paved the way for a variety of different game related magazines to emerge.



### 2.3. Video Games on Pages

Western video game journalism (from now on called game journalism) has its roots in the early '80s, starting out in magazines, which alongside video games, discussed both computing hardware and programming (Bootes, 2020; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Suominen, 2010; Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009). In the late '80s came about one of the first major mainstream video game culture magazines: *Nintendo Power* (1988-2012), which was essentially Nintendo's way of influencing and educating the consumers on the company's products (Wiedeman, 2012). Consalvo builds on Genette's concept of *paratexts* describing how game publications contribute to shaping the industry, discussing how Nintendo capitalized on turning "news into a subscription based magazine" (2007). The connection to the critiqued journalistic dimensions: review, advice, and commercialism can be clearly seen from the beginning, as both the products and information needs were satisfied by the same outlets.

Game culture studies have observed the impact of game journalism, considering widely how magazines became meaningful in dealing with gaming capital and shaping video game cultures (e.g., Bootes, 2020; Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009; Suominen, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2012, 2013; Consalvo, 2007; Mäyrä, 2010). Other studies have contextualized the occupational ideology of both print and internet-based game journalism, describing game journalists as mediators of value statements, and acknowledge gaming capital as a currency in the hands of those who have the knowledge, and the possibility to influence others (e.g., Foxman and Nieborg, 2016; Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009). Game journalism and discourses around gaming have been considered as a part of the forming of gamer identity, from both the gaming enthusiast writers, and their audience's perspectives. In the west, both have been predominantly constructed as young, heterosexual, white, and male (Shaw, 2012; Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009). Kline and Dyer-Witherford (2014), discussing player identities from the industry point of view, coined the term "militarized masculinity", describing how the video game industry has a choice of continuing with either violence or variety.

The constructed gaming markets and gamer identity have been studied in more detail. Shaw examined how gamer identities are formed by interviewing people who play games, but may not identify themselves as gamers, noting that "identification does not entail audiences creating their own 'identities,' but rather working within a context in which

particular identities are being articulated” (Shaw, 2013). The study shows how the amount of time, commitment, and money spent on video games are part of the factors in identifying oneself as a gamer (Ibid). Shaw points out, that games are made for a target market, and game companies keep publishing games they consider appealing to their target audiences, arguing that the inclusion of the representation of the complexities and intersectionality of players in gaming contexts is important (Shaw, 2013).

The constructed audiences and the journalistic discussion around games seems to have been somewhat homogenous through the infant years of video gaming, and market logic has been at the core of it.

In his dissertation, Fisher examined the misrepresentation of modern players, especially women, by the video game magazines and journalists. He also coined the term *Ideology of anxiety*, describing video game journalists having a fear-driven relationship with video game developers and publishers (2012). Kirkpatrick discusses identities constructed through commodities and the ambivalences that derive from it, as *gaming’s constitutive ambivalence* (2013). Shaw pointed out that normalizing the ‘everydayness’ of video games for the broader audiences in the media landscape to be a constructive way of addressing the problematized gamer identity without strengthening the already established constructed audiences (2012).

During the years, there has been an increase in what Huber, a researcher on game aesthetics, describes in a panel discussion as non-academic fan scholarship and its more critical insights, that he suspects the academic critics to be deeply indebted to, but also still widely regards as naïve (Thomas et al., 2009).

Stephen Totilo, the former editor-in-chief at *Kotaku* captured the need for gaming coverage to mature and discuss games’ complexities more in-depth, in the vein of book or film critique, stating that aesthetical analysis of games’ is extremely rare (2005). The problem was also noted by Thomas et al., stating how “Oddly, while reviewing turns a quick critical eye toward games, the art of reviewing games receives little critical attention of its own” (2007).

Same subject was also discussed more recently, as Nieborg and Foxman observe: “while enthusiast writers have an extended tradition of meta-criticism and self-reflection in their

publications, this seems mostly absent in mainstream reporting” (2016). This dialogue reflects the interesting impasse between the occupational game journalism and fan scholarship.

The problematic stance of game journalism and its basis in the fast-developing product-driven landscape affects the focus, and the content it produces. No matter where the journalism is located, whether in magazines or online, a conflict of interest lies in the notion that the major advertisers are the game publishers and hardware manufacturers (Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009). While game journalism has matured through time, and shifted its focus to the online environments, the pressure on the occupational journalists remains, and has increased with the highly vocal audience.

With even more outputs available, such as blogs and YouTube, the idea of alternative game journalism comes into play. While the more independent content creators, akin to the previously discussed non-academic fan scholarship, are well versed in game critique, they operate on platforms and abide to their platform’s rules, and their audience’s expectations.

Prax and Soler, in their study, interviewed both alternative- and established game journalists (2016). They problematize alternative game journalism by its contents’ distribution, which follows the profit maximisation of the platform, and the possible distribution of audience and material income. Freedom to be critical also requires living in financial insecurity, unless the journalist gathers a large audience, and financial security through the platform. The study also found that:

Alternative game journalists do not understand themselves as journalists but instead see themselves as critics or reviewers. They see established print-media game journalists as journalists. However, the interviewees from established game journals also do not identify as game journalists. This means that nobody understands themselves as game journalists (Ibid).

The possibility of game reviewing on streaming platforms has also been noted. They offer an interactive and participatory aspect to the process, but easily lack in depth, which traditional reviewers can convey in writing. The commitment and time to reflect on the

experience differs from the real-time commentary of the streamers (Johnson and Woodcock, 2019).

The field of game journalism has been studied broadly, with many of its aspects examined and problematized throughout the years. Next, I will continue by examining how more recent studies have approached the subject.

The ambivalence of game critics has also been studied further. Foxman and Nieborg conducted an exploratory study of the self-perception of game critics. Their textual analysis frames a *network of ambivalences*, in which “the identity, motivation, style, content, and format are intrinsically enmeshed and responsive to one another.” They found that the critics do not possess a clear understanding of their own identity, letting their personal background conflict with their writing, lacking common goals and values, and a clear understanding of their professional practices (2016).

In the US, Perreault and Vos examined the metajournalistic discourse on the broader journalistic field regarding game journalism between 2010-2018, analysing 53 articles, in which its low analytical quality is part of the discussion (2020). This critique mainly highlighted the game journalists’ dependency on materials provided by the game industry, but also noted the reviews not focusing on the meaning of games but rather the more superficial measures, and the problematics of reviewing numerous games in a short span of time (Watson, 2016; Owen, 2014; McGinn, 2010). The metajournalistic discourse of the study primarily confirmed the previous perceptions but engaged the dialogue from the broader journalistic field.

It is worth noting that the Gamergate controversy has also been studied by the academia, with the personal affiliations between a female video game developer and a prominent gaming journalist coming to light in 2014 in a blog attack from the developer’s ex-boyfriend, accusing her of trying to obtain favourable coverage for her game. Although the accusations were quickly disproven, the incident sparked harassment campaigns against women and minorities in the industry, while also calling upon game journalists to explain and defend their role (Perreault and Vos, 2018). Perreault and Vos investigated how game journalists conducted paradigm repair by rejecting their role as only game reviewers within the sphere of lifestyle journalism, and through interviews and articles linked their work to the broader journalistic field, highlighting their professionalism in

covering a “culturally and economically important industry” (Perreault and Vos, 2018).

The problematized occupational ideology was also studied further, more recently, as Fisher and Mohammed-Baksh continue with Fisher’s *ideology of anxiety*, describing how the journalistic content produced, is being “directly influenced/filtered by sources, routines, corporate structures, and advertisers” (2020). The study conducted 15 in-depth interviews with game journalists and explored their perceptions of their occupation. One key insight from their finding’s states:

If not for their anxiety, several of them said, they could conduct Watergate-style investigative articles on video game companies, write hard-hitting reviews of video games with complete independence, advocate for a more equal representation of women and minorities in the video games, and accomplish myriad of other things unattainable within their current constraints (Ibid).

The use of expert game reviews’ impact on the marketing and sales of lower quality video games has also been studied. Hamami and Bailey examined *Game informer*, one of the most circulating magazines in the US, owned by *GameStop* which sells games and gaming hardware, finding that games are sold with the influence of inflated reviews of mediocre titles. (2020).

The magazines’ impact on marketing has also been noticed through earlier publications. Bootes examined UK game magazines from the ‘80s and ‘90s, finding that with the rise of video games’ popularity, the magazines started to rather ‘celebrate than arbitrate’ video game reviews, and noticed that the “persistently rising meta-ratings reveal an upwards push of marketing demands from the software and publishing industry, especially in the face of rising development costs for games, and the need for low-risk economic return on their investments” (2020).

Furthermore, it has been noted in the media, that the review scores from sites such as *Metacritic* and *GameRanking* (both well-regarded review aggregation websites) are linked to not only reflect on the quality of the games but also influence sales. *Activision Publishing, Inc*, a large video game publisher based in the US, conducted a study revealing that ratings above 80 points (out of 100), doubled the reviewed games’ sales with every five points increased in the review score (Wingfield 2007).

Taking the discussion closer to the topic of this thesis, video game magazines have also been studied in Finland. Suominen discusses the journalistic practices of a major Finnish computer hobbyist magazine *MikroBitti*, analysing 26 years (1984-2010) of the publication and its impacts on the forming of historical self-understanding of game cultures (2011). Suominen's findings reveal that the review content, writing styles, and visual language has changed, expressing the maturing of video game journalism, and deepening its connection to the general journalistic practices (Ibid.). Saarikoski notices the diversifying and maturing Finnish game journalism from another perspective: by analysing ten years (1992-2002) of readers' letters to the editor of Finland's first digital game-oriented magazine *Pelit-lehti* (2012).

The studies of the history of video game journalism in game magazines and online seem to examine the publications in-depth, outlining their role not only as the critiqued review-oriented agents between the consumer and the industry, but also as valuable ecosystems that generate, share, and facilitate the growth of player identity, gaming capital, and game cultures. Even after considering the problematized relationships involved, game reviews still hold a valuable position in understanding how games are being discussed.

The studies show how the content of the magazines mature along with the journalists themselves, but also point out how the readers are as much a part of the maturation process, as the game industry itself keeps evolving. Next, I will continue by reviewing the relevant literature on how written game reviews have been studied from different aims and with different methodologies.

## **2.4. Game Review Research**

This sub-chapter reviews the relevant literature on how game reviews have been studied. I will start by reviewing literature that study game reviews in general and discuss their content and continue to review research closer to the topic of the thesis.

Zagal et al. (2009) conducted a study that analysed more than 120 written video game reviews from the most popular US sites *IGN* and *GameSpot*. The corpus was gathered from the whole of the year 2006, and the analysed reviews were randomly chosen from the corpus. The data was openly coded and iterated throughout the process and the

findings formed an understanding of the structure of video game reviews. Through the review deconstruction process, nine underlying themes were found within the game reviews, representing the salient features and qualities that video game reviews have. The findings also informed about the discourse had in the format: what video game review writers think is essential for the readers to know, what they think they already know, and their broader role in the game community (Zagal et al., 2009).

The nine themes within video game reviews found in the study are: *Description, Personal experience, Reader advice, Design suggestions, Media context, Game context, Technology, Design hypotheses, and Industry* (Ibid.). The study found that, although ‘*Reader advice*’ is one major part of video game reviews, the way it was given in the context was of interest: the advice was usually about “how to enjoy a particular game” (Ibid), to get the most out of the product and avoid frustration.

While the study shed light into the construction of game reviews and offers a more holistic understanding of what they constitute of, it did not touch the subject of the actual player information needs. Video game reviews as a genre has its peculiar roots as discussed in the prior chapter, but the research clearly shows that their actual contents cover more than just blatant marketing obscured in game culture jargon.

Other examples of the use of grounded theory on video game reviews comes from Bond and Beale’s (2009) research, where 25 reviews from *GameSpot UK* were coded and 13 categories, in which the reviews deemed games either good or bad, were found from the data: *Gameplay, Environment, Storytelling, User interaction, Customization, Social, Variety, Technical, Cohesion, Maintenance, Price (value for money), Franchise, and Quantity*. The categories were intended as heuristics for game design, reviewing, or game purchasing (Ibid). In his doctoral dissertation, Calvillo-Gómez (2009) studied game reviews for the objectivity of assessing user experience, establishing a theory of *Core Elements of Gameplay Experience: Facilitators, Environment, Gameplay, Enjoyment, and Control*.

Although the previously mentioned studies provide valuable information and theory for understanding both the actual structure of a review, and how the reviews categorize the analysis of games and user experience, their use as a framework for understanding and studying how reviews meet the information needs of the players is still limited. Next, I

will review how other types of analysis have been used to examine game reviews and discuss and evaluate the research taxonomies they provide.

Multiple studies have employed Natural Language Processing (NLP, the use of computers to find patterns in text) to study written video game reviews. While the thesis study will not employ NLP as a tool, some valuable studies that do utilize NLP are reviewed and discussed below. NLP processes can analyse vast amounts of text in the form of game reviews, although the wide variety of topics within a review's structure and the reviews' lack of cohesive universal language limits its potential.

Zagal and Tomuro (2010) analysed gameplay appreciation to form an understanding of the elements or characteristics by which this appreciation is expressed through. The study corpus consisted of hundreds of thousands of user-submitted video game reviews, from which NLP techniques extracted and identified the linguistic contextual surroundings around the word "gameplay" (Ibid.). Their study identified six popular aesthetical elements: *Pacing*, *Complexity*, *Cognitive accessibility*, *Scope*, *Demand*, and *Impact* (Ibid.). Video game reviews house valuable insights into the play experience and its observable aspects, the games' aesthetics, and their appreciation by the players themselves. The findings of the use of adjectives in the reviews also point towards the maturity of video games as a medium (Zagal and Tomuro, 2010). It seems that scholars noticed the opportunity to study and categorize game aesthetics through video game reviews, even if Totilo (2005) criticized the lack of more in-depth discussion of them in game journalism five years prior.

While the study investigates the intangible and offers a bottom-up distilled set of six aesthetical elements, they only offer a certain insight for what could be considered as valuable information for game recommendation, albeit they are from the vocabulary and point of view of the players themselves. What is also worth noting, is that the player-written reviews have matured along the expert reviews as examined priorly, and might hold unintentional, yet influential learned practices and inadvertently define aspects of the output.

Another study on game reviews using NLP processes was conducted by Zhu and Fang (2015), where 700,000 reviews from *GameSpot*, *GameStop*, and *IGN* were analysed. The study found six factors of user experience in video games: *Competition*, *Sensation*,



*Strategy, Playability, Creativity and Usability* (Ibid). The study also proposed a framework for game design, but the proposed dimensions were extracted from a sizeable corpus of reviews described by users of their gameplay experiences.

Some notable studies have centred around examining and categorizing elements of gameplay attributes. Bedwell et al. (2012) proposed a universal taxonomy that offers nine dimensions describing gameplay: *Action language, Assessment, Conflict/Challenge, Control, Environment, Game Fiction, Human Interaction, Immersion* and *Rules/Goals*. Koehler et al. (2017) continued with the proposed taxonomy and examined how 200 player-written reviews on the site *VideoGameGeek* represented the taxonomy dimensions, investigating how useful, complete, and predictive the taxonomy is to characterize video game reviews is. However, the study found limited support for its use for the short player-written reviews, considering how short reviews by players to players might rely on the idea that some of the prior knowledge on similar games and game culture (gaming capital) is expected by the readers. The study also found that besides comparisons, the reviews discussed the value of the games in terms of time, money, and effort. (Ibid). Additionally, Santos et al. (2019) conducted a large-scale study on both expert (video game journalist) and amateur (player) written game reviews on the review aggregator platform *Metacritic*, noting the expert review behaviour to be more balanced in both review scores and through time, compared to the more polarized ratings of the amateur reviewers.

