The Digital Myth of Women on The Battlefield

A Reception Analysis of Female Soldiers in the Online Discourse of Battlefield V

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Lately, the trailer for the game “Battlefield V” received a massive backlash from the players of the Battlefield franchise due to the fact that the game inspired by World War II featured a woman as the main character. This research set out to investigate how female elements are interpreted in a traditional male-dominated digital space, and aims to highlight the elements to consider when introducing a female lead character in a video game.

The method employed was the critical discourse analysis method (CDA) which interprets discourse by drawing out the implicit meanings in texts. The analysis sought to discern the elements depicting the woman soldier in the online discourse around the game that originated from the controversy. The interpretation of the results is based on the reception theory, as well as the concept of identification and develop around the theory of gender and media and game theory (ludology).

The results revealed that the perception of women as a role, from a presence and aesthetic perspective in a virtual space, is influenced by gender roles and the reception of History. Another conclusion is that when giving a female character the main role, with all the attributes of a male character, it seems to confuse the players, resulting in that they cannot identify themselves with the avatar. In addition, the physical appearance contributes to the identification with a character and confirms the precedent studies about male players identifying with male players. The findings support the autonomy of historical understanding and its connection to visual culture in order to explain the phenomenon. As a consequence, the rejection of the main character has led to the creation of a community built around the online discourse and the imbalance of gender values, favorising masculinity over femininity.

Keywords: Video Games, Critical Discourse Analysis, Battlefield V Phenomenon, Identification, Gender and Media
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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTROVERSY

Media have treated the topic of women identity in various ways, for instance, the depiction of women in paintings (Berger, 1972), movie production (De Lauretis, 1984; Mulvey, 1989), and politics (Ross, 2004). The focus of this master thesis lies on the representation of women in video games, specifically on the Battlefield V controversy.

On May 23rd, 2018, the games studio EA DICE cast the last opus of the Battlefield series to the public. The already infamous game introduced a British, mechanically enhanced woman as a main character in the multiplayer mode. After the screening of the trailer, the Battlefield gaming community strongly reacted to the “Historical inaccuracy of the game”. The commercial shows soldiers deployed on a battlefield scene where two factions are confronting each other. Following the first-person view camera which focuses on the female character, the viewer interprets that she is the main protagonist of this video, fighting in the frontline. This female soldier wears a long coat with straps and high boots. Her red hair is tied up, showing a blue war painting underlining her eyes. Her left arm is non-existent and replaced by a steel prosthesis with three claws in place of a hand. She shoots at the enemy faction with rifles and strikes her foes with a baton.

THE RECEPTION OF HISTORY IN MODERN SOCIETY

The game is presumed to take inspiration from the World War II era and, when thinking of women’s involvement during the both the first and second World War, the general assumption is that they have mostly been acting as a support staff in field hospitals, or crafting weapons, and never partook in combat. Contemporary society’s understanding of History is built upon visual culture (Mirzoeff, 2009). Media show the world in visual terms, and the displayed images carry an interpretation of what is seen and unseen. Carlyle (1993) leans on the heroes of England to visualise History, which has been translated, interpreted and assembled together thanks to preserved paintings representing the great men on battlefields. These paintings are able to tell the narrative of past battles. Hence, the modern perspective is to Mirzoeff (2009) entangled to the subjectivity of great men from the past. For him, History has been written the way particular men wanted the world to know them, to show one face of the period. Later on, photography played a similar role: during the 19th century, people concluded that a picture is an apparent capture of reality.

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1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fb1MR85XFOc
Media have been accepted into society as exposing the reality of the world: an image is powerful and, as part of mainstream culture, has a strong impact on the way we perceive things (Howells & Negreiros, 2012). From the visual popular culture such as TV shows, movies and comic books, the modern society believes only men fought and while women kept a supporting role. From this perspective, world wars are associated with the masculinity.

Philosophers determined the “autonomy of historical understanding” which refers to the capacity of an individual to deduct a universal Historical knowledge, through late nineteenth centuries notions. Roth (1988) is interested in Hayden White’s concept of Metahistory which connects obsolete ideas to a more contemporary point of view. In his approach to historical writing, White (Roth, 1988) investigates Barthes (1968) “reality effect” whose central idea is that the romanticized facts of the past involve narrative elements thought to be the truth. White’s (1988) inclination in this theory is that writers have invented their own criteria giving a presupposed reality of facts. Consequently, historians have granted them the ability to create their own criteria, conferring them a peculiar authority. For him, the past possesses no form or meaning, historical writing has the capacity to shape the past and intently communicates its meaning. Due to the translation and interpretation of History, from writer to writer, History as a consequence inevitably contains distortions, and affect our own perception of History. White (1988) holds that historical writing is a practice of representation. History is no longer a neutral and factual timeline but rather opens massive possibilities of witnessing reality. The creation of meaning from the past becomes related to the ways society wants to live and change. Instead of watching historical writings as a distorted version of historical realism, White (1988) relates to its openness to reflect a series of past events depending on the character endorsed in a contemporary world with contemporary problems. In the case of Battlefield V, the game becomes a method to represent gender diversity when equality for women is a societal topic.

Some gamers argued that this is not a strike against women, but that the game itself has gone too far in putting a female character in the frontline for social diversity. Others commented that it is a progress in the women’s representation in gaming since few female characters only take a leading role (ex: Lara Croft in Tomb Raider (Jansz & Martis, 2007).

History has remained obscure for a long time as it is the case for women soldiers, up until the Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich (2017) published her book The Unwomanly Face of War composed of the testimonies of Russians fighters during the Second World War. Hundreds of women pilots, snipers, and front line soldiers have confessed about taking part in World War II. Alexievich (2017) gives a voice to the one million women who fought in the Red Army, and she does not forget to mention women soldiers from all countries, including the
225,000 British women soldiers. For Alexievich (2017), the forgotten stories of those women fighting in all branches of the military is due to a strongly masculine representation of war. Speaking for all women she writes “We are all captives of “men’s” notions and “men’s” sense of war. “Men’s” words. Women are silent” (Alexievich, 2017, p. xv).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The presence of women in media has been overall dissimilar to that of men. Media emphasize women’s bodies more than their individual skills (Wolf, 2013). The reactions to the game's announcement trailer lift several questions about the accurate depictions of women in new media like video games. It is important to keep in mind that the game was criticised even before being played. Choosing a video game as an object of study is based on the conviction that the representation of women in new media matters to the feminist discussion by debating on a better inclusion of female media characters. Since the start of the Me too movement, which addresses sexual violence cases made against women, it is even more important to align the real representation of women with their digital alter ego. Scholars have shown that media have an influence on culture (Said, 1985), language (Hall & University, 1997) and representations (Foucault, 1982). Notions like diversity, sex or gender are conceptualized through the prism of the media (Orgad, 2014). In the case of video games, the perception of stereotypes affects gender representations (Dietz, 1998).

The context of the creation of the game is important to understand in order to also understand the conflictual discussion around it. The video game industry is worldwide generating each year more than the cinema industry (Zackariasson, Walfisz, & Wilson, 2006). It amassed $138 billion (1250 billion SEK) by the end of 2018 (Wijman, 2018). The video game industry is characterised by its own cultural identity: Zackariasson and Wilson (2012) argue that “Game development is a creative collaborative process involving numerous disciplines rooted in a particular culture producing creative, artistic and culturally important works.” (Zackariasson & Wilson, 2012, p. 18). The Swedish game industry has always been a part of an international production system because of the game publishers being mostly international. Stockholm is in fact, representing the most competitive gaming industry in the world (Strömbäck, 2017). The Battlefield franchise was created by the Swedish studio DICE in 2002. DICE is also the creator of the platform game Mirror’s Edge and the FPS (First Person Shooter) game Star Wars Battlefront. Since 2006, DICE belongs to the American publisher Electronic Arts, and the fusion was renamed EA DICE. EA publishes world famous AAA games (games produced by a mid-sized or major publisher with high budgets and big development teams) like FIFA Football in the category EA Sports, the Sims, and Mass Effect. It also publishes independent games under the label EA Originals, such as the title A Way Out.
Battlefield is an online FPS playable on PC and console. It depicts different conflicts: real events like the Vietnam War or unreal ones like the imaginary war of USA and China. As a matter of fact, it is not the first time that EA DICE wants to include female soldiers, such as in the downloadable content (DLC) pack “In the name of the Tsar” for a more progressive climate. The company is in itself turned toward Gender equality and had agreed on a commitment to the same values:

“We believe interactive entertainment has the profound ability to both reflect and propel the gender equality movement. Creating experiences with strong gender representation is an intrinsic principle for our company, deeply rooted in our creative processes, and we are committed to delivering more games that help inspire inclusive communities”. (EADICE, 2019)

However, EA Games was heavily criticised for including “Loot boxes” in their previous games that the players had to pay for. Because of that marketing decision, many players started to hate the company for overselling its assets. After the incident, a regulation was created to limit micro-transactions in game.

With all these elements in mind, the study's aim is to understand the reactions of the players from a gender theoretical perspective in order to contribute to more inclusive development of games. This research is done through a qualitative analysis. A collection method inspired by the ethnography method combined with a Critical Discourse Analysis is chosen and applied on comments and interactions discussing the female character. The concepts of gender in media is highly entangled to the one of identity (Gauntlett, 2003). The present thesis takes a reception perspective to establish the relation of players to gender inclusion in games. The interpretation of a text by the readers - and in the case of this phenomenon, the interpretation of the game by its players - is tremendously important, and even more delicate when the text inspires from a historical event because it falls into the concept of “Autonomy of Historical understanding previously announced.

The conceptualization of the Battlefield V phenomenon contains the potential for encouraging innovative practices in game design, like the implementation of a gender diversity climate in games and accompany them better. The study provides information concerning the inclusion of female lead characters and elaborate on the discussion of feminism and games.
KEY CONCEPTS

The definition of digital games used for this study is based on the definition of digital culture and games studies professor Frans Mäyrä (2008). Playing involves to overcome challenges, demonstrate creativity and building strategies (Mäyrä, 2008). Mäyrä (2008) considers games to become a cultural force. The term digital games is described as “all kinds of contemporary games utilizing computing technologies within its operation.” (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 12). Within the digital games category are found computer games, home console games, mobile games and almost every type of digital device.

The category Action games compiles all games that contain physical challenges (Hwa Hsu, Lee, & Wu, 2005). For players of the action games genre, certain typical design features are identified to make the game fun. These features include words like “Avatar”, “novelty and powerfulness,” “appealing presentation,” “interactivity,” “challenging,” “sense of control,” and “rewarding.” There are plenty of subgenres in the action games category, such as platforms games, battle arena or shooter games, the last subgenre being where Battlefield V is positioned.

The narrative in games, in the specific term used here, assumes a different position from a traditional narrative. Thomas, Bell, Ensslin, and Rustad (2014) interpret digital narrative to shape new forms of narratives. Digital narrative refers to hypertext fiction and interactive fiction. The definition used for this study is a combination of definitions from various scholars. ‘hypertext’ is non-sequential writing for Mäyrä (2008). Its specificity comes from the choices the player can decide on. Montfort (2005) has differentiated ‘interactive fictions’ from the traditional narrative where the difference lies in computer processes and that they explicitly has to respond to the user’s commands.

PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTION

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to examine how female elements are interpreted when they enter a traditional male-dominated digital space. The study will be based on Battlefield V's introduction trailer to display the main arguments online, from the players discussing the newly introduced female character in order to understand the causes of the strong reactions.

From this reception angle, the aim is to highlight the elements of game design to consider when introducing a female lead character in an action game based on History. The goal of this study is to contribute to game theory, together with gender and media theory, allowing game developers to implement new elements that reflect their vision of the game, in the future.
The study is important to raise awareness of the lack of main female characters in video games and the reasons why there are not more female leaders in games. It contributes to the field of gender studies along with narrative studies within game research.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is stated as follow:
How does the Battlefield’ community interpret from a discursive point of view the newly introduced female lead character in the action’s video game Battlefield V?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review sums up different ideas and arguments stated by previous scholars in the field of game studies, gender and media studies and gender in games. The study of digital games involves studying the players and their attitude toward games. Games carry ideologies which influence the players over the virtual world into the real one. The study of violence and aggressiveness in digital games became one approach to study the influence of games upon the players. One other major subject of study in games is the research on gender representations, specifically the presence and role of women in virtual worlds. The following sections present existing scientific evidence of the motivations of players and the corresponding influence of violence, aggressiveness and gender in games.

RESEARCH ON THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE PLAYER

One of the most relevant parts of the study is to examine other studies focusing on the motivation and involvement of the player, when playing games, specifically adhering to the notion of identification.

Immersion, or the aptitude to feel part of the world made for the game, along with experience are among the most important characteristics a player is seeking for when playing games (Schell, 2014). According to a study by Ermi and Mäyrä (2005), the game is contained in four realms of experience: (1) entertainment (absorption and passive participation), (2) educational (absorption and active participation), (3) aesthetic (immersion and passive participation) and finally (4) escapism (immersion and active participation). The notion of escapism, is when the player dissociates himself from the real world perceived as unpleasant, to enjoy a recreational digital world. It is for Hefner, Klimmt, and Vorderer (2007) a major motivation of entertainment. The pilot experiment conducted by Hefner et al. (2007) with players of “Battlefield 2” supports the assumptions on the relationships between interactivity, identification, and game enjoyment. When identifying with a character or role offered by the
game, players change their self-concept by adopting relevant attributes of the character, for instance, they perceive themselves as more courageous, heroic, and powerful during identification with a soldier. In his article, Cohen (2001) defines identification as one of several possible responses of media audiences to media characters. For him, identification with media characters is most characteristically a response to narratives. Furthermore, he discusses the consequences of identification with media characters for the development of identity and socialization processes. More than being an attitude, judgment, or response to media characters (e.g., liking, similarity, affinity, or attraction), identification engages the audience member during the reception.

RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCE OF GAMES

Video games are more than virtual worlds, Cohen (2001) explains that people actively interpret what they have seen in the media to attribute specific meaning to, for example, their social relations or their identities. Part of the learning process happens during childhood (Purvis, 2009). Through the process of gender socialization, the child learns what is expected from men and women. Since video games are popular with youth, they become agents of socialization (Mäyrä, 2008). Children are able to recognize that games are not real, but will not question the role endorsed by women. For McDonald and Kim (2001) video game characters are considered by children as role models and have the ability to shape players' perceptions of gender roles.