The previous sub-chapter discussed game reviewers and the ideology of anxiety. Thominet (2016) examined game reviews from two revenue models: digital distribution sites and sites that sold advertising. The studied sample consisted of 180 player-written game reviews of 36 game titles, from six game genres, that were analysed with move-strategy analysis method (Ibid). The analysed moves described the review content structure and the strategies deployed in the text, noting how the user-generated reviews typically followed the general pattern of expert game reviews, but in addition, they also revealed that the reviews did not always adhere to the typical genre expectations, instead catering to three different audiences: potential consumers, game developers, and current players (Thominet, 2016). These findings seem to correspond with the Zagal et al. study (2009), highlighting that game reviews do indeed contain insights beyond being mere buyers' guides.

Game reviews have been studied largely to form an understanding of their contents and structure, and the research has been valuable for developing taxonomies and heuristics to inform game development and design from the point of view of appreciation, user experience, and aesthetics. Next, I will examine the research applied in the theoretical framework of this thesis study, suggesting the approach to add to the research on game reviews from the point of view of their audiences. The research was conducted for examining additional access points for recommendation and advisory services, through the *appeals* of video games.

## **2.5. Appeals of Video Games**

The concept of appeals has its roots in the readers' advisory and media- and information studies, informing what attracts people to particular media (Lee et al., 2017). Readers' advisory and appeals, the basis for the research, have been widely utilized in US libraries throughout the years, and the framework was developed through combining different models and understandings of readers advisory, proposing a coherent set of information needs for aiding in video game recommendation (Lee et al. 2017). Librarian Nancy Pearl, who uses the term *doorways* for her set of the appeals, stated that "We need to start thinking about what it is about a book that draws us in, rather than what the book is about" (2012).

The study consisted of 1257 surveys, which offered open ended answers for peoples' favourite games and their appeals for them, which were then analysed to form the 16 elements: *Narrative, Challenge, Sensation, Fellowship, Nostalgia, Fantasy, Exploration, Mood, Depth, Creativity/Innovation, Expression, Accomplishment, Competition, Submission, Mastery and Learning* (Lee et al., 2017). The listed appeals form the basis of the framework employed in this thesis study.

Hyerim Cho, also member of the previously mentioned Lee et al., research group, in her doctoral dissertation continued analysing player/user appeals from a broader, cross media point of view, finding new themes for recommendation and information seeking (2019). Cho discussed how players could be informed about how much time would be needed to fully enjoy one segment of the game during a play-session, about the representations of

explicit content and characters, the intellectual challenge of the game and the platforms the game can be played on (Ibid). The themes Cho (2019) studied in her dissertation, that this thesis study will add to the proposed appeals framework are: *Values* (personal beliefs) and *Time* (temporal information).

Although some of the appeals correspond with the categories from the previously reviewed studies, there are more intangible dimensions in the set, for example: *Nostalgia*, *Mood*, *Depth*, *Submission*, *Fantasy*, and *Values*, with also the point of view and analysis turning from user experience, structure, and aesthetics to recommendation and advisory.

For the purpose of this thesis study, the proposed set of 18 appeals of video games, identified for recommendation and advisory services, will be defined and examined as *information needs*, and used as the theoretical framework for conducting the thesis research.

## 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant literature detailing the brief history and problematization of video game reviews and examined how written game reviews have been studied. This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the research design for the study, providing transparency and validity for the analysis while also acknowledging its limitations. The following sub-chapter 3.2 will first examine the research questions and theoretical framework employed. Sub-chapter 3.3 continues by examining the magazine publications the dataset was gathered from, while sub-chapter 3.4 elaborates on the data selection process. Next, sub-chapter 3.5 details the analysis instruments and process, with the chapter concluding by providing an example of the preliminary analysis process in sub-chapter 3.6.

### 3.2. Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

The study examines written video game reviews from two different publications, *Reserviläinen* and *Pelit*, with the former providing short-form reviews, and the latter their long-form counterparts. The aim is to study how these particularly distinct magazines conduct their reviews, concentrating on the contents' specific differences, and how well do the reviews meet the readers information needs according to the appeals framework proposed by Lee et al. (2017), and complemented by Cho (2019). The research questions are:

(Q1) What are the key differences between the short-form and long-form reviews?

(Q2) How are the proposed appeals of video games present in written video game reviews?

(Q2) How do the reviews cater to the proposed information needs of the readers?

The study conducts a qualitative content analysis focusing on selected game reviews from the sources. Krippendorff defines content analysis as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts ... to the contexts for their use” (2018). By applying the complemented appeals framework as the main analysis tool, the study aims to deductively provide a further understanding on how the differences effect the information the reviews provide. Furthermore, the research employs a hybrid approach: while the framework of appeals provides a set of themes for analysis, the research also studies if any new themes emerge from the dataset.

Although the thesis study is situated within game studies, it will draw from a concept from literary studies. The sub-chapter 3.3 examines the magazines and contextualizes their *implied readers* (Iser, 1972), while also evaluating the *implied players* (Aarseth, 2007; Smith 2006, Stenros, 2015) of the reviewed titles. *Reserviläinen* caters to a very specific audience: Finnish Defence Force reservists, while *Pelit* is a Finnish game cultures magazine. Implementing the concepts complement the research framework, providing a further understanding through recognizing the magazine context of the research data. This chapter will next briefly examine the concepts of both the implied reader and implied player and the way the concepts will be used in the analysis and continues through reviewing the publications and defining the dataset of the study.

### **3.2.1. Implied Reader**

The concept of implied reader has been widely used in literary studies (e.g., Iser, 1972; Schmid, 2010). It conceptualizes the hypothetical reader, one who the author addresses in their work. Iser examines the purpose of the author as “to convey the experience and, above all, an attitude toward that experience” to the reader (1972). For the study, the implied reader is examined as to have the sufficient understanding of the work belonging to the genre of reviews.

While the research scope is limited to examining only the concrete textual parts of the review data, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the source magazines’ review contexts, examining the layouts, technical information, pictures, and other unique attributes embedded in the reviews of the game titles. The analysis framework will incorporate how the reviews’ authors have conceptualized and address their implied

reader, but also how they consider them as an implied player, discussed in the following subchapter.

### 3.2.2. Implied Player

While literary studies apply the concept of the implied reader, game studies have adopted the concept in a rather similar but distinctive fashion as an implied player (Aarseth, 2007). The concept is used as a design aid, representing the hypothetical and abstracted player, for whom the game is designed to be engaged and understood by (Stenros, 2015). Jonas Heide Smith, in his Doctoral Dissertation examines the concept of the implied player, dividing it into four categories which he refers to as four *player models*, through which the relationship of game design and player behavior can be studied (2006).

Two of the player models, the *Susceptible Player Model* and the *Selective Player Model* examine the post- and pre-game behavior of the players, respectively (Smith, 2006). According to the susceptible player model, the players' post-game behavior and attitudes are affected by the game (Ibid.). The thesis study will consider the source reviews to represent the post-game attitudes the author expresses to their readers. The selective player model states that the player actively selects the played games to fulfill their needs (Smith, 2006) and has been studied through the uses-and-gratifications paradigm<sup>1</sup>. It is worth noting that the appeals framework used in this thesis study also draws from the studies on gratification.

The remaining two, the *Active Player Model* and the *Rational Player Model* both examine the player during play. In the context of the study data, the reviewers themselves serve in the role of distributing gameplay related insights and gaming capital to the readers. While the concept of implied player has been divided into four player models, the models are not mutually exclusive and do not take into account all of the aspects of being a player in the wider context (Smith, 2006). As examined previously, the study scope will similarly consider only the textual material of the review data, while acknowledging the source material's magazine contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> Uses-and-gratification theory has its roots in the '40s and is from the field of communication and media research.

### 3.3. Publications

Two sources of written video game reviews were chosen for the purpose of the thesis study. The combined dataset is gathered from two different Finnish print magazines, with 15 reviews from each source, and 30 video game reviews in total. The language of the reviews is Finnish, and all relevant parts of the data were translated to English for the analysis and discussion. While the translation process was done by the thesis researcher, the material and context were studied rigorously, and the translation process strived to provide an accurate translation of the texts, preserving their contextual nuances.

First half of the data corpus derives from the Finnish military reservists' magazine *Reserviläinen*, and the second half from the Finnish game culture magazine *Pelit*. The initial 15 game reviews were chosen from the *Reserviläinen* magazine, and the complementary set of the reviews of the same game title are from *Pelit*. The following subchapters will go into more details about both magazines, offering a brief outline of the magazines' circulation, readership, and contents, and how the game reviews are situated within the magazines. Examining the context in which the reviews reside provides validity for the content analysis, Krippendorff stating how "texts occur in the analyst's world but acknowledge their origins in the worlds of others" (2018).

#### 3.3.1. Reserviläinen –Magazine

*Reserviläinen* is Finland's largest circulating national defence magazine and is the tribune of the Finnish Reserve Officers' Federation (FROF), with around 28 000 members (FROF 2021), and the Finnish Reservists' Association (FRA), with approximately 38 000 members (FRA 2021). *Reserviläinen* is published by Maanpuolustusyhtiö MPY Oy<sup>2</sup> (Reserviläinen, 2021). The magazine is a tabloid sized periodical published eight times per year.

The following is a detailed breakdown of the readers of the publication from the magazine's 2021 media card. This thoroughly detailed readership breakdown is presented to offer an informed basis for the conceptualization of the magazines implied reader,

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<sup>2</sup> MPY Oy is owned by Finnish Reserve Officers' Federation (FROF) and Finnish Reservists' Association (FRA).

discussed priorly in this chapter.

The edition of the magazine is 60 000, with the circulation being 57 037 (LT 2017, circulation survey), and the total readership at 125 000 (KMT 2018, National Media Research) per publication.

The further readership breakdown stating that 87% of the readers are male, and 13% are female. Age distribution of the readers breaks down to 10% of the readers being 12-24 of age, 23% being 25-44 of age, 25% being 45-64 of age and 43% being above 65 years of age. Finally, the household breakdown states that 33% of the readers are from a family with children, 19% are from a single-person household, 49% from a two-person household, and 32% being from a 3+ persons household (KMT 2018, National Media Research).

Tuomas Kaarkoski, the editor-in-chief states that the magazine's video game reviews' target reader is expected to be an active reservist between the age of 20-30 years old and having an interest in video games (Kaarkoski, private correspondence, October 22, 2021). It is worth noting, that while the data suggests that only a subset of the readership aligns with the intended audience demographic, the reviews are present for all the readers equally, highlighting the importance of both the concepts of implied reader and implied player when studying the data.

### **Contents of Reserviläinen, Briefly**

The typical contents of the magazine consist of reviews of the current topics around national defence, and security policies, considering the nation, the defence forces, and international crisis management, while also focusing on the conscripts and reservists. The coverage is of a wide variety, ranging from discussions on training, physical fitness, military equipment, and weapon systems, to reservist and civilian participation in the national defence, while also covering military history. There is a heavy emphasis on the reservist aspect, as is to be expected, and the mission of both the FROF and FRA are embedded in the magazine: maintaining and improving the military skills and leadership abilities and readiness of the reservists and strengthening of the national defence will and traditions (FROF; FRA, 2021). The magazine also contains relevant advertisements and on the back pages there is a review section, along with interviews of individual reservists,



and a last page crossword puzzle<sup>3</sup>. Next, we will take a closer look at the game reviews.

### **Game Reviews in *Reserviläinen***

The thesis data corpus derives from examining 54 digitized *Reserviläinen* magazines, with 50 game reviews in total, four of the magazines lacking their game review altogether (with the publication 10/2021). The digitized publications span from January 2015 to October 2021, totaling up to 8 publications yearly. The video game reviews in *Reserviläinen* are part of the magazines back pages' *Arvostelut/Arviot* (reviews) section, also containing book and movie reviews representing a more timeless section within the publication. The current guidelines on the content of the magazine state every other publication to contain a game review, with the others having an interview of an author (Kaarkoski, private correspondence, October 22, 2021), explaining the lack of the four reviews.

The reviews are short form, roughly 130 words-, or around 1200 characters long. Most reviews contain a small, stamp sized picture of the game's cover art at the top (in 7 instances the picture is amidst the text), a tagline for the game, name of the author, and the review text itself with additional game information underneath (game title, available platforms, publisher, age limit), (see Figure 1). Most of the reviews are based on experiences with the PlayStation platform, apart from the titles that are only available on PC.

The magazine's reviews aim to cover game titles published within a couple of months of their release, with the reviewed titles chosen by the authors based on their own interests (Kaarkoski, private correspondence, October 22, 2021). The reviews also try to demonstrate some variation in the game genres, avoiding repetition in subsequent publications (Ibid.).

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<sup>3</sup> Here is another wonderful opportunity for game studies: understanding the construction of military crossword puzzles.



## *Call of Duty* *Battle Royale*

Paavo Airo

**Call of Duty** Modern Warfare Battle Royale -versio tuli maaliskuussa ilmaiseksi ladattavaksi. Warzoneksi nimeytyn version jopa 150 pelaajan squad modessa korostuu tiimpelaaminen, eikä sooloiluun ole varaa.



Peli on sikäli armollinen, että pelaaja voi kuoltuaan vielä päästä takaisin peliin joko vankilan kautta päihittämällä toisen taistelussa kaatuneen tai siten, että toinen squadin jäsen ostaa pelaajan vapaaksi.

Pelissä käytettävä raha tarjoakin vaihtoehtoja taktikointiin. Säästääkö rahaa toisten palauttamiseen takaisin vai ostaako ilma-iskuja, joilla tuhota muita squadeja paljastamatta sijaintia.

Testatessa peliä tuli voittokin random-pelikaverin kanssa ilman mikrofonia. Mutta hommaa helpottaa huomattavasti, jos yksi squadista näkee heartbeat sensorillaan vihollisen lähellä ja voi sanoa siitä toisille. Hyvät pelikaverit ovat tässäkin kaiken a ja o.

Pelistä löytyy myös Plunder-pelimuoto, jossa tavoitteena on kerätä mahdollisimman paljon käteistä, jos Battle Royale alkaa tympiä.

*Call of Duty Modern Warfare:*

*Warzone*

*Saatavilla: PC, Xbox One,*

*PS4 (testattu)*

*Julkaisija: Sony. Ikäraja: 18*

**Figure 1:** An example of the short-form reviews from the *Reserviläinen* –magazine.

Throughout the years there has been three game reviewers for the magazine, with Mikko Virta being the sole author from January 2015 up until his last written game review published in the February 1/2019 magazine (Virta continues to write the book and movie reviews). With the April 2/2019 magazine, Paavo Airo (sub editor) and Tuomas Kaarkoski took Virta's place, continuing writing the reviews, with Airo having written 6 reviews, and Kaarkoski 11. Kaarkoski, in a private correspondence, states that the reviewer change occurred due to time constraints, with him and Airo taking their place, both salaried employees of the magazine and having played video games on multiple platforms since childhood (Kaarkoski, private correspondence, October 22, 2021). It is also worth noting, that the magazine received free copies of the games up until the change of the reviewers (Ibid.).

### **Titles Reviewed in *Reserviläinen***

As mentioned previously, by October 2021 the magazine had reviewed a total of 50 games, of which 33 are reviewed by Virta, and the rest 17 by Kaarkoski and Airo. While

the titles had been chosen in accordance with the reviewers' interests, they represent commercial games that are readily available off-the-shelf, while leaning towards the more adult audiences. The following is a rough breakdown of what types of games have been reviewed and how the chosen titles have changed with Kaarkoski and Airo replacing Virta as the reviewers. The process of familiarization with each review afforded a more informed selection process for the defined dataset for the study.