The effects games have upon an audience is intrinsically linked with the idea of representations (Mäyrä, 2008). The analysis of Miller and Summers (2007) provides information regarding gender differences in the portrayal of characters in video games magazines. It could be noticed, that males exposed to the stereotypical portrayal of females as helpless sexual objects might adopt negative attitudes towards women. Similarly, it may affect the female's perceptions of how they should act. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) suggest that playing a sexualized video game female warrior unfavourably influenced people's beliefs about women in the real world.

RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSIVENESS IN DIGITAL GAMES

Linking to the influences of digital games and on their players, a major aspect of game studies are violence and aggressiveness (Dietz, 1998; Dill, Gentile, Richter, & Dill, 2005; Engelhardt, Bartholow, Kerr, & Bushman, 2011; Scharrer, 2004; Smith, Lachlan, & Tamborini, 2003). The review paper from Dill and Dill (1998) proposes through compiling literature a causal relationship between the exposure to video game violence and the increase of aggressive behaviours and other aggression-related phenomena. Video games can present violent
content, whether it is aggressiveness or sexual offence. According to Dietz (1998), 21% of the games contain “some form of aggression or violence directed specifically at women” (Dietz, 1998, p. 437). Furthermore, themes of some games include violence. Beck, Boys, Rose, and Beck (2012) have explored the effect of media violence while focusing on the objectification of women in games. This violent representation emphasizes a rape attitude toward women. The study is based on the rape myth of Burt (1980), stating that rape myth is a "prejudicial stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists." (Burt, 1980, p. 217). As suggested by the study's findings, a link between sexual objectification of women and the violence against them was found. Humiliation, murders of women and sexual assault increase the myth rape assumption in male players, making it normal to maltreat women in society.

RESEARCH ON GENDER REPRESENTATION

Research on the portrayal of gender in interactive media is particularly relevant because of the way in which games have associated masculinity with games, making the default gender male (Carr, 2006). The literature on gender representation in games falls into two broad categories: (1) Male characters are more present than women (Dietz, 1998; Ivory, 2006; Miller & Summers, 2007) with the main character often being male (2) Females are portrayed as a sex object with hypersexualized bodies and endorse a supportive role (Dietz, 1998; Downs & Smith, 2010; Ivory, 2006). Carr (2006) stresses the importance to examine the meaning of gender in games, through its rules and representation. The representation can be witnessed from the beginning or emerge while exploring the game.

Further studies support the notion that women are physically more likely to be represented as attractive, and in a sexy way (Dietz, 1998; Ivory, 2006; Jansz & Martis, 2007; Miller & Summers, 2007). The vision of beauty imposed in games represent women with large breast and thin hips (Dietz, 1998). Dill and Thill (2007) have measured in their study that 62.6% of females embody this vision of beauty. Females also wear more revealing clothes than men (Downs & Smith, 2010; Miller & Summers, 2007).

The women depicted in games often carry the same roles. Dietz (1998) conducted a reference study about women's portrayal in games and the use of violent themes. The study discloses that women are minimized in games. They are completely missing from the game or they are misrepresented. Dietz (1998) found out that only 15% of women are heroes. Secondly, women endorse a submissive role where they are in distress or non-significant. Finally, these women are seen as evil or being an obstacle in the game. However, more contemporary games include less submissive characters than previous studies (Jansz & Martis, 2007). The female roles have changed today to reflect intrepid women of leadership to whom are given the principal quest of the game. However, the portrayal still stresses on sexualized female features. The ‘Lara
Phenomenon’ observed by Jansz and Martis (2007) defines “a strong and competent woman character in a dominant position.” (Jansz & Martis, 2007, p. 147). Although these dominant female characters still display exaggerated female features, their presence gives an empowering role for women gamers. Another way some scholars have depicted a common representation of women in games is the combination of sex and violence, also known as ‘eroticized aggression’ (Dill & Thill, 2007). This term refers to female characters posing with a weapon in a sexy manner. Dill and Thill (2007) have quantified that 83% of the female characters are sexualized, aggressive or both.

Studies from game scholars have exposed different factors explaining the dominance of men, starting with production (Carr, 2006; Mäyrä, 2008; Scharrer, 2004). A major part of the playable games is created by male developers targeting a male audience. For Schell (2014), the core design of the game was always from the beginning more male than female. Furthermore in her book, Carr (2006) reveals that game advertisement is also aimed towards a male audience since game magazines publish reviews and articles written by males and intended for males. These findings are supported by Dill and Thill (2007) who analysed the content of games magazines which visuals sexualize women through revealing clothes and hypersexualized poses. The type of games played by men according to Schell (2014) is mastery, competition, destruction, spatial puzzle and trial and errors. The marketing of games has emphasized these stereotypical genders’ behaviours because retailers continue to market games depending on the gender based on these assumptions (Carr, 2006).

LEARNING FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The current literature has shown a large panel of studies regarding player’s motivations, effects of games on games, violence and gender representation. Immersion and experiences of the player introduced the reader to the notion of identification by exposing the relationships between interactivity, identification, and game enjoyment. Games have shown having an influence on players: video game characters have the ability to shape players’ perceptions of gender roles. One influence has been violence and aggressiveness. A causal relationship between the exposure to video game violence and the increase of aggressive behaviour has been determined. These behaviours are emphasized by gender portrayal in games where men are the most dominant and women are objectified and sexualized.

Most of these studies have done a content analysis to expose quantitatively female’s presence. This study will contribute to filling the gap of gender in games from a qualitative perspective while compiling it with the field of the narrative in games.
Additionally, some interesting concepts connected to the problem have emerged from the literature review. The concept of game theory, identity gender and media, and reception theory are later explored in the theoretical framework.

THEORETICAL FRAME AND CONCEPTS

The framework determines the lens through which to investigate the topic and the limit of the problem.

GAME THEORY

Game theory or “ludology” study all types of games, from board games to sport (Myerson, 2013). It is a part of cultural studies and video games studies are one area of focus. This growing field gives opportunities to other fields to open up and branches out and into all social sciences. The fact that it is cross-disciplinary, gives way to examine sociology, psychology, game design, or literature and narrative (Mäyrä, 2008).

The main characteristic of digital games is its distance from the real world. Mäyrä (2008) considers the characteristics’ meaning "endogenous or produced and contained within its own structure" (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 139). When looking closer at its structure, a game is composed of four different elements articulated together (Schell, 2014). First, the mechanics of the game create the rules by which the player will comply with. The rules are considered the core of the game, implying a gameplay experience which consists of a range of sensation, requiring the entire participation of the player (Mäyrä, 2008). The gameplay experience can be perceived as feelings, thoughts, actions, and symbolic meaning from the player. The second element found is the technology, in other words, the material that makes a game possible to happen.