### **Age Rating of the Reviewed Games**

Looking at the reviewed titles first through their PEGI<sup>4</sup> rating shows that, of the first 33 games, all except two are given the PEGI rating of either 16 or 18 (16 titles have the PEGI rating of 18, and 17 the PEGI rating of 16), with the outliers being *Street Fighter V: Arcade Edition* (Capcom; Dimps, 2018) and *Matterfall* (Housemarque, 2017), both being rated as PEGI 12. (*Street fighter* is a side-scrolling beat 'em up game, and *Matterfall* a side-scrolling shooter). The remaining 16 titles show a greater variety with the ratings, as 7 of them have the PEGI rating of 18, three are rated PEGI 16, two are rated PEGI 7, and three are rated as PEGI 3. With this group, the outliers are *World of Warships: Legends* (Lesta Studio, 2015) and *Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart* (Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2021) as PEGI 7, with *Crash Team Racing: Nitro-Fueled* (Beenox, 2019), *NBA 2K20* (Visual Concepts, 2019), and *MotoGP 20* (Milestone S.r.l., 2020), each rated as PEGI 3 (The titles genres are respectively: 3<sup>rd</sup> person vehicular combat, 3<sup>rd</sup> person shooter platformer, kart racing, sports, and a racing game). The lower PEGI show a change in the game titles being reviewed and situates at the change of the game reviewers and the aim to cover a more varied range of genres.

### **Genres of the reviewed games**

The overall genres of the games are somewhat varied, but with a heavy emphasis on action-adventure and first-person shooter (FPS) -oriented titles, some with stealth or role-playing elements to them, and mostly of both the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person varieties. Out of the 50 reviewed games, 17 titles represent strictly 1<sup>st</sup> person games, 17 titles are played through 3<sup>rd</sup> person, and the remaining three are a combination of both.

There are outliers also in the case of the title's genres, listed in the following games: *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games, 2015), an interactive drama and survival horror, *Total War:*

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<sup>4</sup> The Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system launched in 2003 (PEGI 2021).

*Warhammer 1 & 2*, *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia* (Creative Assembly, 2016; 2017; 2018), which are turn-based strategy and real-time tactics games, a survival horror game *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* (Capcom, 2017) and the aforementioned *Street Fighter V: Arcade Edition* (side-scrolling beat ‘em up). These titles represent the outliers of the first 33 game reviews, with the genre outliers of the following 15 reviews being *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game* (CD Projekt Red, 2018) a collectible card game, along the titles already mentioned in the previous sub-chapter.

With the change in the reviewers, the variety of game genres being reviewed broadened from the outliers of interactive drama, survival horror, sides-scrolling shooter and beat ‘em up, with the inclusion of sports-, racing-, card-, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person vehicular combat games, while the emphasis remaining in 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person shooters, and action-adventure games. As the reviewed titles became more varied, the context in which they were reviewed remained the same.

### **3.3.2. Pelit -Magazine**

The second source, *Pelit*, is Finland’s first game related publication discussing only games (Saarikoski, 2012), The *implied reader*, according to the 2023 media card of *Pelit*, is considered “everyone interested in gaming”. First published in 1992, *Pelit* is a venerable Finnish game culture magazine, spanning over four decades, with 11 published issues yearly. The magazine is published by Fokus Media Finland Oy. While the magazine is not related to the Finnish Defence Force reservists’ as *Reserviläinen* is, it is worth noting that Finnish citizens are obligated to participate in national defence according to the Constitution of Finland (Puolustusvoimat, 2023). For transparency and coherence of the research, the study will be informed by the national context of the publications but will leave the dimension of national defence out of its scope.

While *Pelit* does not currently participate in the national media research (KMT), the previous data found state the readership having been at 129 000 (KMT, 2010/2011, national media research), and the survey from 2013 places the magazine’s circulation at 21 469 (LT 2013, circulation survey). The latest circulation information found on the *Pelit* website dates to 2006, with the magazine’s managing editor Niko Nirvi stating the magazine’s circulation to be exactly at 30 173 (Nirvi, March 21, 2006). While the research

data for this study is gathered from between the years 2015 and 2021, *Pelit* still remains to this date one of Finland's most known and established game culture magazines.

### **Game Reviews in *Pelit***

The main reviews in *Pelit* –magazine are of much longer form, between one to three pages each, with multiple captioned screenshots from the reviewed title, and sometimes stylized with graphics from the game on the background layout of each page (see Figure 2). Throughout the years the overall layout has changed, but the main concept has remained the same. *Pelit* –magazine reviews also contain a flavored tagline by the author, along the basic information of the reviewed title, with some varied information depending on the product, e.g. version number of the reviewed title, minimum PC specifications to run it, multiplayer player-counts, the cost of additional downloadable content, and the need for an internet connection to play the game.

Additionally, *Pelit* –magazine reviews being of longer form, contain several paragraphs of text with subheadings, and most often a numerical score from 0 to 100 at the end of each review, along the possibility of an additional '*Pelit suosittalee*' (Pelit recommends) –stamp, highlighting the game as worthy of attention, even if the numerical score is not considered a typical high score. This end section of the reviews also contains a short, around ten to fifteen words long summary with a list of pros and cons, typically from one to three each. Some game titles have additional, short reviews from other authors on the last page of the main review.

In contrast to the three authors of *Reserviläinen*, the reviews of *Pelit* vary more significantly. The study does not propose speculations regarding how the reviewers of the magazine were appointed but notes that 9 individual authors conducted the 15 reviews of the study corpus: Heikki Hurme, Juho Kuorikoski, Juho Penttilä, Markus Lukkarinen, Markus Rojola, Samu Ollila, Santeri Oksanen, Tuomas Honkala, and Tuukka Grönholm. The number of authors does not distribute evenly between the two publications, and the information is expressed for transparency.



Figure 2: Metro Exodus review. Online preview version of *Pelit* 3/2019. Source:

[https://www.lehtiluukku.fi/lehti/pelit/\\_read/3-2019/207239.html](https://www.lehtiluukku.fi/lehti/pelit/_read/3-2019/207239.html)

While the examination of the *Pelit* magazine remains more concise, the study dataset will be established from the reviews of *Reserviläinen*, complemented by the corresponding reviews from *Pelit*.

### 3.4. Defining the Dataset

The research employed relevance sampling to define the dataset. According to Krippendorff, relevance sampling as a technique aims to select units contributing to answering the research questions, with the analyst manually examining the texts for the analysis (2018). The technique offered the researcher the means to gather a coherent and magazine context aware dataset for the study. The subchapter continues by presenting a comprehensive overview of the further data selection- and refinement process.

The first step in defining the dataset was to gather all the relevant information regarding the reviews from *Reserviläinen* compiled on a spreadsheet. The information gathered consisted of the game titles, publishers, and publishing years, along the game genres, age

ratings, the platforms the games were reviewed on, with dates the reviews were published, and their authors.

Reviews from *Reserviläinen* were already in a digital format, and the corresponding paper magazines of *Pelit* were gathered from the library and the reviews were digitized. Care was taken to examine and digitize the correct *Pelit* magazine reviews containing the main reviews of the titles, making sure not to include any preview-, secondary- or retrospective reviews for the dataset. Next, the corresponding details of the *Pelit* reviews were added on the spreadsheet detailing the same information as to their *Reserviläinen* counterparts.

The magazines' context formed the study corpus to concentrate on the more adult oriented games, and for that purpose, most of the outliers mentioned earlier in the chapter were left out of the final dataset. The data spreadsheet was utilized to define the study corpus, with the emphasis being on both 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person shooters, and action-adventure games, with the exception of one strategy game. The target readers of *Reserviläinen* reviews being 20 to 30 years old active reservists, and the reviewers' being active reservists themselves (Kaarkoski, private correspondence, October 22, 2021), the chosen data attempts to represent a coherent set for the thesis study, taking the reviews' wider context into account, while also acknowledging leaving out the outliers.

Further considering the remaining catalogue of *Reserviläinen*, the reviews hosted both single- and multiplayer titles, from games set in prehistoric times up to the distant future. Since the reviews span from 2015 to 2021, a careful consideration was taken to select titles from each year to have a broad representation of both the catalogue and reviewers. The magazines also contained more than one title reviewed from the well-established game franchises, along with remastered- and spinoff series. Using the spreadsheet, the dataset defined to comprise of a broad representation of different types of titles, through limiting the repetition of multiple similar games of the same initial franchise.

The following is a chronologically descending list of the full defined dataset, the detailed list can be found in Appendix 1:

Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare  
The Last of Us Remastered  
Battlefield Hardline

Metal Gear Solid V: Phantom Pain  
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege  
Far Cry Primal  
Watch Dogs 2  
Sniper Elite 4  
Horizon Zero Dawn  
Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia  
Shadow of the Tomb Raider  
Call of Duty: Black Ops III  
Control  
Call of Duty: Warzone  
Cyberpunk 2077

### **3.5.Design and Coding for the Analysis**

With the defined dataset consisting of both *Reserviläinen*, and *Pelit* reviews digitized, each of the 30 reviews were meticulously transcribed using a text editing software, storing the data in individual files one for each review. The process of transcribing the texts served to further immerse the researcher with the data, enhancing the familiarity and understanding of the material.

Next, the textual contents from each review pair were systematically highlighted in the text editing software, with distinct color-coded annotations illustrating the corresponding content found in each pairing review. The long-form *Pelit* reviews containing more textual content compared to the short-form reviews from *Reserviläinen* left large parts of the text without the color-coded annotations, while the contents of the short-form *Reserviläinen* reviews were more thoroughly color-coded. More details regarding the process will be provided in the next subchapter examining the analysis process.

It is worth noting that the process contained intrinsic challenges, with each pair of the textual data being from two distinct subjective sources (authors), and the process was conducted through the subjective interpretation of a single researcher. However, the step offered the researcher an instrument to examine the extent the information in the short-form reviews was found in the long-form ones, and more importantly, how the short-form textual data overlaid upon the long-form texts, allowing the analysis of the key



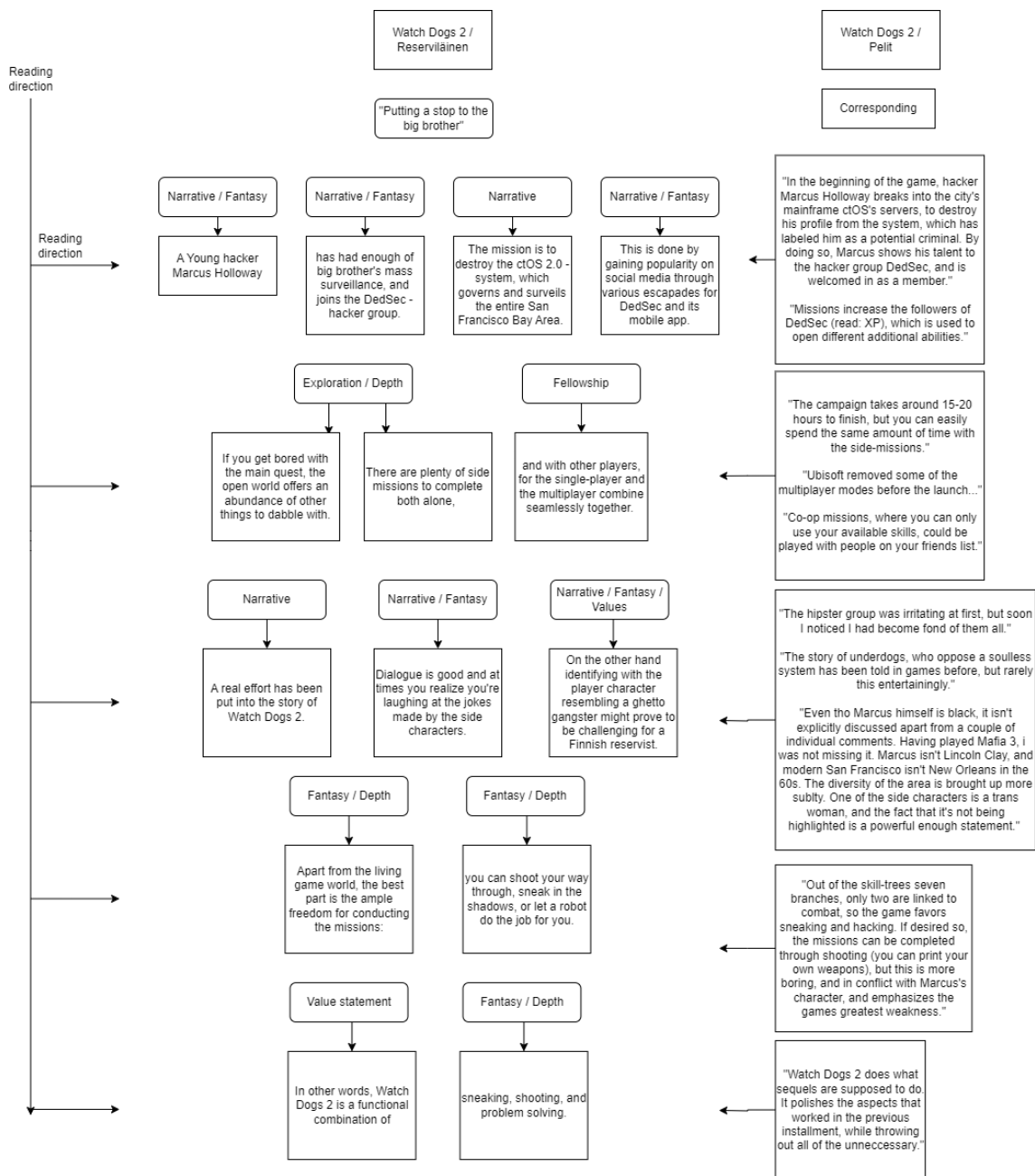
differences between the reviews.

To answer the research question: **(Q1)** What are the key differences between the short-form and long-form reviews? -the study analysis concentrated on how the long-form reviews expand on the aspects found also in the short-form ones, emphasizing the understanding of how the corresponding content is elaborated upon. This however limited the extent to which the corresponding data was examined but focused the study scope to examine the differences thoroughly.

Each of the *Reserviläinen* reviews were also transposed into a diagram form (see Figure 3), to ensure that the reviews' structure was considered throughout the analysis process through the schematic representation. At this stage, the *Reserviläinen* reviews and the corresponding parts from the *Pelit* reviews were also translated to English. The schematic representations served as analytic instruments within the study, helping the researcher understand the reviews' structure, the context of the parts the long-form reviews expanded on, and to organize the coding process discussed in the following.

Next, each of the transcribed and color-coded text files were transferred to ATLAS.ti analysis software and coded. Saldaña expresses codes in qualitative analysis to represent “researcher-generated” constructs symbolizing and attributing interpreted meaning for pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes (2013). For the study, the coding process was iterative with multiple rigorous coding cycles, first utilizing the appeals -framework by Lee et al. (2017), complemented by Cho (2019). After the initial coding, additional sub-codes were assigned appropriately to the data, either to the primary codes or where particularities emerged. Given the information-rich nature of the textual content, the coding process meticulously considered co-occurrences to encompass each appeal category correctly.

As the data coding was processed in the software for deductive content analysis corresponding to the framework, simultaneously, the codes corresponding with the initial framework were assigned to the diagrams for coherence. After coding with the framework, an inductive approach was utilized in the process, as new codes started to emerge from the data, not present in the initial analysis framework. Careful consideration was employed with the emerging codes as to correspond with the scope of the study, aligning to add to the analysis regarding the study research questions.



**Figure 3:** Diagram example for *Watch Dogs 2*. The review from *Reserviläinen* reads vertically, with the corresponding translations from *Pelit* to its right.

The following subchapter details an example of how the corresponding material within the reviews were examined. This part of the process ensured that the researcher was informed of the material found solely in one of the pairing reviews and serves as an example of how the color-coded annotations mentioned previously in the chapter were created.

### 3.6. Preliminary Analysis Process

The review for *Watch Dogs 2* (also examined in Figure 3) serves here as an example. This part of the research process proved crucial for understanding the similarities between the reviews, but most importantly underlined and situated the omitted parts found only in the *Pelit* reviews coherently.