The present thesis focuses on analyzing the reception of two elements in a game: the aesthetic and the story. The aesthetic remains the most seen part of the game (Schell, 2014). It creates a direct relationship between the player and the game. It refers to the art style and its various tonality and shape, the aspects of the characters and explores the theme of the game. Video game characters are a common element to the youth of popular culture (Dill & Thill, 2007). They can be distinguished by their design and are associated with various functions such as the hero, the mentor, the assistant, the tutor, the final boss, the minion and the hostage (Schell, 2014). The type of characters found in digital games is specific characters connected to the story, or characters labelled under the name of “avatar” supposed to represent the player (Hefner et al., 2007). The motivation of the player to create an avatar is in the first place, to make a characters that perform himself. Often, the player chooses an avatar which represents
an ideal role and aspect to match his ideal person (Schell, 2014). Otherwise, the character is called “iconic”, meaning it possesses more comic traits and characteristics. Players maintain close to distinct relationship with their avatars: they can project themselves or feel no connection to it. The avatars, however, has the potential to strengthen the player's focus of attention (Mäyrä, 2008). Schell (2014), theorizes that a greater projection of the player can be reached by using the first-person view. With no visible avatar, the player relates even more to the character by projecting empathy in it. However, the empathy can be affected if the character follows the “Uncanny Valley” notion from Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori (Schell, 2014). Mori has observed that people empathise more with a human or something resembling a human, while a robot with a human appearance is, on the other hand repulsive. The artificial human is considered "disease" or dangerous. This phenomenon can be applied to artificial characters and, therefore, video games characters.

Finally the story or narrative is according to Schell (2014) an organized sequence of events. Hefner et al. (2007) support the importance of the narrative to create successful games. The inclusion of the story's elements participates in the entertainment of the experience. The narrative in digital games challenges narratives in traditional media with the concept of interactive fiction, or hypertext fiction (Thoss, Ensslin, & Ciccoricco, 2018). This becomes possible because gameplay and narrative follow various game rules (Ang, 2006). These rules are essential to the process of defining a narrative space with narrative rules, i.e. the semantic layer of game experience. Thoss et al. (2018) argue that it is through gameplay that players can interpret the narrative whether it is by including cinematic cut scenes or narrative elements observable to the player. Narrative and game rules coexist in a dual way (Ang, 2006). When the narrative changes, it disrupts the game's rules as much as the actions and strategy will influence the narrative. In short, “Gameplay is the actions taken by the players, whereas narratives are an account of these actions” (Ang, 2006, p. 306). A change of technology, such as a new game console, can as well bring a different narrative experience (Thoss et al., 2018).

Among the four elements, none of them carries more importance than the other (Schell, 2014). For instance, the mechanics have to be carefully chosen when telling the story, in fact, the mechanics will reinforce the story. The aesthetic and technology should work together to create a nice gameplay experience. The theme is what connects the elements together so that they interact simultaneously.

Game theory is important for this study as because they bring the concept of characters and furthermore draws the notion of players projecting themselves into the avatar. The thesis needs to elaborate on the identification with the avatar distinctively, so that it can be described
how the process of identification is a necessary motivation for the player. This notion is important since the comment reversed around the female avatar and that ident.

IDENTITY THEORY

The idea of identification with characters is highly entangled to the one of actual identity. In fact, in identity theory, identification is a process forming the identity (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Identification (also called self-categorization) is defined as follow: “The self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classification.” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224)

Cohen (2001) defines the mechanism of identification explaining that "audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside as if the event happens to them" (Cohen, 2001, p. 245). He goes further when stating that "identification is an imaginative process through which an audience member assume the identity, goals, and perspectives of a character" (Cohen, 2001, p. 261). It is measured by behavioural, cognitive and emotional concepts and encircles perceptions, attitudes and desires. Identification contributes to engaging the audience member during the reception. This way, users take a new perspective and may change their attitudes. They can even stop to be aware of their social roles and relate to the character’s role.

Identification contributes to the player’s personal development and identity (Cohen, 2001). The player sees himself close to his ideal self and imagines being the actual character (Hefner et al., 2007). Hefner et al. (2007) found out that many male players identified with masculine characters because it makes them feel courageous, dominant and brave. Male players found warriors’ roles attractive and so, they engage with the character. Identification with a media character happens when framed into a narrative. The interaction with the game provides an authentic experience, for example, being a soldier in "Battlefield II". However, it seems that interaction is not the only requirement for identifying with a role. Gender roles play a major part in the perception of the character and its acceptance. By definition, gender roles are when there is a distinction about the expectations of one individual in the behaviour, interactions and place he has in a society based on his gender (Blackstone, 2003). The stereotypes about gender and war are described by Goldstein (2006) believe that, in biological perspective, that men are programmed for war, remains stronger than women and that their higher testosterone level equals more aggressiveness. For Hefner et al. (2007) this signifies young men find masculine, dominant and violent characters more attractive. On the opposite side, women are peacemakers meant to take on caregiving roles (Goldstein, 2006). The only counterexample is
found in Greek mythology: The Amazon tribe is an all-female society of warriors known for having fought the Greeks in the Trojan War.

The roles offered in digital games today are meant to be more interesting for men than for women who cannot identify with digital characters. In addition, video games representations of male and females influence the perception of one's self. Barlett and Harris (2008) have determined the effect of inaccurate representations to find out a negative feeling toward their body, and low self-esteem in males and females. Building one's identity is also a social process (Stets & Burke, 2000). Players not only identify with characters in-game, but they also identify with the communities built around games. Mäyrä (2008) noticed that players join a group for various reason (1) they can define their identity by belonging to a group based on the same interests (2) the group provides meaning by acknowledging the commitment of the player (3) players situate themselves by comparing differences and similarities. Groups are then, categorized by their commitment: “hardcore gamer” or “casual gamer”.

GENDER AND MEDIA

In the identity theory, it was concluded that male gamers identifying with male characters depicted courageous, important and powerful roles. The identification to appealing characters regarding gender and their portrayal, supports the findings of gender studies with the general idea that men are portrayed strong while women are cast as sensitive. Also, and as mentioned in the introduction, the topic of gender within media has been treated in numerous ways. Video games are seen by Grodal (2013) as a distinctive medium able to link perception, cognition and emotions. With that in mind, the topic of gender and media needs to be developed as one notion.

Sex and gender are two concepts related to each other. Nonetheless, they are different (Acker, 1992). Sexuality is given at birth and adds physical attributes according to sex. Gender is the social construction of identity. For Judith Butler (1990), there is a correlation between sex and gender, but gender is not a result of sex. According to feminist theorists, women’s identity is not only related to inherited sex. The French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (1953) claimed that ‘(o)ne is not born a woman but rather becomes one. No biological, physical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine’ (De Beauvoir, 1953, p. n.s.).

A previous study (Prentice & Carranza, 2002) have shown the psychological characteristics that define men and women. When men tend to be logical and independent, women are more
emotional and sensitive. The accuracy of this characterization is questionable since women have the capacity to lead as much as men can cry (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). As a matter of fact, the construction of traditional masculinity is built upon what is defined as “not masculine”, for instance being insensitive.

The perception of a typical feminine or masculine profile is strongly accentuated in media which usually disseminate one representation only of gender (Purvis, 2009). Media emphasize women’s bodies more than their aptitudes. Therefore, women are identified by their physical appearance (Renard, 2016). The inaccuracy in representing women in mass media has a strong impact on their identities. On the other hand, the representation of men in media is not based on their appearances but rather power and force.