#### *Watch Dogs 2*

The *Reserviläinen* review of *Watch Dogs 2* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2016), concentrates heavily on examining the *narrative* appeal of the game. According to Lee et al. (2017), while being the most commonly identified appeal for video games in general, for the genre of action-adventure, their study rank *narrative* as the second, after *exploration*, and before *fantasy*. The review as a whole contains connections to the *narrative*, *exploration*, *fellowship*, *fantasy*, *values* and *depth* dimensions, with *depth* being the second most detailed, following the *Narrative* dimension.

Comparing the lengths of the reviews, the *Reserviläinen* one is 126 words long, while the *Pelit* one is 1212 words, without the eight pictures and their captions, making it roughly 10 times as long as it's counterpart. Parts of the *Reserviläinen* review below are contrasted with the closest corresponding information from the *Pelit* review for comparing their content.

The structure of the *Reserviläinen* review starts out by laying out an overview of the narrative elements of the game, covering the aspects of its lead player *character*, the overall *story* of the game, the game's *objective*, and *means* to achieve it. The narrative overview is detailed in an easily readable way, and understanding the game's setting does not require any prior knowledge on video games. Examining a part of the narrative overview detailing the *means* to achieve the game's *objective* (as expressed in the review), shows the lack of any connection to the actual gameplay elements; the reader is given no information on how the gameplay ties in with the narrative. *Reserviläinen* examines gameplay progression in *Watch Dogs 2*:

This is done by gaining popularity on social media through various escapades for DedSec and its mobile app. (*Watch Dogs 2*, *Reserviläinen*, 1/2017).

Meanwhile the closest corresponding part from the *Pelit* review offers more information to the reader.

Missions increase the followers of DedSec (read: XP), which is used to open different additional abilities. (*Watch Dogs 2, Pelit*, 12/2016).

Here the review ties in the content to actual gameplay related information. It is worth noting that the reader is assumed to understand the concept of XP (experience), and what ‘opening different additional abilities’ means. The length of the *Pelit* review covers more of the surrounding topics, but the implied reader has sufficient understanding of these gameplay concepts and can concentrate on the content.

After the narrative overview, the next part of the review examines the *exploration* and *fellowship* dimensions, mentioning the game to be set in an open world with its missions to be playable both in single- and multiplayer. While the concepts are gameplay related, they are arguably understandable in this context, and relate information to the reader regardless of their understanding of games. The next part returns to evaluate the previously overviewed narrative.

The evaluation concentrates on summarizing, and pointing out some of the narrative’s aspects, namely the dialogue of the side characters, and concludes with a remark on identifying with the player character.

On the other hand identifying with the player character resembling a ghetto gangster might prove to be challenging for a Finnish reservist. (*Watch Dogs 2, Reserviläinen*, 1/2017).

The longer format *Pelit* review examines the identification process more in-depth.

Even though Marcus himself is black, it isn’t explicitly discussed apart from a couple of individual comments. Having played *Mafia 3*, I was not missing it. Marcus isn’t Lincoln Clay, and modern San Francisco isn’t New Orleans in the 60s’. The diversity of the area is brought up more subtly. One of the side characters is a trans woman, and the fact that it’s not being highlighted is a powerful enough statement. (*Watch Dogs 2, Pelit*, 12/2016).

While the contents are different, so is the context. The longer format affords the incorporation and framing of other games within the review. Here we also see the difference between the implied readers of the magazines. The evaluation of the narrative in the *Reserviläinen* review addresses both the reader, who by definition is a Finnish Defence Forces reservist, with or without interest in playing the game, but also the implied player, whom the review addresses with the more specific gameplay- and narrative related information. The *Pelit* magazine's implied reader is addressed as representing of a more diverse background and with an understanding of the state of game cultures in a broader sense.

The quotes correspond with the appeal dimension conceptualized by Hyerim Cho in her PhD dissertation, as *values* (2019). Some media users prefer to be informed about contents relating to their deeply cared about personal values, and as such, the quote represents a more sparsely signaled appeal dimension.

The review continues by examining the *fantasy* and *depth* dimensions of the title. The 'living game world' is addressed, and the depth of the game's missions is both overviewed and evaluated. Here both of the reviews examine the *depth* through giving examples of the approaches the player can take to engage with the gameplay. The *Reserviläinen* review outlines the major possibilities observed by the reviewer as described below.

You can shoot your way through, sneak in the shadows, or let a robot do the job for you. (*Watch Dogs 2, Reserviläinen, 1/2017*).

What is worth noting when comparing the two, is how *Reserviläinen* addresses the gameplay approaches as equal, and in uniform with both the limited word count of the review, as with its implied readers, while *Pelit* can provide a longer take on the subject, going even more in-depth with the review.

Out of the skill-trees seven branches, only two are linked to combat, so the game favors sneaking and hacking. If desired so, the missions can be completed through shooting (you can print your own weapons), but this is more boring, and in conflict

with Marcus's character, and emphasizes the game's greatest weakness. (*Watch Dogs 2, Pelit*, 12/2016).

The review concludes with evaluations concerning the *depth* dimension, offering a value statement for the game, along with a short summary of what the reviewer considered important: "In other words, Watch Dogs 2 is a functional combination of sneaking, shooting, and problem solving" (*Watch Dogs 2, Reserviläinen*, 1/2017). What is worth noting, is that most of the short-form reviews end with a value statement which often addresses the appeal of *mood* while stating the titles value.

This part of the sanalysis of the two reviews shows that the *Reserviläinen* review roughly corresponds with the Lee et al. listed top three appeals for the title's genre (2017), but the way it represents the information regarding the narrative appeal, is that of a general, unspecified media artifact.

What is also worth noting is that the review seems to divide the narrative dimension into two subcategories, the *overview* and the *evaluation*. Furthermore, as detailed in the beginning of this chapter, the subcategories consist of details about the *character*, *story*, *objective*, and *means*. These categories emerged as subcodes informing the analysis.

In conclusion, this part of the analysis process informed the research that the information in the short-form texts is also dominantly found within the longer format. When examining the 15 individual reviews, the appeals of *narrative*, *fantasy*, and *depth* were the most prevalent, with *values*, *innovation*, *fellowship*, and *competition* also expressed frequently, the short-form reviews at times also addressed the appeal of *sensation*.

The most notable differences between the two review types apart from what is only found in the long-form *Pelit* review, were the visual information elements provided by the screenshots in the *Pelit* review, which are left out of the scope of the thesis study, and the use of more varied appeal dimensions. The *Pelit* review also addresses another dimension conceptualized by Cho (2019), *time*, detailing the length required to play through the games content, the main quest, but also its side-quests.

It was more noticeable with the *Pelit* review, that multiple appeals co-occurred. As an example, when the less used dimension of *sensation* was addressed, the games aesthetics were described to expand also to cover the *mood* and *nostalgia* dimension. The review

also contained mentions of narrative parallels to popular culture TV-series, inducing nostalgia.

In short, the longer *Pelit* review seems to rather expand on *Reserviläinen*, and what the short form review expressed.

This concludes the research design chapter of the thesis, the chapter discussed the research questions and theoretical framework of the study, examined how the dataset was defined, and addressed the analysis design process. The next chapter will study how the differences show in the data and examine the results of the study.

## 4 ANALYSIS & RESULTS

### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter constructed a thorough examination of the research design, while also detailing how the study assesses the data. This chapter will analyse the parts expanding, or found only in one type of review, to highlight their differences. The sub-chapter 4.2 divides the analysis into parts corresponding with the video game appeal categories proposed by Lee et al. (2017), and Cho (2019). The analysis results suggest a new category found in the data, which will be addressed as *accessibility* and will be examined in the chapter as a separate category of its own.

The analysis refers to and defines “experience run-throughs” as longer parts of the reviews examining one aspect of the game in length, typically covering over multiple paragraphs, where the reviewer assesses the reviewed title through their personal play experience or understanding of the game. Most often the game reviewers address multiple appeals co-occurring at the same time, while the analysis attempts to categorize the data regarding the proposed main appeal. This, however, highlights the interconnectedness of the appeals throughout the chapter.

Parts of the analysis offer specific examples from the data, while the more common themes are noted more descriptively. The appeal categories are not set in any specific order, and the categories that were not significantly prevalent in the data are left out.

### 4.2. Appeal Categories

#### MOOD

Some of the reviews start with examining the game’s mood in the opening paragraphs. For the game titled *Control*, the reviewer starts by drawing from the tone of the game to express the mood of it for the reader, with the beginning paragraphs depicting a stylized introduction conveying a sequence of the reviewer’s personal play experience. Similarly, the *Call of Duty: Warzone*’s review summarizes the tone, tempo, and dramaturgy of the play experience through the review’s introductory paragraphs:



Well, 150 participants are crammed on a plane and flown to a faraway destination. At the destination they parachute out of the plane and end up (hopefully) safe on the ground, where the actual fun begins. At first you're in a hurry, when everyone's trying to find better weapons and equipment for themselves from abandoned buildings and other stashes. The basic pistol only serves to fend off mosquitos, so finding a proper gun is priority number one. Only then can you relax a little. But still, you can't just stay sitting down, as the ever-approaching poisonous gas cloud forces you to always stay on the move (Pelit, 04/2020).

*The Last of Us Remastered's* review shares similarities, but emphasizes the game world and its inhabitants, addressing the implied reader about the tonality of the game without regarding the reviewer's personal play experience. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege's* review encapsulates the reviewer's mood towards the game in the form of a Finnish pop song with altered lyrics derived from the reviewed game. The review continues to examine the situatedness of the game within the (then) current state of the shooter genre in a similar lighter tone. Here the reviewer primes and invites the reader to approach the review content through a proposed mood and openness, linking the tone to popular media, while also implying the game's value to the reader.

Approaching the appeal of mood from another angle, the review of *Watch Dogs 2* continues by addressing the first installment in the series, examining the game's overall tone and its main character before continuing to evaluate the actual second installment in question.

The mood of the game is also expressed through examining the experiential possibilities the game affords its players. The review of the game *Control* gives concrete examples of how the games mood could be experienced through play, while proposing its reader the same questions that are presented to the game's main character through the game's narrative.

The reviews can also concentrate on examining specific game modes. *Call of Duty Black Ops 4's* reviewer expressed their feelings towards the game's zombie mode, stating:

I know, that Call of Duty's zombies has its dedicated fanbase, but I don't belong with those people. I don't even know if this should be said, but I think Call of Duty's four player co-op against endlessly spawning, bullet sponge zombies, is something incredibly numbing (Pelit, 11/2018).

Here the reviewer expresses the mood a specific game mode evokes in them. The review continues by concluding that the game mode in question would not affect the review score, showcasing how the long form reviews can examine various individual elements within the reviewed games, propose their value to the reader, yet omit them from the overall value proposition.

At times mood is expressed as a preconceived belief regarding the reviewed game, the game series, or its developing studio. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*'s review is an example where the reviewer goes at length to examine their perception of the game series and its creators. The following is an abridged example from the review:

I'm not part of the Metal Gear Solid fan club, and this review shouldn't be read as written by one who is. My relationship with Hideo Kojima's game series is contradictory. [...] Kojima is a great artist, having an original style, but as a game creator lacks in self-critique. Theatrical monologues, overly long radio conversations, and half an hour cutscenes are not defensible on any level, they are simply tedious. [...] I got so frustrated at Patriots [a previous title in the series], that I wouldn't play Peace Walker, or The Phantom Pain [previous titles in the series] meant as a prologue for Ground Zeroes. [...] To my surprise, The Phantom Pain has less story, less rambling, and more game (Pelit, 10/2015).

This style of contextualization and positioning the reviewed game in a continuum affords the long form reviews to consider the previous subjective merits that might reflect on the reviewed game itself, juxtaposing the reviewer's preconceived attitudes and mood regarding the reviewed game at hand. Most often these types of paragraphs prime the reader to perceive what is written in a set framing, while not yet expressing anything concrete about the game being reviewed.

The review of *Horizon Zero Dawn* expresses mood by emphasizing more clearly how the game's story affects the reviewer and offers an overview on how the story arcs feel to play throughout the whole game, while also dedicating some paragraphs discussing

memorable occurrences during gameplay. The review mentions the feelings of constant dread and tension during battles, but also the satisfaction of “Everything going according to the plan, even if it happens rarely.” (Pelit, 03/2017). Similarly, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*’s Mood is examined through examples of gameplay, highlighting how the game’s narrative plays out in creating a “heavy experience”, as something that hasn’t been seen “Since *Call of Duty*’s ‘No Russian’”. (Pelit, 10/2015), also serving as an example how projections of mood are tied into prior experiences.

The long form reviews also share concise evaluations regarding mood, such as “Shadow of the Tomb Raider is a delight to play.” (Pelit, 10/2018), but continue to expand on some other aspects of the game in the review more in detail. The review continues with remarks on the mood stating the game to be “Believable and relatable, or in turn, epic and light.” (Ibid.). With shorter accounts, the long form reviews also offer more explanation to the evaluating statements.

Another way the appeal of mood of the reviewed game was expanded on was linking it to the consumption of different media of the same tone. *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*’s reviewer exclaimed how they, after finishing the game watched *Edge of Tomorrow* and got a feeling of Déjà vu (Pelit, 11/2014).

## **NARRATIVE**

The *Control*’s and *The Last of Us Remastered*’s reviews are examples where the reviewer describes the narrative setting of the games by walking through the initial stages of the story, while also going through describing the player characters and the problems they encounter. For *Horizon Zero Dawn*, the backstory and setting are laid out in a more precise way, detailing how the main character connects to their culture and what motivates them to take on the journey that is the game’s story. The review also expresses to the reader how identifiable and well suited the main character is for the player’s own gaming experience, while also criticizing the other characters lacking in moral ambiguity (connecting to the appeal of values), and the main characters storylines becoming convoluted in the process. Here, the longer form review also draws comparison to another game which narrative has been highly regarded.

What is also notable is that the review proposes the reader multiple questions regarding what could be of key interest regarding the uncovering of the game world’s secrets,

stating: “You will be exploring the fascinating world in search for the answers almost obsessively.” (Pelit, 03/2017), connecting the appeal of narrative to the categories of exploration, and mood.

The appeal of narrative is also examined in the long form reviews by dividing it to parts. The review can propose value independently to multiple aspects of the narrative, for example by highlighting character development but critiquing the overall main story the characters are part of. *Cyberpunk 2077*'s review is an example where the reviewer evaluates most of the side missions being repetitive but proposes the ones regarding notable side characters to rise above the mass. While not being expressed clearly in the data, it could be argued that the long form reviews consider the games' plot and story as the same, and by not distinguishing the two, tend to examine the narrative aspects of the games in laborious ways.

The instances the appeal is discussed in can also be more concrete and specific, such as with the in-game textual documents, or the game's NPC's, which can be explored more thoroughly in the long form reviews. The textual documents are further examined in the reviews of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, and *Control*, where the reviewer considers interacting with them as being integral in experiencing the narrative, to appreciate the game's story. *Far Cry Primal*'s review is an example where the reviewer examines the game's NPC's stating how the “Rough world leaves its inhabitants also mental scars: The otherwise so sympathetic Sayla collects the ears of the Udami people she kills, to silence the yells of her dead Wenja people.” (Pelit, 03/2016). Here the game's narrative is examined from the perspectives of other previous, or current inhabitants of the game world, interacting both directly and indirectly with the player character.

When the reviewed game is part of a continuous story arc branching over multiple games, the long form reviews can go through more of the narrative connections between the games in the franchise, but also examine the differences in their writing. *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*'s review draws back to the first entry in the most recent game trilogy and traces the narratives problems there:

At stake is the fate of the whole world, when Lara Croft goes head-to-head with Maya Indian legends and the Trinity organization from the previous games. I can't

comprehend why a story in the spirit of Indiana Jones has to be forced to have an “epic” story, which mostly just alienates from the play experience. Uncharted [another game series] is lightyears ahead of Lara. Surely the basis for the problem derives from the first entry in the [new] Tomb Raider -series, on which the game builds its story upon. The situation being that, because I stepped on this heap of fresh cow dung already back in 2013, now five years later the stuff exudes from between my toes (Pelit, 10/2018).

This also serves as an example of how game stories are not always experienced through only a single media regarding their reviewing. Similarly, the reviewed game can be compared to other game franchises to distinguish their individual merits, and even propose value of each. These instances also highlight the implied reader rather than the player.

As in the example from *Horizon Zero Dawn*, the review problematizes having multiple story arcs that are part of experiencing the games’ narrative as a whole. When narrative is part of a longer experience run-through, some of the story elements are examined more closely, and can be used as examples of how the reviewer evaluates singular experiences in contrast to the whole. For *Battlefield Hardline*, the reviewer addresses both the implied reader and the implied player, by examining and proposing half of the writing to be engaging while the other not, with the gameplay remaining entertaining throughout.

The long form reviews can also contain spoiler warnings regarding the game narrative. The *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*’s review goes on in length encompassing the whole narrative arc criticizing the writing. On the other hand, the reviews can condense material that, if written out, could be considered spoiling the game’s story. In these cases, the condensed material usually hints at the story aspects, examining how the game’s story could fold out, tying it to the appeal of mood. Overall, when addressing the appeal of narrative, the long-form reviews tend to cater to both the player- and reader aspects of implied audience.

## **FANTASY**

In the long form reviews, the player characters initial problems can be more descriptive, along the means through which the character can interact with the problems proposed by the game. The long form reviews also examine the ways through which the player

experiences the characters connectedness to the game world in more detail. As a contrast, the reviews can also contain experience run-throughs of descriptive, yet more sweeping tone. The review of *Far Cry Primal* is an example where the reviewer gives an overview of the game's fantasy examining the appeal through exploration, mood, sensation, and innovation. The opening paragraph stating how:

Far Cry Primal changes its weapons an order of magnitude towards the ancient, namely clubs, spears, and bows. Primal's sandbox is a big, dangerous wilderness filled with magnificent and untouched Central European woodlands, snowy mountains, and prehistoric large predators. It is also so brutal place, that it makes post-apocalyptic sandboxes feel like a paradise (Pelit, 03/2016).

These paragraphs do not necessarily detail the game mechanics but rather express them, proposing the game's appeal for the implied reader. Relating to the appeal of mood, they can have a concise description of the reviewer's sentiments contained within the text, but here the appeal of fantasy is more so used as to sum up the experience, rather than examining it in detail. Incidentally, the short-form review of the game contains almost the same content addressed in the quotation. However, the long-form format affords multiple, and more in detail due to their length.

Another example of how the appeal of fantasy is examined in the game *Control* is the way in which the level design of the game is being described. The review offers examples of how the player might experience the game world and interact with it. Alternatively, the review of *Horizon Zero Dawn* goes into detail explaining the games various cultures with their beliefs and ways of living. *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*'s review also notes the various cultures within the game but critiques how English is the prevalent language of communication. Evaluating the same, *Far Cry Primal*'s reviewer examines the game to revolve around different tribes, with each of them having a language of their own, and no-one communicating in English. Furthermore, it could be argued that the reviewers are indirectly commenting on the production value of the titles.

The long-form reviewer of *Cyberpunk 2077* goes in length at expressing their previous view and expectations for the game world's Night City, grown from experiences playing the pen and paper roleplaying game. They examine the contrast between their imagination and reality, concluding that through play they grew to fall for the game designer's take

on it. This example highlights the weight of the developers' design decisions especially regarding game's set in previous works in other media. The short form review also addresses briefly the game's roots in tabletop roleplaying, further emphasizing the relevancy of other media regarding the appeal of fantasy.

The appeal can also be seen to be expressed as connected to the player's personal appeal of values. In the review of *Watch Dogs 2*, the reviewer exclaimed how they, at first, were disliking the "gang of hipsters" serving as the main character's companions but continues by stating how they grew to get attached to each one of them (Pelit, 12/2016).

As with all the appeals, the long form reviews can contain connections to other games, but also reflections about the game creators themselves. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*'s review serves as an example where the reviewer postulates the game saga's director Hideo Kojima's writing style and direction, comparing the reviewed title to the director's previous works, while also making a comparing statement linking video games to another form of media, movies. Here the salient features of games are contrasted to less participatory media, while also expressing and proposing a connection to it.

Other way the review data signaled the value of the *Fantasy* appeal and its connection to other media and cultural aspects is how the long form reviews often evaluated real-world actors in the games' characters roles. A total of six long-form and one short-form review had mentions of this real-world connection and how it affects the fantasy, and to some extent the narrative appeals of the tile. With some actors, their characteristics or previous work was also referred to. The review of *Cyberpunk 2077* goes as far as to evaluating the game actor's having micro expressions enhancing the immersion, connecting the player to game world to enjoy its appeal of fantasy.

## **EXPLORATION**

Also the exploration appeal is discussed from the perspective of the possibilities the player is given to interact the world with. In the review of the game *Control*, the exploration is tied to the narrative, fantasy, and depth appeals:

The corridors, sprawling in different directions mess with the sense of direction, luckily you carry an excellent map in your pocket. The world changes when Jesse cleans the control points: the walls recede, and the red glow gives away. At the

same time, fast travelling becomes possible. The control points also recover health, and you can pick up missions from them (Pelit, 09/2019).

The review exemplifies exploration through level-design, in-game map, and the player characters connectedness to the game world through the story. *Horizon Zero Dawn*'s review outlines the explorative nature of the game with descriptions of the game environments, with the review depicting how wide, open, and multidimensional the game world is. When the long form reviews examine open game worlds, also the game's repetitiveness is usually addressed.

On the other hand, the appeal of exploration can also be addressed in concise notions of the games' map sizes and count, as in the case of *Sniper Elite 4*. Regarding multiplayer games, the map sizes and layouts are examined from the point of view of gameplay and enjoyment. When the reviewer of *Call of Duty: Warzone* discusses the Battle Royale - genre, the appeal of exploration ties to finding familiarity and nostalgia within the game's map, as the franchise's previous multiplayer maps have been interwoven into a bigger whole.

The reviews examining the appeal of exploration can also tie it to the appeal of time, as in evaluating and proposing how long exploring the game or its sections might take.

## **DEPTH**

The long form reviews can examine the appeal of depth from multiple perspectives and levels. The review of the *Control* -game inspects the developer's previous titles, expressing how the game has taken steps to being more open for the player to explore and experience the narrative through, not only evaluating the game as a standalone product, but also establishing the writer's sentiments of the previous titles from the developer. The review also specifies a subgenre of games, called *Metroidvania*, situating the game within it, signaling for the appeal of depth to the implied player.

Some reviewers also examine the game's depth regarding the play experience from a more specific point of view, with speculations of the developer team and their efforts:

People at Ubisoft have been closely watching the first episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Freaks & Geeks*. The deliberately formulaic introduction is



meant to momentarily deceive the player before revealing the true nature of the game (Pelit, 12/2016).

Another example from the review of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* also examines the game's deliberate design, while also connecting to the appeal of innovation:

But does it matter because the individual operators are a brilliant idea. It prevents, amongst other things, the matches from feeling like clone wars, and even that all the players would use the same optimized equipment -meta from the internet (Pelit, 01/2016).

Depth is also expressed more in detail, through depictions of encounters and specific situations, for example with the games various enemies and puzzles, and how the game mechanics allow the player to deal with the challenges (appeal) they face. The long form reviews can also give more detailed examples of how depth plays into the player being able to enhance the characters capabilities through upgrading their weapons and abilities.

What is worth noting, is that depth doesn't necessitate volume. *The Last of Us Remastered's* review examines how the game follows the logic of scarcity, with the reviewer proposing that the scarce resources force the player to avoid conflicts. *Cyberpunk 2077's* review on the other hand, details how the game offers the player multitudes of items and equipment, while proposing their real in-game value as very little, with the player having to scrap or sell the unnecessary items individually. The reviewer also connects to the appeal of fantasy, critiquing the logic behind the item evaluations to be based on the item's bonuses, rather than the items themselves. Here too, the appeal of depth is examined through developmental decisions and philosophy, where abundance doesn't equal to depth.

As stated above, depth as an appeal often seems to be represented through depictions of how the reviewer has engaged with the games' affordances, and what they have found to make the play experiences enjoyable for themselves, addressing the implied player. Often the reviewer examines the tactics they employed emerging from the game's perceived depth and are expressed as both propositions of value and enjoyment, connecting depth to the appeals of expression and creativity/innovations.

The reviews regarding games with expansive game worlds, such as *Cyberpunk 2077*, highlights the reviewers spent time with the reviewed title. They examine how the, at first glance seemingly in-depth game world with numerous ways to interact with, and especially navigating it feels. The reviewer remarks how “Everything works until you are only looking and not touching.” (Pelit, 01/2021). The reviewer continues by giving examples and concludes by saying they could go on, but acknowledge the game is not a city-simulator. This example highlights the genre expectations that can be examined in the long form reviews, while also connects to the appeal of time.

Another example of how the game’s genre affects the ways in which the reviewer can be seen examining the game’s depth comes from the same review. *Cyberpunk 2077* having roleplaying elements, the game narrative’s depth was examined when the reviewer played through it twice over to see how impactful the game’s choices were regarding the play experience. The reviewer examined through examples how the choices made impacted the game’s narrative, proposing the implied player of the value of their decisions in impacting the narrative and overall play experience.

The appeal of depth is also most often expressed through lengthy experience run-throughs, as in the reviews of i.e., *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, and *Battlefield Hardline*. The depth of the games’ enemy AI mechanics are expressed to the reader through the appeal of fantasy, and how the AI connects to other core game mechanics. In these reviews, the AI is examined as its own category, comparable to level design or character customization.

The depth depicting experience run-throughs can also be written in a style that addresses the implied reader and the long form reviews seem to take that into account in their forms of expression. The review of *Shadow of the Tomb Rider* is an example, in which the game’s depth is also examined through its narrative. In this instance, the perceived depth is proposed to be too great, evaluating how a more concise storyline would have been better. Here the review considers not only the game that is being reviewed but also the storylines deriving from the previous game titles of the franchise. The scope of evaluation can go even further. *The Last of Us Remastered*’s review serves as an example for when the reviewer examines other game franchises and developers, drawing comparisons between the games’ narrative depth.

Depth is an appeal that can also be examined through speculations of the future of the game being reviewed. For multiplayer games, the appeal of depth can usually be examined through speculations of future game content, in the form of more diverse maps, game modes, or some more specific game content. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege's* reviewer expresses their interest in having more open and wider multiplayer maps for the game in the future, in contrast to the current small-scale maps set around-, and inside buildings (Pelit, 01/2016).

As examined earlier, the appeal of depth in the data ties it to the framework's appeals of expression, and creativity/innovation, when the reviewer expresses how the game affordances allow room for creativity. However, the initial study framework assesses the appeals of creativity/innovation as connected, while the study data suggests the appeals of creativity and innovation to be examined distinctly separately, suggesting rather the appeals of creativity and expression to be examined together.

### **CREATIVITY and EXPRESSION**

In the reviews, the appeal of creativity ties heavily into the games' affordances. In the case of *Watch Dogs 2*, the review examines how the functionality of the game characters customization through the game's wardrobe not only allowed the reviewer to express their creativity but through expression, also to identify to them, adding to the game's perceived appeal of fantasy.

Another example of how the appeal of creativity can be expressed can be found in the review of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*, an FPS shooter, where the reviewer explains the key tactic to their success in the game's multiplayer being avoiding conflict by any means until they are one of the few remaining players left, portraying a different side of creativity.

### **VALUES**

The appeal of values can be examined from various points of view and is referring to our personal values. As examined previously regarding the appeal of fantasy in the review of *Watch Dogs 2*, and the reviewer's sentiments on the character group of hipsters, the review also notes how the game portrays minorities such as colored- and transgender people. The review posits that "since the matter is never called to attention, [it] is a sufficiently impactful statement." (Pelit, 12/2016). The short form review also examines

how “relating to the player character resembling a ghetto gangster” as possibly proving “to be challenging for a Finnish reservist.” (Reserviläinen, 02/2017). Here the quotations can be seen to address the implied reader. Similarly, the review of *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six: Siege* examines how one of the game’s five player multiplayer modes allows the players to go against fully concealed, generic AI terrorists, who do not depict or offend any certain religion or ethnic group (Pelit, 01/2016). It is worth noting, that in this example, the review directly addresses the implied players, rather than emphasizing on the implied readers.

The review of *Cyberpunk 2077* examined the game’s main character’s actor from the perspective of marketing, stating how at first, they expected the praises for Keanu Reeves’s character portrayal to be part of the game’s marketing campaign, but the character turning up to be excellently written. This example highlights how the reviewers’ own values can affect their perception of the reviewed products. Another way the popular sentiment is examined, can be found in the review of *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia*, where the reviewer states:

I fully understand that the creators wanted to follow history and not veer off to make up too many stories. Rome Total War caused a small scandal merely by how it had flame combusting pigs in it. But I must confess that, being used to Warhammer [previous, fictitiously themed title in the franchise], it’s hard to return to the simpler troop selection (Pelit, 06/2018).

Here the reviewer not only examined a feature that garnered a small uproar, but also examined how they feel when a new game has less to offer than its predecessors.

The appeal of values is also highlighted when the pricing of the game content is being examined. The review of *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six: Siege* is an example where the reviewer assesses how “With real money you even get three types of currency, which can be used to buy cosmetics, like weapon skins. Yes, the fully priced game contains micro transactions, and that’s not even all: would you be interested in a 30-euro Season Pass?” (Pelit, 01/2016). When the reviews examine the pricing of in-game, or future content, it could be argued that the appeal of accessibility and time are also addressed.

Values are also examined more broadly, in relation to game genres. The review of *Tom*

*Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* sums up the writer's position towards the shooter genre through time, examining it being "degraded to the level of Call of Duty and Counter-Strike." (Pelit, 01/2016), situating the reviewed title within a continuum. Here the reviewer's personal values exemplify how the reviews can compare the titles to each other, while being informative towards the implied player.

In the review of *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*, the broad sentiments towards the franchise are examined in a humoristic tone through cultural and media viewpoints:

The Call of Duty games are meant to be despised for their americana, and these days also for being the white privileged Xbox-dudebro's yearly treat. Myself, being a progressive game journalist, I regard this, number one brand of killing games openly and equally. I've gone through every Call of Duty game since the first Modern Warfare. Fan I'm not, but the big money shooters are a delight once a year.

The reviewer examines values and attitudes towards the franchise, while also stating their own. Here the appeal of values is used to postulate the situatedness of the game within the gaming culture, and to propose its value within it. The review of *Battlefield Hardline* examined the franchise and discussed the cynicism towards the idea of game series releasing titles yearly, tying the appeals of values and innovation together (Pelit, 04/2015).

*Cyberpunk 2077's* reviewer claimed how the development team had to go through a months' long crunch -period where the workweeks were six days long. These types of examples contrast the developmental periods in evaluation with the proposed enjoyability of the final game product, considering not only the game itself but also the values laden in creating it. The appeal of values gets a further examination in the same review when the reviewer assesses a game being released unfinished and containing a lot of bugs. In this example also the appeal of time is taken into consideration, as the reviewer proposes the game receiving updates, proposing its further value in the future.

Another noteworthy way the reviews examined the appeal of values, can be argued to be present when the reviews make a note of the games' having received awards. In these situations, the awards can be seen as merits of common, shared values. One way the

dataset's game reviews seem to examine the appeal of values is in regard to the wider context of the global video game market.

## **CHALLENGE**

The appeal of challenge is examined in various ways in the data, with the reviews mainly expressing ways in which the games feel challenging. However, the appeal can also be addressed more diversely, or from different perspectives. The reviewer of *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia*, examined how they enjoy the updated battle system in all except “how the AI troops have not, at least in the retail version, been trained to utilize all the new tactics.” (Pelit, 06/2018). Here, the review examines how some aspects of the game's challenge does not follow the logic of the rest of the game, but also speculates how it could be addressed later by the developers.