Gender representation in video games is a topic of research within game studies (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Dietz, 1998; Dill & Thill, 2007; Jansz & Martis, 2007). Gender in games reflects upon the portrayal of women in-game and discusses roles, stereotypes but also the portrayal of men and the effects of these portrayals on attitudes towards gender.

Gender lifts the question of identity because as stated in Mercer (1996): Sexuality is part of the identity of a person. Identity is also built thanks to media representation. Hence, representations of gender, in a media like video games, impacts directly the identity of the player with the process of identification to the character.

**VIDEO GAMES AS DISCOURSE**

Identity and discourse align on the notion of a social process. A discourse is a language that is interpreted in a context of use (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The definition of language from Hodge and Kress (1993) is that language is a form of social practice where people share meaning with each other. The creation of identity is a social process and translates in game studies in the creation and identification to communities. The discourse is defined in the theoretical framework.

As one of the founders of CDA Fairclough (1995) considers power transmission through discourse. It is indeed through language that ideas are shared. Critical language is the mechanism of looking for linguistic or visual elements to highlight links between language, power, and ideology, but the links can be more or less obvious. Discourse is highly related to the idea of power: Language is not only a way of communicating but is often motivated by social construction and domination (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 24).
Video games enter in discourse because it is a communication form where players create and communicate with multimodal worlds (Gee, 2014). Furthermore, when games stand in a position of gender progressivity, they make a social statement and sends a political message. Paul (2012) observes that the analysis of discourse in games focuses on examining elements such as the words within and surrounding video games, the design of games and society, and the practice of play in games. Indeed, the texts and structures surrounding gaming have an important effect on the constitution of the discourse of gaming because they participate in a process of meaning creation and the construction of identification. For instance, the socializing process has been enhanced with the growth of the internet: social platforms have created a space of communication between gamers and developers.

Discourse analysis permits to describe the ways in which gender identities are constructed through language (Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002). Language happens to continuously construct masculinity and feminine identities. West and Zimmerman (1987) and Fishman (1983) supports the idea of the language influenced by male dominance creating a ‘dominance approach’. To illustrate the approach in visual culture, feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey (1989) defines "The Male Gaze" to explain women's representations in film. It refers to the way viewers engage with visual representations drawn upon psychoanalytic theory. The "Male Gaze" suggests that in the hierarchy dominated by males, women exist to please the look of men.

In Fairclough, Wodak, and Van Dijk (1997) vision of discourse, and having in mind the dominance approach, a game is seen as a discourse conveying ideologies like the construction of masculine identities through a retrograde vision of women.

**RECEPTION THEORY**

As previously discussed in connection to Hayden White (see above, p. 5), the reception theory helps to understand the player's perception of History in the game. Furthermore, and as pointed out in game studies, the story is important to the game because it supports a better identification to the character. This is why the reception theory is addressed.

The narration is important to interpret accurately the text i.e. the game. Game theory has demonstrated that the narration is one main element of a game that matter to players as well as the characters connected to it. However, the narrative theory in games is missing in the mentioned studies. In order to explain the conflicted reception of the feminine element in the game Battlefield V, the reception theory from German philosopher Hans Robert Jauss will frame the research.
The Reception Theory is “interested in trying to understand the actual process of reading itself” (Buchanan, 2018). The theory appears in the essay “The Change in the Paradigm of Literary Scholarship” written by Jauss in 1969. With the purpose of bringing the gap between History and aesthetic approach to literature, it states that the interpretation of a text is essential to the reader (Jauss, 1982). For Jauss (1982), it becomes more important to scrutinize how existing texts are read and responded to. Therefore, the literature appears from a reader’s perspective, a text cannot exist if it is not read. Furthermore, Jauss (1982) defines the concept of “Horizons of expectations” to designate the expectations carried by the reader when interpreting the text of an author. The place of History is essential to the horizons of expectation because it is a reference for the reader.

The reception of a text is influenced by concepts connected to gender in media and gender roles. There is a general presumption that women were not mobilized in the front lines of war (Goldstein, 2006). Therefore, a text emphasizing women’s participation on the battlefield has high chances on being rejected. Some games are based on a real frame, looking for a realistic representation called ‘mimesis’ rather than an exact representation because digital narratives involve impossible scenarios to happen (Thoss et al., 2018). If the game frames an imaginary story, the player conventionalizes that these impossible scenarios, which take roots in fantasy or adventure oriented games can exist. This also happens with the impossible spatiality displayed in a game with floating platforms and teleportation. Hence, when the boundaries of the game are defined, the player allows them to exist. The thematic needs to fit the gameplay, and the surreal spatiality to follow generic games conventions. However, when the game violates the narratives conventions as with Battlefield V, the player refuses the scenario. The unnatural narration is a mix of violation of narrative rules and mimetic principles. An unnatural approach results in an invalid reception of narration and literary experience.

**THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SELECTED THEORIES AND APPROACHES**

Game theory has demonstrated characters to be important to the player because of the notion of identification, which a concept found in identity theory. However, this identification is constrained by factors such as gender. In fact, gender is part of identity. The inaccurate representation of gender in media affects the perception of one’s self, in turn, the identity of the player. Identity is a social process that is connected to language. The discourse found in the comment section focuses on the avatar, which as seen, is a factor in forming the identity. The notion of discourse becomes necessary to the analysis. Finally, the player’s perception of History in combination to the story has demonstrated how this is important for players when accepting characters, staying in line with identity theory.
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although the notion of representation of gender in games has been a topic of interest and study in academia, it has mostly shown the misrepresentation of women and the negative impact on both men and women. The study will focus on highlighting elements from the Battlefield V controversy and its consequences by articulating the theory about it. Such a conceptualization contains the potential for encouraging innovative practices and accompany them better.

Those who work in the game industry will find the study useful because it provides information that enables them to implement successful feminine elements in future games.

This project contributes to game research while explaining the changes to be made inside games in order for new elements, like featuring women, to be accepted. In addition, the research draws important results to elaborate on the discussion of feminism and games.

METHOD AND MATERIAL

This chapter details the data and the procedure of collection and analysis of data for the study. The research method that has been chosen for this master thesis is a qualitative one because this study intends to understand a specific phenomenon. Qualitative research seeks to investigate social and cultural phenomena as well as the people in their social and cultural environment (Myers, 1999). According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research examines social problems, here the ‘inaccurate’ representation of a main female character in the general opinion.

DATA

The data for this study is meant to be the evident components to answer the research questions (Kozinets, 2015). In order to depict the reactions from the players, the sample is composed of comments and interactions posted about the video trailer of the video game Battlefield V.

The game, which belongs to the Battlefield series, is a First Person Shooter (FPS) where soldiers fight during World War II. The game has been developed by the Swedish game studio EA DICE and released the game on November 15th 2018 (EADICE, 2018). It contains two different modes to play: a solo and multiplayer mode, in which the latter including a Battle Royal mode since March 25th 2019. The commercial called “Battlefield V Official Reveal Trailer” was screened on May 23rd 2018 and received a severe backlash from the viewers.