*Sniper Elite 4*'s review is an example where the game's challenge is portrayed as “controllable”, which is further examined through gameplay related affordances and depictions how the game challenges the player. Here challenge ties in with the appeal of fantasy. The review of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*, in contrast to the previous, examines the game multiplayer's uncontrollable nature, stating how in “a hundred player multiplayer game you can never be sure how many pairs of eyes evaluate the same distance from a nearby bush.” (Pelit, 11/2018).

In the case of the review of the game *Control*, the appeal of challenge ties not only to the gameplay related aspects, but also the narrative of the game. The review describes how the player characters mental state and plot complexity play their parts in the whole.

The appeal of challenge can also be used to reflect on other games more in general, situating the reviewed title more broadly within the gaming culture. By doing so, the reviewer proposes the game's challenge to be part of its appeal. In *The Last of Us Remastered*'s review this is expressed by the proposition that “Comparing to other modern games, the difficulty level of The Last of Us is on point.” (Pelit, 09/2014). It could also be argued that in some instances the appeal of challenge relates to the appeal of accessibility.

## **SENSATION**

The long form reviews can afford to express more about the game genre, both in text and

through the pictures. The review of *Control*, for example states that the game is played in third person, something that is not clear from the short form review. The long form review also adds to the category by examining how the game rhythm and audiovisual expression feels and plays out. As *Horizon Zero Dawn*'s review examined the exploration of the game world to a greater degree, the game world also gets an in-depth look through the appeal of sensation. The reviewer goes on to state how “[The player character] doesn’t necessarily need to even take part in what’s happening, as the environment will start to tell its own story to the player, independent of the main storyline.” (Pelit, 03/2017), addressing the reader of their possible experience. The long form review also affords the writer to have full paragraphs detailing memorable gaming experiences in greater detail.

Examining the appeal of sensation, the reviews again make connections to other media, namely movies. While movies and scriptwriting are discussed through the game narrative, the graphics can be remarked as being movielike, giving the reader a concise value statement of an aspect of the game. The *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*'s visuality was further examined with remarks such as the animations being flawless, and the game's cinematics shining with professionalism (Pelit, 10/2018). These shorthand ways of expression not only convey information but may also signal to the reader that the review will examine other aspects of the game in more detail further in the review.

A more direct way how other types of media affects the appeal of sensation can be seen in the review of *Battlefield Hardline*, which the reviewer describes as to contain aspects that highlight the TV-like characteristics of the game by incorporating “previously on” - vignettes when the game gets restarted (Pelit, 04/2015). The review also notes how the game utilizes “every cliché available from police series” (Ibid.).

## **MASTERY**

The appeal of mastery can be observed usually in the context related to the examples of proposed tactics for play, showcasing the reviewer having mastered a way to interact with the game, with suggestions on how the game could or should be played according to their experience. The reviewer of *Far Cry Primal* examines the innovative animal companions of the game, going over each of them, discussing and evaluating their use and effectiveness for different gameplay situations. After the lengthy examination of each animal (and tactic), the reviewer proposes how the game could be intense and satisfying to be played on a harder difficulty and with iron man -mode (permanent death), as the

game offers the player multiple ways to approach each situation (Pelit, 03/2016). Here the reviewer reflects on their own experiences, while also proposing the game's potential to be enjoyable on different difficulty settings, linking to the appeal of accessibility.

Reviews concentrating on the multiplayer aspects of the game tend to be more precise with their propositions, and the reviewer can more clearly state which tactics seemed to work for them and which did not. With the inclusion of other players, the examination of tactics or game affordances that the reviewer deems not having played into their success seem to grow more important. Regarding reviews of multiplayer games or game modes, the appeal of mastery ties closely to the appeal of competition, while still approaching the subject from a more individualized perspective. The review of *Call of Duty: Warzone* serves as an example, when the reviewer, after going through their personal tactics, states how “All the best gear is left right there in the city center, where their property rights are determined through bloody struggles.” (Pelit, 04/2020).

The appeal of mastery can also be seen in the data when the reviewer remarks something being coincidental or random when it should not be. While not directly related to the appeal of challenge, obtaining mastery over- or through a gameplay mechanic when it is unreliable, signifies how the two are related. In the review of *Watch Dogs 2*, the appeal is examined when the reviewer finds navigating in the game world, in conjunction with the game's autosave function, to have changed their play behavior resulting in the “gameplay becoming a step more boring.” (Pelit, 12/2016). *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*'s review is another example, where the reviewer notes how after getting accustomed to the multiplayer aspects of the game, they found that item spawns were not as random as the game mode advertised, exclaiming how “in reality, the locations are not nearly as randomized as a first timer might think.” (Pelit, 11/2018), concluding how “thus the system allows small-scale profiteering” (Ibid.) The reviewer continues to examine how some of the item spawns are more known amongst the players, arguably highlighting how understanding the nuances or “meta” of the multiplayer games being part of the process of mastery.

Mastery in multiplayer games can also be seen discussed in the reviews through the mastery of previous titles in the genre. *The Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*'s reviewer states how “the run & gun style characteristic to COD's, does not work at all in the square kilometers sized open world.” (Pelit, 11/2018).



## FELLOWSHIP

The appeal of fellowship is present in the reviews of multiplayer games. *Call of Duty: Warzone*'s review is a typical example where the reviewer examines the benefits of playing the game with company, while also giving their perspective on how the game plays solo.

The review of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* serves as an example where the reviewer examines the collaborative aspects of the game, by going through how they felt while playing on public servers with random co-players from around the world. The reviewer also compared the play experience to other multiplayer experiences, examining how some of the playstyles, general conventions of players, and the mood derived from previous shared gaming experiences. The reviewer stated how "The impact of Counter-Strike shows: for some defenders, the concept of "defending" is still unknown, and respectively, the dumbest attackers cried when the defenders were camping." (Pelit, 01/2016).

## COMPETITION

When the appeal of competition is being discussed, the long form reviews can examine and describe the available multiplayer game modes and propose their value to the implied player. Playerbase, Innovativeness of the game modes, co-players (fellowship), and game maps are some of the evaluated aspects. The connectedness to the appeal of accessibility is highlighted in the review sections examining the multiplayer modes of games. Beside the playerbase, here the long form reviews can also speculate the future content updates of the reviewed game, or even entirely new and upcoming titles for playing competitively.

The experience run-throughs in the review of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* are an example of the reviewer examining how a match within the game plays out. Here the reviewer examines the appeal of competition through multiple other appeals, first describing how the players can interact with the game affordances and each other and continues to suggest how an individual might experience the gameplay, through a proposed example of a typical match.

The long form reviews of games containing multiple multiplayer modes can also propose value to the modes separately. *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*'s review highlights one mode to be commendable, while proposing the overall value of the game to be questionable due to unknown longevity (linking to the appeal of time).

On a smaller scale, when examining the appeal of competition, the reviews may point to certain audiovisual aspects of the game to be of importance for the best play experience. *Call of Duty: Warzone*'s reviewer stated how the game's audio did not serve the competitiveness well, as situational awareness in multiplayer games is of importance.

Sections examining competitive multiplayer elements also draw comparisons to other similar titles, comparing the play experiences, proposing how enjoyable the reviewed title could be in comparison to others. The review of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* compares the game's destructive environments to Battlefield series games that have tried the similar mechanics, highlighting how certain innovative aspects of comparable games can garner the attention within the reviews. The review of *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* serves as another example:

Even when I last year skipped the multiplayer of Ghost [previous game of the franchise], the pause didn't help, it just feels like, thank you I've seen this too many times already. In theory, the exoskeleton's abilities have some freshness to them, and especially the jumping, but I've also seen that already in Titanfall. (Pelit, 12/2014).

Overall, the long form reviews afford to examine the game cultures more broadly, and competition between competitive games' is examined to be high in the industry. Furthermore, the appeal of innovation seems to play a part in these evaluations.

## **NOSTALGIA**

The appeal of nostalgia can be found in the data in different ways. While examining the puzzles within the game *Control*, the reviewer stated how the lack of the possibility to search the Internet for answers made them "Returned in [their] memories to the lovely 90's" (Pelit, 09/2019). Meanwhile *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*'s review reflected on the game's narratives situatedness within the franchise, going back to the *Nintendo Entertainment System*'s times in the 1980's. The reviewer of *Cyberpunk 2077* also looks back at their past, stating how akin to the game and the game world, they played 'a gang youth in a metropolis' in their home city back in the 80's.

While the appeal of nostalgia is rarely stated in clear terms regarding the game itself, it can be examined to be present when the review discusses other titles of the franchise or

the game cultures in general, thus drawing from their previous experiences. The review of *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia* is as an example where the reviewer examines their personal sentiments, by examining the game's smaller scope: "This is not the worst idea, as I've at least myself, always enjoyed the Shoguns and other more limited scope Total Wars, and not the big scale productions, which explode in your hands towards the end." (Pelit, 06/2018). Here the nostalgia is expressed in comparing the reviewed title to the previous ones in the series, highlighting the series different characteristics.

Most often the reviews do situate the game as being the current installment in the series being reviewed, but do that for framing, or to possibly add to the reviews' credibility signaling their gaming capital, in which case also additional connection to gaming culture is usually given. In these instances, the role of the reviews consumer as an implied reader is given more focus to.

*Shadow of the Tomb Raider's* review gave an overview of the franchise itself and its roots between the two developers through the years, while also examining gaming culture more broadly:

Core Design's Tomb Raider is almost a similar concept to Tetris in the gaming field: many people who shy away from playing, still recognize the hero archeologist Lara Croft, or at least know to tell that a game is in question.

Crystal Dynamics cut the long downfall in 2013, when Lara Croft was re-invented. The popularity of Uncharted was not left unnoticed, for Lara Croft dashed into the adventures in the step marks of Nathan Drake.

Furthermore, the review also reflected on the popularity of a similar and competing game series.

## **TIME**

The appeal of time is expressed in various ways within the data. In the review of the game *Control*, the reviewer described how "Even the first hour rattled me to get interested" (Pelit, 09/2019), proposing the implied reader of the game's entertainment value, while also signaling them of the tone of the review. At times, the aspect of time is addressed in a more descriptive way, as in the review of *Metal Gear Solid V: Phantom Pain*, through

statements such as: “The story moves forward at a damn leisurely pace.” (Pelit, 10/2015), to more clearer terms: “It took me like 20-30 hours to become aware that the campaign had something wrong to begin with” (Pelit, 10/2015). The reviews can also contain information of the total length of the game, in remarks such as “Shadow of the Tomb Raider being just an excellent ten-hour joyride” (Pelit, 10/2018).

A paragraph detailing the game’s length can also contain more evaluating details, as with *Battlefield Hardline*’s review stating: “The single player, measured with a yardstick, is of reasonable length, with Veteran -difficulty about eight hours. Any replay-value it doesn’t have.” (Pelit, 04/2015). More speculatively, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*’s review expressed how after playing a week, the reviewer started noticing signs of weariness. From another point of view, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*’s review noted how the reviewer had played one of the previous titles of the series three times over. The reviews can also propose how the playstyle might alter the play experience, as is the case with *Cyberpunk 2077*, when the reviewer examines how they completed the game twice. For the second playthrough with a playtime of 20 hours, the reviewer only went through the main story, stating how the whole felt to work better that way, without wandering around in the sandbox game world. They also proposed that during their second playthrough, the character development felt clearer (Pelit, 01/2021).

When regarding multiplayer games, the review of *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six: Siege* examines the structure of a multiplayer match, describing how long the individual rounds last, the maximum length of a full match, and propose how victory is usually achieved. The review also considers other aspects related to the appeal of time, stating how “The maps are so compact, that 5 vs. 5 players is enough for a good compact experience.” (Pelit, 01/2016). The example highlights how the aspects of temporality can be examined in relation to other appeals.

*Horizon Zero Dawn*’s review also examined individual gameplay loops and their durations but from a single player game, identifying a typical battle to last between five and ten minutes. Time, as any other appeal can also be expressed through critique, and through more technical examination, as the reviewer notes about navigating the game, and toggling map markers off in *Horizon Zero Dawn* “but finding that out only after 30 hours of playtime.” (Pelit, 03/2017).

Overall, these observations can also be seen as value propositions of enjoyment expressed in relation to temporality, while also offering advice for the proposed player on how to enhance their play experience.

In the long form reviews, the expressions of time were also related to game cultural phenomena such as review deadlines and expectations of the game genre. In *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, the reviewer both acknowledges the length of the game, but also the realities of their profession, stating that “At the threshold of the review deadline, and my game clock showing 55 hours, I still hadn’t unlocked the last story missions. I must admit that I had to watch the ending from YouTube.” (Pelit, 10/2015). This also serves as an example of how other aspects of game culture can be tied into the longer form reviews, while simultaneously addressing the appeal of accessibility.

Another way time and accessibility made a connection was in the review of *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, where the reviewer stated that “with the new Tomb Raider trilogy coming to an end, yet another reboot should be considered” (Pelit, 10/2018). Expressions as stated can be examined as propositions of value of accessibility through temporality. Temporality also relates to the reviews of remakes and remastered games, such as *The Last of Us Remastered*, where the reviewer states how they only played the remastered version, noting how “These types of games don’t get old, even if the platforms change.” (Pelit, 09/2014).

*Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia*’s review is another example of how the long form reviewer affords to consider the full extent of a game series, while also examining the series’ evolution through the ages:

The Total War -series, known for its massive battles, consisting of thousands of men (and women), just turned eighteen years old. The series has through its long history, dealt with wars of the antiquity to the battles of the Middle Ages, so the sceneries and centuries have changed a lot. The fantasy side was visited in Total War: Warhammer, where the known game mechanics were merged successfully with spells and other supernatural. Now the orcs and other freaks have, at least temporarily, been put in the penalty box and we’ve returned to the real historical events. (Pelit, 06/2018).

Here the review not only examines the past of the game series, but also examines and categorizes its differences, proposing the reader the previous titles value.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Most often the appeal of accessibility is examined not only throughout the whole review, both also in the latter part of the reviews when the platforms that the game is available for is being discussed. The long form reviews address this more in detail with also further speculations on the longevity of the games and their playerbases, also tying the value propositions and speculations to the appeal of time.

On a broader scale, *Horizon Zero Dawn* was examined through “Being an exclusive, *Horizon Zero Dawn* is a nice feather in Sony’s cap.” (Pelit, 03/2017), while the short form review from *Reserviläinen* exclaimed that “The biggest minus comes from its availability, as the game has only been released on PS4.” (Reserviläinen, 06/2017). Another way the appeal of accessibility can be addressed, is when the review mentions the title already having been released as an open beta version. *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*’s review on the other hand is an example where the reviewer revisits previous titles of the series examining how many times they played through the games’ single-player campaigns, signaling their value. The relation to the appeal of time can also be seen here, and even while the review does not explicitly comment on how accessible the older titles are during the time of the current review, it is still worth noting.

The expression of accessibility also depends on the game as a product. *Call of Duty: Warzone*’s review states how the game performs as a loss leader of the current game in the franchise. The game is examined as being free for everyone, as in it does not require owning the newest entry in the series to be playable, but with all the accomplishments transferring to the actual base game if purchased in the future. The reviewer also speculates how through being free to play, the game may retain its playerbase for months to come (Pelit, 04/2020).

Further examining the game production and pricing, the reviewer of *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia*, compares the game’s smaller scope to the previous titles, examining how the “Saga-games are meant to be pushed out at a faster pace and with a lower budget, but in order to be fair they can also be bought with a smaller budget.” (Pelit, 06/2018). Here the philosophy of the game development is examined, and the game’s accessibility

is discussed, with also the appeal of values being considered.

Another way the appeal of accessibility can be perceived in the reviews is how the different aspects of gameplay are being discussed. Both the complexity of control schemes in terms of producing a certain desired outcome, but also with the instrument the gameplay is controlled through. The long-form reviews go in more detail about the subject, but on the surface the appeal is expressed through gameplay interactions. In the short-form reviews, a Finnish shorthand colloquial term “pelattavuus” (roughly translating to “playability”) is used to discuss the subject. As an example of a gameplay relation, the *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*’s review states how “There’s aiming assistance for chickens like me, taking care that every shot is a headshot.” (Pelit, 10/2018), expressing how the accessibility options may reflect on the proposed entertainment value of the game.

As stated previously, the appeal of accessibility is also highlighted when the reviews examine the possible difficulty settings of the games. Here the difficulty also ties in with the appeal of challenge, while emphasizing the possibilities of the players themselves to tailor the experience more suited for their individual enjoyment.

In addition to the games’ availability or customizability, accessibility can also be viewed through the game’s age rating. In these cases, the appeal is tied to other appeals such as fantasy, as in the case of *The Last of Us Remastered*, in which the reviewer proposes that “When [the main character’s] knuckles thrash the oppositions faces into minced meat, the game’s K18 -rating redeems its awarded seal.” (Pelit, 09/2014).

Accessibility can also be tied in to examining the narrative aspects of the games, when it is expressed through remarks of something integral to the proposed enjoyment of the game being unlocked only through playing something additional to the main story, namely side missions. In these instances, it could also be argued that accessibility is tied in with the time appeal.

Regarding multiplayer games, the reviews discussed accessibility in terms of both the playerbase and game options. *Battlefield Hardline*’s review stated how through a small playerbase, the server filters were not feasibly applicable, while also examining the third-party component the game used to finding the matches. What is also worth noting is how

the review discussed the pricing of the game, comparing it to the previous titles in the franchise, and expressed how the future “upcoming DLC’s will split the server population to even smaller siloes.” (Pelit, 04/2015). The review also goes to propose “dark clouds over” the game caused by other upcoming game releases during the holiday season. The multiplayer related aspects of game reviews seem to speculate the appeals of accessibility and time through more direct monetary evaluations.

Another way the appeals of accessibility and time are addressed in unison can be examined in the review of *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six: Siege*, where the reviewer observes themselves having played the game always at a rather late hour, speculating if the low number of “rage kids” and other “regular idiots” could derive from the time of play (Pelit, 01/2016). The review also serves as another example of how the long form reviews afford to examine the mechanics and technology behind multiplayer servers and connectivity, with the reviewer speculating how the game having dedicated servers and server listing would allow the players to find company sharing the same language for communicating in a multiplayer environment effectively. In addition, the review also goes in-depth about the hardware requirements of the game, examining the game’s optimization regarding its graphics, while also stating how the game crashed the reviewer’s computer when they plugged in their USB headset or tried closing the game from its own menu. Here the long form review examined accessibility through both the actual hardware requirements but also through the game’s “quality of life” and user experience.

In the review of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*, the author exclaims how the game setting in the future and lacking any single player component offers no reliable presumptions of the power levels of the game’s weaponry, or usage of the game’s equipment and items. The reviewer examines how the single player campaign could have offered a way for the player to get to know how to use them and not having to learn through trial and error. Another, distinctly different installment in the franchise, *Call of Duty: Warzone*, is an example where the reviewer notes how the game offers tiered color coding to the game’s weapons signaling their value, while also wonders why the arsenal is left rather small while outside the multiplayer there would be plenty (Pelit, 04/2020). These examples highlight the subjectivity of the accessibility evaluations.

## **INNOVATION**

In *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*’s review, the appeal of innovation expresses



itself in how the game's mission objectives are depicted to be designed. Here the narrative is depicted as being innovative, as "The missions usually have some kind of a hook to mess your plans", continued with how "All the objectives are not even stated beforehand" (Pelit, 10/2015). As examined, the innovativeness within the games is usually contrasted by statements about the reviewers' sentiments of the game being reviewed, or through examples of how they have encountered something similar in previous games they have engaged with. Another example can be found in the review of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, considering the game's boss fights and "being able to prepare for them only by using a walkthrough" (Pelit, 10/2015).

Most often the appeal of innovation is discussed within longer experience run-throughs, examining various gameplay affordances. The review of *Watch Dogs 2* looks at the gadgets the player character has in their disposal and how they are interacted with individually or combined. The reviewer exclaims how their innovative use not only produced some of the most enjoyable moments during play, but also through mastery over them, the reviewer succeeded in a personal challenge by completing a "demanding mission" through innovation (Pelit, 12/2016). The example addresses how one central appeal works through an umbrella of many (mastery, challenge), arguably demonstrating how interconnectedly the appeals can be present with each other, and how innovation precedes the appeal of creativity.

The review of *Call of Duty: Warzone* examines the title's innovative multiplayer game mechanics, with the reviewer describing their experiences while making remarks of how the new mechanics could be balanced better. When the reviewed title is a multiplayer game, the suggestions can also be about game balance, rather than critique of mechanics.

Another way, as formerly discussed relating to the appeal of values, the appeal of innovation can be seen is how the long form reviews discuss the game as part of a series, or through the previous titles from the developers. The Battlefield series as a whole was examined with "[Battlefield 4] lowering Battlefield PC-gaming from the championships league to the category of cynical yearly upgrades." (Pelit, 04/2015). Here the review examines the appeal of innovation related to the brand image and the appeal of values. The long form reviews can also compare the innovativeness of the title to other game series, as in the case of *Call of Duty Advanced Warfare*'s comparison to *Titanfall* and *Destiny*, regarding the games already having cornered the innovative vertical game

navigation (Pelit, 11/2014).

Regarding new entries to established franchises, the appeal of innovation does not necessitate the game to be innovative for the review to examine the appeal of it. *Call of Duty: Advanced warfare*'s review looks at how the game plays out, commenting on the changes in a broader sense: "This is what I waited, this is what I got." (Pelit, 11/2014). The reviewer also makes a joke of a trope of the series regarding helicopters, and continues to examine flying in the game franchise through the appeal of accessibility, stating how they still, after failing multiple times to fly one, didn't have the energy to change into playing with a controller (Ibid.).

The review of *Far Cry Primal* is another example where the game itself is not considered innovative in anything but the setting, but how "already the period the game takes place in, makes it considerably more interesting playground than a normal game would be. Oros is a living and breathing valley, whose inhabitants are memorable, and far from any normal game's babyfaces." (Pelit, 03/2016). Here the value is proposed through a single innovative aspect, but with the expectation of the implied player to understand the game series and or the genre in question.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENT**

The appeal of accomplishment seems to be closely tied to the multiplayer game reviews in the data. When the reviews examine the reward mechanics of multiplayer games, accomplishment also ties to the appeal of depth and accessibility. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege*'s review states how through leveling up the character in multiplayer, the player is allowed to join the ranked matches and accept new in-game challenges (Pelit, 01/2016).

The long-form reviews also discuss reward mechanisms in multiplayer game modes, expressing how the lack of unlockable items or how the matches calculate game score can affect the sense of accomplishment. *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4*'s review encapsulates the appeal of mood and not feeling accomplished through the statement of: "Mere participation and ending up as someone else's target awards you only Eurovision points: Finland, zero poäng". (Pelit, 11/2018).

From a broader perspective and regarding finishing a game, accomplishment can also be seen examined when the reviewer goes through their overall mood while reflecting on

their journey through the game. Statements regarding story arcs' lengths and game chapters' contents are examples of how the sense of accomplishment ties into the perceived value of the game, evaluated through the writers' own sentiments and preferences of games as products.

The review of *Control* discussed the collectible in-game textual documents as being part of the narrative, but also stated that they enjoyed collecting them and wanted more of what they conveyed, serving as an example of how the appeals of narrative, and sense of accomplishment can be viewed in the reviews.

The review of *Total War: Thrones of Britannia* states how the game's campaigns are shorter than in the series previous titles, with the reviewer noting how the shorter length also comes with a perk, of "now being able to complete the game, and that the latest save file won't stay and haunt you for ages." (Pelit, 06/2018). In the example, also the appeal of time and accessibility connects to the appeal of accomplishment. While the multiplayer games' reviews discuss the appeal of accomplishment more, the single player games' reviews also address it, both in terms of the whole game, but also through some smaller aspects of them, as discussed priorly.

This concludes the thesis analysis and results chapter. As examined, the appeals were expressed and examined through distinctive manners in the data, addressing the audience as both implied readers and implied players. The appeals were also often co-occurring, while also connecting the information provided from the subjective gameplay related experiences to the broader aspects of game cultures and the game industry. The following chapter will synthesize the research findings and provide a summary of the thesis study.

# 5 DISCUSSION

## 5.1.introduction

This chapter discusses and synthesizes the key findings from the research of the thesis study. The study conducted a qualitative content analysis on 30 written video game reviews from two magazine sources, *Reserviläinen*, and *Pelit*. The data corpus consisted of short-form reviews of 15 game titles from *Reserviläinen*, and their 15 long-form counterparts from *Pelit*. The study utilized a framework of appeals of video games, presented by Lee et al. (2017), and complemented by additional appeals proposed by Cho (2019). Furthermore, the study framework was informed by the concepts of implied reader (Iser, 1974), and implied player (Aarseth, 2007; Smith, 2006; Stenros, 2015), to address the magazine context of the data. The study aimed to answer the three research questions:

(Q1) What are the key differences between the short-form and long-form reviews?

(Q2) How are the proposed appeals of video games present in written video game reviews?

(Q3) How do the reviews cater to the proposed information needs of the readers?

The chapter continues to present the key outcomes of the thesis research in sub-chapter 5.2, further examining the appeals relations to various aspects of their expression in sub-chapter 5.2.1 and proposes a new appeal of accessibility in sub-chapter 5.2.2. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing the study limitations in sub-chapter 5.3.

## 5.2.Study Outcomes

The subchapter starts by briefly summarizing the findings from the short form reviews to better highlight the key differences proposed after.

First by examining the preliminary analysis process of the study investigating the corresponding content found in both the short-form, and the long-form reviews, the data

seems to suggest that the short-form reviews do cover most of the appeal categories found in the long-form ones. While the *Pelit* reviews being on average 10 times as long as their counterparts in *Reserviläinen* they both still shared similarities by addressing most of the appeals of the study framework. Similarly, the appeals of submission and learning were absent in both review types.

The appeals of narrative, fantasy, and depth were expressed most prevalently in the short-form reviews. The survey data from Lee et al. states narrative as the most frequently identified appeal in their study, with fantasy, and depth as the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (2017). The prior research examined the appeal of narrative as referring to experiencing and appreciating the story, and the appeal of fantasy referring to immersing oneself in a fantasy world and doing things not possible in real life (Lee et al., 2017). The short-form reviews in this study, emphasizing the two appeals arguably cater more to the implied readers, as the context frames the reviewed titles more easily approachable and of the audience who necessarily do not play. The appeal of depth, as examined by Lee et al., refers to the appreciation of the scale and choices (2017), which in the study data seems to highlight the emphasis of offering the reader information regarding the gameplay itself, addressing the implied player. However, as mentioned previously, the short-form reviews did address multiple appeals, which suggests that the reviewers considered the games rather holistically, offering a valid set of information about the titles, further supporting the appeals as an additional access point for video game recommendation as proposed by Lee et al., (2017), and Cho (2019).

While the appeals did co-occur in the short-form reviews, co-occurrences were not as prevalent as in the long-form ones, and when the review content corresponded with an appeal, the segment was also typically presented less descriptively and in more general terms. Arguably the review length, title, the author, and the magazine context affected the content. The short-form reviews within the dataset typically concluded with a value statement regarding the game, and belong to the problematized review genre in which the critics' personal background is argued to conflict with the writing, and lacking a clear understanding of their professional practices (Foxman and Nieborg, 2016), while not arguing for or against, the reviews still largely address the proposed appeals of video games identified by Lee et al. (2017), and Cho (2019).

However, the key differences emerged from the data by examining the material found

only in the long-form reviews. The study suggests that the long-form reviews rather expand on examining the similar and related aspects that the short-form reviews address. The longer format affords the reviewer to discuss the appeals of the game by examining them more interconnectedly and through a variety of relations as discussed later. The format did also address the reviewed titles through more varied, and less frequently expressed appeals.

The longer format afforded the reviewers to situate the games within a larger context more than their short-form counterparts. The reviews examined not only the game but could also propose value to other games in the franchise and evaluate the games' narrative throughout the series. The reviews also examined the game genres, expressing genre expectations, and compared the reviewed titles to other games, also proposing value to them and/or their distinct elements. The longer format also encompassed comments on the game studios, game developers (even individually), and evaluated the developers design decisions. The reviews also further examined the games in wider game cultural and game industry contexts, also referring to more of other types of media in the process, highlighting reviewers' cross-media appeals.

With *Pelit* being a game culture magazine, the study supports the notion of game reviews being meaningful in dealing with gaming capital (e.g., Nieborg and Sihvonen, 2009, Kirkpatrick, 2012, Consalvo, 2007), as examined in the literature review of the study. However, by inspecting the reviews through the framework of appeals of video games (Lee et al., 2017; Cho, 2019) the data seems to point out that the reviews offering a wider context for the games address the proposed appeals of the titles while also conveying the appeal relations to various other domains. Smith, in their study of the four player models, proposed the Susceptible Player Model as to examine the post-game behaviours and attitudes affected by the game (2006), which the thesis study data supports, as the reviewers situate the games within a larger context. Smith (2006) also defined the Selective Player Model, as the player actively selecting games to fulfill their needs. While both the short- and the long-form review support this, the long-form reviews expand on it with the wider framing of the games, for instance, by comparing it to other titles.

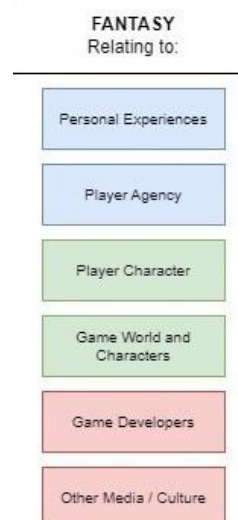
On a more focused scale, the long-form reviews could contain more of the reviewers' personal experiences, detailing their memorable gaming moments, and by offering the implied player audience tips by addressing how they themselves enjoyed the games. The

personal experiences could be expressed through longer experience run-throughs within the long-form reviews, which also afforded to propose value to individual elements of the games, and to examine different game-modes independently, and more in depth. The other two of the player models proposed by Smith (2006), the Active Player Model and the Rational Player Model, are observed in the data, as the reviewers depict actively engaging with the games in both their own ways, and discussing how they optimized their play according to the perceived objectives and goals of the games.

In summary, the study suggests that the appeals expanded on in the long-form reviews emerge relating to three *dimensions*: the more subjective *personal experience*, the *game world and narrative*, and the games' contextual situatedness within the *game cultures and the game industry*. In comparison, Lee et. al., found that the users were drawn to the games for various reasons, some closely related to the content, and others more for the user experience (2017). The next sub-chapter examines the proposed dimensions more in detail.

### 5.2.1. Appeals' Aspects of Expression

The dimensions seem to emerge from the appeal relation to various aspects of expression. The relations are exemplified in the Figure 4 below. The study suggests three levels to emerge from the data, each categorizing and expressing the reviewed aspects of the appeals in an expanding nature, from more personal, to relating to game cultures and the game industry in general.



**Figure 4:** An example of how the appeal of fantasy is expressed within the data. The full list of appeal relations can be found in the thesis Appendix 2.

**Personal experiences (blue):**

The first dimension examined through the appeals discussed the reviewers' personal experiences related to the reviewed title, the overall tone of the game, identifiability with the main character, player agency and gameplay related insights, the audiovisual aspects of the game, game modes and other players within the game.