The comments took place on various channels. It appears that most of the commentators reacted directly on the platform where the official reveal trailer was released: on the Battlefield YouTube channel. A part of the community has also expressed opinions on Twitter under the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield. Finally, Facebook and the subreddit of the game have gathered discussion around the female character. This research considers a deep qualitative analysis, hence, one channel of communication will permit to focus on the necessary amount of data. According to Kozinets (2015), the data must be representative of a phenomenon. The YouTube channel provides accessible comments representing the reactions of the players.

YouTube is a social digital platform that allows video sharing (Burgess & Green, 2018). Hence, its users can create content by uploading videos, consume videos by viewing and organizing them into playlists, and finally engage with the content. The viewers rate, write in the comment section under the video, share with a link or other social media. The participatory platform is accessible to private users and companies alike. The data collected on YouTube are in their very own nature an open discussion between the viewers and the creators or curators of the content.

DATA COLLECTION

PROCEDURE

Nethnography is the understanding of the virtual world, its online communication, interactions and exchanges (Kozinets, 2015). Nethnography deals with words, drawing, pictures and sounds and digital artefacts. It aims to ‘obtain a cultural understanding of human experience from online social interactions’ (Kozinets, 2015, p. 18). The choice of nethnography as a scientific method was reflected upon the consumer’s perspective of the phenomenon. The method develops an idea about the collection of data online which is relevant for the research. The data is only accessible to a device which is connected to the internet. Also, the data collection procedure aims to capture online content while understanding the people represented in the interactions within a community and taking the context into consideration. Although the researcher simply observes people in ways that avoid social interaction, collecting material online involves conducting the research ethically. The nethnography and its ethical protocols involve the preoccupation of investing public or private online spaces, the consent of the authors to use the data or the age matter online. The ongoing debate about the internet as a public space stresses that the research has to keep the anonymity of the authors. This is order to protect their identities which includes the age of the person or persons.
The reactions have been observed online, making social networks the main space of expression. Coleman (2010) delimits three intended purposes to orientate the research to the ethnography of digital media. (1) The cultural politics concerning topics like identity, ethnicity or race, (2) the vernacular culture that examines phenomenon; genre and groups for example technology toxic after effect (Maxwell & Miller, 2008) and (3) the prosaic category seeking for the reflection of social practices and daily integration of media. The present study tackles the category of vernacular culture by articulating an online phenomenon.

The collection process is content analysis which focuses on the analysing online content on social media (Kozinets, 2015). Content analysis investigates online communication and interaction on social platforms to find out the overall patterns of communication and meaning. To gather the data, the researcher collect from the chosen channel a sample of data to be analysed with the qualitative CDA method.

**MATERIAL**

The comments were retrieved from the comment section of the commercial. The total number of comments under the video was 232,169 at the time of data gathering. Because the analysis is qualitative, the comments need to be relevant to compose the sample. Only the relevant contributions concerning the main character, her appearance or role were picked to scope the research. When selecting the threads, the researcher has filtered the top comments, which are the comments gathering the most engagement (likes and comments). The interactivity between participants based on the flow of communication helped the selection. A pattern had emerged from this point: most users speak about the company, the game or the historical inaccuracy. Among the 20 most popular comments, 4 comments talked about the main character or women on the battlefield of war. In order to analyze the full interaction with other users, the whole thread of comments, following the top comments, was also retrieved. In total, 67 comments sharing the various visions of the female woman character compose the sample. The comments are kept in the form of screenshots so that it keeps the YouTube layout, for accuracy and authenticity, and facilitates the analysis.

All the comments sampled are not treated. The comments are chosen upon their relevance to the researcher. Some comments are off topic and therefore automatically discarded. Other comments contribute to a general understanding of the pattern of communication but don't need analysis in depth, for instance, the quick reaction to give credit to the author. In order to select the final sample, chosen criteria were applied. The first criteria is that the comments should be data-rich and offer detail or descriptively rich data. Secondly, the comment should relate directly to the woman in the commercial or be a reaction to a comment concerning her. As a final criteria, the heterogeneity in the type of comments was prioritised, so the discourse
is composed of different ways to interact and brings a productive analysis. The final sample contains a total of 26 comments which include a discourse rewarding around the female main character (see Appendix 1).

Nethnography involves ethical concerns and anonymity (Kozinets, 2015). In the case of this study, the researcher had to consider the ethical principles that apply to the online public space. The researcher needs to protect the identity of the authors of the comments, by not exposing their name or nickname, age, origin and any information that could violate the privacy of the authors. Thus, the researcher does not display the screenshots to protect anonymity and had changed the names and avatars of the users when presenting the results. For the readers with a study purpose that want to access the sample, please contact the researcher of this study.

VALIDITY

Validity is related to the value of the research (Seale, 2004). It is needed to validate the research in order to reproduce it.

Internal validity implicates the design of the research including methods and tools to show the present conclusions and attempts to answer the aim of the study. The study has been outlined based on a literature review. Therefore, the object of the study was chosen because of the lack of qualitative studies in this body of literature. The game has been discussed and debated enough to initiate an online discourse surrounding the game rich in comments and insights to create a relevant sample that would produce empirical results.

External validity brings the question of the generalisation of the study beyond the specific research context (Bryman, 2016). The Battlefield V controversy is the study of one isolated phenomenon in particular, however, the question of historical reception is likely to happen in other video games from the same subgenre which take inspiration from History.

RELIABILITY

Reliability concerns the repeatability of a study. This part focuses on the factors that have played a role in producing reliability. This study is built upon feminist assumptions which influence in a qualitative study the interpretation of the results. Due to the nature of the nethnography method, the data remains dependent on the internet connection. An internet connection was necessary and all troubles due to location or a weak Wi-Fi connection could, therefore, be a problem to access the data.
THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative method that aims to reveal possible underlying meanings and ideologies while taking the context into consideration (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The method is applied to texts to find out the connection between language, power and ideology. When visuals are considered, the method is described as Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). It is, then, not only focused on linguistic but also on the visual aspects that collaborate in creating meaning. The meaning in CDA centers on the concept of ideology and power. Machin and Mayr (2012) observe that “language is not simply a vehicle of communication, or for persuasion, but a means of social construction and domination” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 24). It is through language that society share ideas and concepts. The sample consists of online reactions making the use of the method possible. This method permits examination in depth of the comment in order to generate patterns of communication.

The aspects of the discourse the researcher focuses on are the language elements from the comments, therefore, a linguistic analysis is performed. The researcher centre their attention on the kind of words and terms found in the text and their significances. The analysis seeks for the kind of 'lexical field' which is created in a discourse. A lexical field is a set of words connected to the same theme. The intention of this process is to reveal the author’s perspective on the situation. The comments denote one facet of the author’s subjectivity, and the discourse analysis unveils the connotation i.e. the hidden meaning behind the text. In practice, the linguistic analysis means, according to Machin and Mayr (2012), to have a look at the vocabulary in a text. The different lexical, words chosen or not mentioned reveal one’s underlying beliefs concerning identities, values and ideologies.