**Game narrative/world (green):**

The second dimension examined through the appeals consisted of regarding the game story and narrative, the player character within the story, the game world and its other characters, individual aspects of the narrative, and in-game textual data.

**Game cultures and industry (red):**

The third dimension examined through the appeals considered the game series the title represents, other video games, game development and game developers, other media and culture, game writing, game genre, monetization, marketing, the future of the reviewed title, and technology related to playing.

The comprehensive list of the appeals and their expressions in the data are listed in the thesis Appendix 2. The thesis study proposes that, for example when regarding a single appeal such as values (see Figure 4), the game reviews could address the appeal of fantasy through player experience, the game world, and other media relating to the title.

What is worth noting, is that the previous research on game reviews examining their content and structure (e.g., Bond and Beale 2009; Zagal et al. 2009), show similarities in their findings to what this thesis study expressed as the appeals' aspects of expression. Zagal et al. proposed nine themes: description, personal experience, reader advice, design suggestions, media context, game context, technology, design hypotheses, and industry (2009) However, this study proposes that by utilizing the appeals of video games to study their expression in game reviews, allows for a more coherent, context aware understanding of the reviews' content, adding further understandings to the field of game review research and recommendation. Regarding the research by Bond and Beale, and their study proposing heuristics for game design, reviewing, or purchasing, their study suggested the following categories the reviewers deemed good or bad: gameplay, environment, storytelling, user interaction, customization, social, variety, technical, cohesion, maintenance, price, franchise, and quantity (2009). This thesis study and its use



of the framework of appeals propose a deeper understanding of how the different appeals of video games are expressed relating to the categories.

Regarding the appeals framework and categories as examined previously in the thesis, the study data suggests that at least in the context of written video game reviews, the appeal of innovation, which the prior research defines as creativity/innovation, expressing appreciation of the games innovative, novel, or experimental ideas (Lee et al. 2017), to be separated to its own category. The data rather suggests that the appeals of creativity and expression could be combined, as the prior study defined expression as an appeal to expressing oneself and/or creating things in the game world (Ibid.). In the game reviews, creativity and expression were examined throughout in connection to one another.

### **5.2.2. The Appeal of Accessibility**

Considering how the main appeals for video games were identified by Lee et al. through survey responses inquiring what attracts users to play certain games (2017), the appeal of accessibility did not emerge in their data. However, by studying video game reviews, the data suggests that the games' accessibility is considered as a meaningful appeal. Accessibility was examined in various ways in the data, with the reviewers commenting on the titles by evaluating their price, examining the development and accessibility through beta periods, or being free to play. The reviews also discussed the previous titles in the series (while not explicitly stating their availability), also regarding the accessibility to enjoy the narrative of the franchise'. Furthermore, the scope of the games and their game modes were discussed, along with content and game modes unlocked through play.

The reviews also considered the platforms the games could be played on and evaluated the games' current- and future performance relating to hardware and bug fixes. The appeal of accessibility was also expressed through examining the games' age rating, control complexity and controller options, aim assistance, and tailored difficulty through game options along with other quality-of-life considerations. The proposed appeal of accessibility also related to the games' release schedule compared to other upcoming titles, considered the possible or upcoming downloadable content (DLC) for the games, and their effects on the games' playerbases. The reviews also examined how some of the multiplayer games use third-party software for matchmaking, and evaluated how the time of the day the games are played could affect the server player population and even considered co-player languages in terms of communication in co-operative games.

While not strictly expressing an appeal that attracts players to play a game, the study argues that the appeal of accessibility could be incorporated as one access point for recommendation and advisory services, and for game studios to consider during game development.

### **5.3.Limitations**

While the study provides valuable insights into the appeals of video games through game review research, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The scope of the study was limited to Finnish written video game reviews. This inherently limits the outcomes to consider only the Western, or even only Northern cultures. Furthermore, the short-form reviews being from a Finnish military reservists' magazine also limits the scope as other publications might offer different nuances to the shorter form review genre. The review data was also translated to English by the researcher, which could also affect the study.

The magazine dataset for the study was also rather small. While the data was sampled for relevancy to answer the research questions, the 15 individual video game reviews (30 reviews in total) consisted of three separate genres, with multiple authors. One of the reviews was decidedly an outlier, representing the genre of strategy games, but its incorporation in the dataset did not stand out in the coding or analysis process of the study.

While the data saturated in the coding process, some of, what the study expressed as 'the appeals' aspects of expression' were still infrequent in the data. This however rather proposes venue for future research on the topic.

It is also worth noting, that the thesis researcher is not an expert utilizing the research method employed in the study. The research design could be improved upon, if not fully redesigned by more seasoned researchers. The background information relating to the publications is also rather lengthy but offered a way to validate the dataset and familiarize the researcher with the data.

Furthermore, the appeals framework was not originally devised to study game reviews, but to propose the appeals to improve user recommendations and 'readers advisory' for video games (Lee et al. 2017), and as such, the value of the proposed appeal of

accessibility for validity or future research should be evaluated by further research.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will conclude the study by summarizing the key findings drawn from the thesis research, discuss their implications, and suggests areas for future research.

In conclusion, the thesis study aimed to examine video game reviews from a new perspective. The short-form reviews seem to discuss the games in ways which address the priorly identified appeals attracting people to play certain games. Multiple appeals were addressed in each review, signalling how the reviewers consider the reviewed titles rather holistically, with the reviews closing remarks concisely stating the games' value to the reader.

Furthermore, the study suggests, that the long form reviews add to the information the short reviews provide, by expanding on, and examining the games more in depth. The research indicates that the longer reviews addressed the appeals also through their interconnectedness to each other and addressed how their aspects of expression relate to three dimensions: *personal experiences* (in and out of game), *game narrative/world*, and *game cultures and industry*, highlighting the significance of the frameworks appeals of games (Lee et al., 2017; Cho, 2019) in a wider game cultural and cross-media context.

The thesis study contributes to the fields of game studies and media studies, by adding to the existing studies of game reviews, while also proposing the appeal of *accessibility*, as a valuable, and coherent addition to the appeals framework for game recommendation and advisory services. The appeal of accessibility was implied throughout the data, and could be addressed for example, through information about the games' difficulty-, quality-of-life-, and controller options, and information relating to the games' unlockable content.

While the thesis study was of a smaller scale, game reviews could be studied further through the appeals. Smaller video game developers could for example examine the user generated game reviews on platforms like Steam, to further understand what appeals to the players in the reviewed games, as the framework is derived from expressions in users' terms. Other frameworks, while providing design aid, examines the players in different ways. Readers' advisory and game recommendation services (in libraries for example), on the other hand, could investigate incorporating game review content to their processes, as game reviews seem to examine the titles through cross-media contexts.

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# APPENDIX 1. FULL DEFINED DATASET

*The defined dataset, year 2015*

1. *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* (Sledgehammer Games; Raven Software, 2014), is a major installment in the franchise, an FPS (first-person shooter) set in the near future. The game offers both single- and multiplayer components. This title was chosen as it is an integral, but different take on the franchise, with a futuristic setting. *Advanced Warfare* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 1/2015, on PS4 by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 11/2014, on PC/PS4 by Tuomas Honkala.

2. *The Last of Us Remastered* (Naughty Dog, 2014) is a remastered version of the critically appraised single-player 3<sup>rd</sup> person action-adventure / survival horror. The title was selected to represent a remastered game with heavy emphasis on story. The title was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 3/2015, on PS4 by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 9/2014, on PS4 by Juho Kuorikoski.

3. *Battlefield Hardline* (Visceral Games, 2015), The game is an FPS from a venerable franchise, set in the present, but unlike other games in the franchise, instead of war focuses on crime and policing. *Battlefield Hardline* was chosen to represent another well-known game series but offering an interesting setting veering off from the set norm. The game also offers both single- and multiplayer modes. The title was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 4/2015, on PS4 by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 4/2015, on PC by Tuomas Honkala.

4. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (Kojima Productions, 2015) is a main entry in the series, played in 3<sup>rd</sup> person. *The Phantom Pain* is a stealth action-adventure set in the near past. The game offers a view to open world games, and games with an intricate and highly praised storyline, with both single- and multiplayer modes supported. *The Phantom Pain* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 7/2015 by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 10/2015 on PS4, by Tuomas Honkala.

*The defined dataset, year 2016*

5. *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Siege* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2015). *Siege* is a 1<sup>st</sup> person tactical shooter with an emphasis on multiplayer functionality, while also having a short single-player component to it. *Siege* was selected to represent multiplayer games set in modern times, including modern counter terrorism operatives as playable characters. The game is still updated regularly with season passes, bringing in more content to its players. *Siege* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 2/2016 by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 1/2016 on PC, by Santeri Oksanen.

6. *Far Cry Primal* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2016), is a single-player 1<sup>st</sup> person action-adventure set in the prehistoric times, and a spinoff of the critically acclaimed *Far Cry* series. This title was chosen as it offers a view on how a spinoff game with emphasis on animals and pre-modern weaponry is reviewed. *Far Cry Primal* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 5/2016 by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 3/2016 on PS4, by Juho Penttilä.

*The defined dataset, year 2017*

7. *Watch Dogs 2* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2016), is an action-adventure from the 3<sup>rd</sup> perspective, supporting both single- and multiplayer game modes, in an open world setting. The game was selected to represent an open world game set in the near future, with multiple means to interact with the game world beside weaponry. It was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 1/2017 by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 12/2016 on PS4, by Markus Rojola.

8. *Sniper Elite 4* (Rebellion Developments, 2017) is a multi- and single-player 3<sup>rd</sup> person tactical shooter with stealth elements. The game is set during the second world war, with a heavy emphasis on sharpshooting. *Sniper Elite 4* was selected to the dataset to represent a more violent game with defined game elements and setting. It was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 3/2017 by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 3/2017, by Heikki Hurme, with no mention of the played platform.

9. *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017), is an open world action-roleplaying game played from the 3<sup>rd</sup> perspective. The game is set in the far future and was selected for its role-playing aspects and the female player character. *Horizon* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 4/2017, on PS4 by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 3/2017 on PS4, by Markus

Rojola.

*The defined dataset, year 2018*

10. *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia* (Creative Assembly 2018), is a single- and multiplayer strategy game, set in the British Isles in 800AD. The game is part of Total war franchise but is a standalone title of the series. The game was chosen to represent strategy games, while also being the only PC platform game in the dataset. It was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 5/2018, on PC by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 6/2018 on PC, by Samu Ollila.

11. *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* (Eidos Montréal, 2018), is part of the long-lasting game franchise, and the third entry of the series' reboot. The game is a single-player action adventure and was chosen to the dataset to represent a semi-open world title with a female player character. The title was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 7/2018, by Mikko Virta. The played platform was not mentioned in the review, and in *Pelit* 10/2018 on PS4, by Juho Kuorikoski.

12. *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4* (Treyarch, 2018). This is the second *Call of Duty* game in the dataset, also an FPS, and part of the *Black Ops* subseries. *Black Ops 4* is the first entry in the series not having a dedicated single-player campaign incorporated. The game is, apart from small single player missions, a dedicated multiplayer title. It was selected to represent a game subseries, its special forces aspect and its different multiplayer qualities. *Black Ops 4* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 8/2018, on PS4 by Mikko Virta, and in *Pelit* 11/2018 by Tuomas Honkala, with no mention of the played platform.

*The defined dataset, year 2019*

13. *Control* (Remedy Entertainment, 2019) is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person action-adventure developed by Finnish Remedy Entertainment. The game is set in a paranormal milieu with a female protagonist. It was selected to the dataset to represent a Finnish game, but also for its female player character and its supernatural setting and gameplay elements. The game was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 6/2019, on PS4 by Paavo Airo, and in *Pelit* 9/2019 on PC, by Markus Lukkarinen.

*The defined dataset, year 2020*

14. *Call of Duty: Warzone* (Infinity Ward; Raven Software, 2020). *Warzone* is a free-to-

play battle royale title of the *Call of Duty* franchise, and while being part of both the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (Infinity Ward 2019), and *Call of Duty: Black Ops: Cold War* (Treyarch; Raven Software 2020), is also a standalone product. It is a multiplayer FPS game with a modern setting, and in the dataset represents cross-platform play, battle royale game mode, and free-to-play games. *Warzone* was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 2/2020, on PS4 by Paavo Airo, and in *Pelit* 4/2020 on PC, by Markus Rojola.

*The defined dataset, year 2021*

15. *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt Red, 2021) is a single-player 1<sup>st</sup> person action-roleplaying game in an open world setting. The game has its roots in the table-top roleplaying game *Cyberpunk* (Mike Pondsmith 1988)<sup>5</sup>. *Cyberpunk 2077* was selected for its role-playing elements, ties to other media, and to represent an open world game traversed in 1<sup>st</sup> person, in a cyberpunk setting. The game was reviewed in *Reserviläinen* 1/2021, on PS4<sup>6</sup> by Tuomas Kaarkoski, and in *Pelit* 1/2021 on PC, by Tuukka Grönholm.

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to the game's first edition, published by R. Talsorian Games.

<sup>6</sup> Author of the thesis has played through the title on PC, starting from the release date. The title was notoriously buggy even on PC, but the PS4 version got taken off the official PlayStation store. The game was reinstated in the store on June 21, 2021.

## APPENDIX 2. APPEAL RELATIONS

Table 1. Appeals' aspects of expression.

MOOD Relating to:	NARRATIVE Relating to:	FANTASY Relating to:	EXPLORATION Relating to:
Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences
Tone of the Game	Game Story	Player Agency	Game Story
Game Story	Player Character	Player Character	Game World and Characters
Player Character	Identifiability	Game World and Characters	Gameplay
Game World and Characters	Game World and Characters	Game Developers	
Gameplay	Aspects of the Narrative	Game Development	
Game Series	In-game Textual Data	Other Media / Culture	
Other Games	The Writing		
Game Development	Game Series		
Other Media / Culture	Other Games		

Table 2. Appeals' aspects of expression.

DEPTH Relating to:	CREATIVITY / EXPRESSION Relating to:	VALUES Relating to:	CHALLENGE Relating to:
Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences
Player Agency	Player Agency	Player Character	Gameplay
Player Character	Player Character	Identifiability	Aspects of the Narrative
Gameplay	Identifiability	Game World and Characters	Game Series
Genre	Game World and Characters	Gameplay	Game Development
Aspects of the Narrative	Gameplay	Genre	Other Games
Game Series	Other Players	Game Series	
Other Games		Other Games	
Game Development		Game Development	
		Monetization	
		Marketing	
		Other Media / Culture	



Table 3. Appeals' aspects of expression.

<b>SENSATION</b> Relating to:	<b>MASTERY</b> Relating to:	<b>FELLOWSHIP</b> Relating to:	<b>COMPETITION</b> Relating to:
Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences
Game Story	Gameplay	Gameplay	Gameplay
Game World and Characters	Game World and Characters	Other Players	Game Audio / Visuals
Gameplay	Other Players	Other Games	Game World and Characters
Game Audio / Visuals	Game Series		Game Modes
Genre			Other Players
Other Media / Culture			Future of the Game
			Game Series
			Other Games

Table 4. Appeals' aspects of expression.

NOSTALGIA Relating to:	TIME Relating to:	ACCESSIBILITY Relating to:	INNOVATION Relating to:	ACCOMPLISHMENT Relating to:
Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences	Personal Experiences
Game Series	Game Story	Tone of the Game	Player Character	Game Story
Other Games	Game World and Characters	Game Story	Game Story	Gameplay
Technology	Gameplay	Gameplay	Gameplay	Game Modes
Other Media / Culture	Other Players	Other Players	Genre	Other Players
	Genre	Game Development	Game Series	In-game Textual Data
	Game Series	Game Series	Other Games	Technology
	Game Development	Monetization	Technology	Game Series
	Other Media / Culture	Marketing	Other Media / Culture	Other Media / Culture
		Technology		
		Other Media / Culture		