Moreover, as seen in the theoretical framework, the notion of discourse, gender and identity are connected together. CDA possesses semiotic tools to scrutinize the mode of communication the author decides on to represent individuals (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The choices of language are never neutral to describe a person, but they rather emphasize the aspects of identity. These choices of language apply to depict different viewpoints of identity. The tools involved in this research are chosen based on their ability to name and represent individuals through the specific language. Taking these aspects into accounts, the researcher decided on semiotics tools relevant for this analysis:
**Word Connotation:** is the association a word or visual element can bring, referring to a basic choice of word to communicate something. The researcher analyses the text and focuses on the implicit meaning of the words (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 32). Since word connotation aims to underline the motivations from the author by analyzing the choice of word, the researcher has selected the tool to give productive results about the perspective of the author.

**Lexical choices and genre of communication:** This tool investigates the different genres of communication through a set of conventions and styles and lexical choices (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 42). The lexical choice is the decision the author made when deciding on a specific word to represent a precise idea. Machin and Mayr (2012) explain that for Fairclough, the lexical choice indicates the level of authority (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 42). The genre of communication can be formal or informal and reveal the purpose of the author. This purpose can be authority or influence. The use of this tool on the online discourse of Battlefield V brings insight into the purpose of communicating a point of view.

**Objectivation:** The objectivation represents participants through a feature, often reducing them to this feature (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 82). The feature can be a physical appearance, like the femininity of a character in a game. Certain moral issues can be connoted by what is reasonable behaviour for a woman rather than for a man (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The tools are important to reveal the beliefs about gender roles in the Battlefield community. Objectivation was chosen based on the ideology the text expresses about characters in this particular text.

**Pronouns vs nouns:** the “Us” and “Them” division: The purpose of the “Us” and “Them” division is to unite people that share similar ideas to create a collective ‘other’ (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 84). For instance, creating a distinction between men as being powerful, and therefore excluding women as not part of this group. The first comments have shown a distinctive schism between the players, making this tool relevant for the study.

**Presupposition:** The presupposition refers to a meaning supposedly, in the mind of the person making the presupposition, is shared by everyone due to the context. Its use is deeply ideological (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 153). These elements of language are taken for granted and sound very logical when they are in fact contestable. The researcher has considered this tool to extract data because the presupposition is built upon ideologies such as the definition of the specific role of men and women in society based on their biological attributes.
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this part, the findings from the analysis of the sample of 26 comments are exposed and interpreted. The results have been categorized, based on the research elements from the research question as well as the literature review and the theoretical framework. The literature review has shown that the representation of women in media are often founded on appearance and gender roles (Renard, 2016). Also, the theoretical framework has underlined that gender in games considers the depiction of women in-game and discusses roles, stereotypes but also the portrayal of men (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Dietz, 1998; Dill & Thill, 2007; Jansz & Martis, 2007). On the top of it, the number of women in games as a main or secondary character remained low (Dietz, 1998; Miller & Summers, 2007). Lastly, the analysis has generated insights about the community that debated about the figure of the woman in the trailer. Therefore, the categories are stated as follow: the presence of the female character, the role of women, the aesthetic of the character, the construction of a community and finally the opposition between developers and players.

PRESENCE OF FEMALE SOLDIERS

The category elaborates on the fact that a woman is being present on the battlefield as a soldier. The literature review has shown that in games, women characters are mostly endorsing a supportive role. In Battlefield V, the main character is a woman with an unconventional role. The presence of this woman leading the military troop has been the first triggering elements of this controversy, hence the comments call out to the presence of the female main character from the commercial in the comments. The results are furthermore, reflected on the reception theory and the ideologies related to the perception of war.

First, the authors of the comments express that women’s presence on the battlefront in inexistent. The comment “[...] promised accuracy, this is not accurate, at all” (18) refers to the asynchrony of having women on a battlefield with a presupposition that the game is mirroring reality. The lexical analysis reveals a predominance of words such as “Accuracy”, “not accurate” and “at all” stressing upon the fact of the game that is not reflecting reality. Another author wrote that “1. Women did not fight on the front line [...]” (10). The listing of the contested elements creates a formal genre of communication gives to the readers the information one by one by structuring the text. The formal discourse seems to convey knowledge and suggests authority over the Battlefield community. If, for the author, there is a possibility that women fought, it was not on the frontlines. The persuasion is emphasized with the presupposition that
the readers have historical knowledge when the author writes "back then" referring to World War II.

The knowledge about History is following the belief on gender and war discussed previously. It is presumed by a majority that women were not mobilised at the front line. The results verify the theory that a text which affirms women’s participation in the war on the frontline would be rejected, confirming Jauss (1969) approach of History and literature: a text cannot exist if it is not interpreted. In the case of Battlefield, the text has been interpreted as being "inaccurate" because of the stereotypes about gender-related to war.

Another stereotype is connected to the nationality of the women who fought. Some authors propose that only Russian women have fought. The term "Soviet women" is for instance explicitly found in comment 11. The comment from the previous section also continues with:

> "2. If you want women in your WW2 game, then make them Russian and snipping German from rooftops or put them in the French resistance! Don't put them in the D-landings or in the pacific fighting the Japanese cause that NEVER HAPPENED!!". (10)

The chance that women from another nationality fought is presupposed to be impossible. Here, the comment uses the informal genre of communication to intensify the power of his text and have influence over the community. The author strongly states with capital letters and double punctuation that British women soldiers are admitted non existent. They suggests a possible solution by giving out the knowledge about the situation during World War II “make them Russian” because they are known as the “Only” females soldiers who fought, or “in the French resistance”, an important group consisting of female leaders such as Marie-Madeleine Fourcade and Lucie Aubrac. The choice of words solidifies the discourse and as a result, the author seems confident and trustful. The next comment answers to an author’s comment who wears the name of a famous Russian leader, confirming the nationality presupposition: "Hey since your @FamousRussianLeader you should know about female soldiers" (4). The objectivation through the term "female soldier" highlight the battle role of Soviet women. The last assumption happens to be about a possible presence of women soldiers but at minima. "I really don’t really care if I see one or two girls fighting on frontlines that aren’t russian or german snipers, but keep it at minimum. […]" (14). The unedited nature of the text and the condescending way of talking about women individuals show the uninvolved role of the author in order to assert a knowledge. Interestingly, the comments about nationality are the ones conveying power as well. This can be explained by the fact that language is in some cases, motivated by domination (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

One of the stereotypes from war seems to be the nationality of the women who fought. In fact, Alexievich (2017) has reported in her book the testimonies of Soviet women soldiers who for
some, were known for being snipers. Because of this assumption, many women were not recognized for the job they did. The results are reinforcing Alexievitch’s (2017) believes of men’s notions of war, and how they silence women.

**ROLE**

To accentuate the impossibility of women being soldiers, some comments have intensified traditional aspects given to gender. As previously mentioned in the literature review, video games characters shape the player's perception. With an unconventional "woman's role" the main character of Battlefield V has been the subject of critique concerning her "womanness".

One of the findings emphasized traditional features of women. First, the fact that women have periods is found in "Can't wait to see female medics carry tampons just in case any other women have period blood in the next update." (1) The reference to the hormonal cycle of a woman is here a presupposition assuming that other people of the community finds it disturbing. By highlighting a natural biological fact, the author takes for granted that it is a woman's concern only, and furthermore, it is disgusting for men. The connotated lexical field of periods is present. In the discourse, the term "period blood" is present to stress the burden it has for both women and men. To reinforce the presupposition, the term “tampon”, a more discrete object to absorb menstrual blood during intense activities, carries a shameful connotation. The connotative choice of words intensifies the part perceived as disgusting to the author and their comment. Also, mentioning terms that refer to the biology of women creates a power of pretended knowledge so that the community can rely on the author. It also keeps out women from entering the conversation because of the shame they could feel. It is noticeable that there is, according to the author, a clear difference between men and women. It is expressed thought terms such as “any other women”, “period blood”. The portrayal of women in media and more specifically video games, has given the image of an ideal woman who is sexualized and objectified. These representations are harmful to women because as seen in the previous studies (Beck et al., 2012), there is a link between sexual objectification of women and the violence against them which makes it normal to persecute them. Players feel the freedom to mention periods in order to shame women because it has a negative connotation in society.

Another feature is found in the conventional role a woman should fulfil according to a traditional masculine point of view. The individuality and sexual independence of the woman is challenged in the discourse with several comments. With the use of objectivation, comment 3 calls the woman his “girlfriend” giving her a submissive status. The term girlfriend refers to the role expected from a woman. Women should be engaged in an affective relationship, most
of the time to become mothers. The “Us” versus “Them” division is expressed by the author in the same comment through the order “leave” given to the readers in order to protect “his girlfriend” from the online critics. He plays the role traditionally given to men and gives her a woman role. This example illustrates the gender socialization process where children learn what is expected of men and women. The depiction of women in video games has shaped the perception players has of society, and that women are to be objectified (Miller & Summers, 2007).

The previous comment contained the term "female medics" (1) a term which refers to the help assistance during the war. Stressing on the gender permits to the author to emphasize that a woman should stay in her conventionally designated role. The expectation is, in fact, literal because the author "can't wait", reducing the women to helping. This argument is found in another thread with the comment “Soviet medic would be correct still” (12) because often the healing roles are taken by women, thus the author gives a stereotyped role to these women. The author assumes through "still" that women are only healers. This comment is answered by the comment “[...] they were not in frontlines you commie, they were behind lines in camps” (13). The phrasing “not in frontlines” combined with “behind lines in camps” aims to lecture the person he answers to and assess with an informal genre of communication that it is truly impossible women fought. Video games have, for a long time, introduced female characters whose only role was to be in distress or in assisting roles (Dietz, 1998).

In the examined comments, the objectivation of women gives men power over women: when men fight, women heal. Additionally, one author wrote that “There will be more genders than vehicles and weapons” (15). A weapon is according to gender ideology about war (see Goldstein, 2006), an object traditionally used by men. The same for "vehicles" that is terminology associated with masculine and not accessible to women. This emphasizes that a distinction in gender is made to be a warrior. Previous researchers have demonstrated the importance of an avatar that matches an ideal role to the player. It is the process of identification that gives the player the identity, goals and perspectives of a character. Because many male players identify with male roles with male traits such as masculine dominant soldiers, the identification to a female character appears impossible. Indeed, the face of a female character implies that her given role is gendered. In war, this means women can take on doctor’s role like a medic, which is not the role a player is seeking for in Battlefield V.

The findings correlate with the gender theory in media, where traditional gender roles are emphasized and believed to be accurate. The general idea of women, and that they are unable to fight, can be traced to the modern understanding of History in our society, which does not mention women soldiers. The literature review has suggested media brutalised women (Beck et al., 2012) while focusing on the objectification of women (Dietz, 1998; Downs & Smith, 2010;
Ivory, 2006). The link between sexual objectification and humiliation of women confirm the normality of aggressing women because of body appearance and their expected functions. The identification with a character is a considerable factor for immersion in gaming. Giving the main role to a female character and the traits usually attributed to male roles, seems to confuse the players, resulting in that they cannot identify themselves with the avatar.

**AESTHETIC OF THE CHARACTER**

One major criticism towards women is as seen in the literature review their physical appearance. This category of the comment’s analysis contains good examples of gender representation and portrayal of video game characters while discussing the player’s perception of History and aesthetic.

Comment 5 contains a direct reference to the aesthetic of the characters. "A face painted woman with a prosthetic arm, a black guy with a katana, and a half-naked Viking looking guy….yes this is definitely reminds me of ww2". The characters are all attacked on their appearance and what they wear and the author's words depict the precise feature he is criticising. The overlexicalisation of terms is used to give “facts and information” to first mock the inclusion of such elements. In order to centre the attention of the readers, the author strongly exaggerates the terms. Hence, the katana is a Japanese weapon used during the samurai era. It is denounced because it looks anachronistic with the actual representation. The "Viking looking guy" is also meant to underline the anachronism as Vikings are not from this region or period of time. The connoted terms are references to different eras while pointing out the type of weapon, ethnicity, or race. They act as a patchwork of terms that bears no correlation. Hence the author shows the randomness of the representation of warriors in the Battlefield game and then share his final point of view through informal genre to draw attention upon the inaccuracy. It is assumed that warriors are in fact white men with combat gear, rifle, and dirt on their face. This stereotyped representation is connected to the idea that male and women are represented in a certain way in media. Women are judged on their appearance and males on their physical prowess. The autonomy of Historical understanding through cultural objects have created this image of soldiers that is admitted to be the only truth.
Now, when focusing on the female character, the comment states that the woman wears a prosthetic arm, which has also been criticised in other comments. A prosthetic arm is a piece of medical assistance, but it is assumed attached to modern medicine as part of the modern world. The word connotation choice is for example "robotic arm" as found in comment 10. Comment 3 uses the informal genre of communication by the use of “plz” (please) to mentions the one healthy arm she still possesses. “Leave my one arm girlfriend alone plz” (3). Another way of discussing the arm was for some to compare that to a handicap: “If DICE is not gonna add any biracial wheelchair Allied soldiers, then I will be personally offended” (15) objectivates the woman by comparing her to a disabled person with the term "biracial wheelchair". This can be expressed in a more explicit way with the adjective “handicapped” like in comment 25 “[…] even though more bears fought in the war than handicapped females.”. Going back to the “uncanny valley” concept from Masahiro Mori (Schell, 2014), the empathy is inexistent for the player that repulses this artificial appearance and refuses the identification.
In addition, the painting upon the face of the character seems to disturb the author. This bad representation is addressed with choosing “face painting” in a sentence with a negative connotation. In Occident, the Hollywood appropriation of Sioux image in Western movies has associated war painting to Native Americans warriors that fight aggressively (Bataille, 2001). With the objectivation of the characters associated with the adjective in front of them, female character is reduced to physical characteristics. The female character of Battlefield V is criticised on her appearance, confirming the previous findings of gender representations in media. It also seems that appearance is considered important for the reception when representing History. The players have an “autonomy of Historical understanding” impacted by visual culture (see Mirzoeff, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the makeup and prosthetic arm supposedly not part of the image of World War II contribute to the rejection of the female character. The acceptance of a character is hence intertwined to the stereotypical visual representation of History.

COMMUNITY

The following category revolves around the construction of a community through the discourse of Battlefield V. As pointed out in the theoretical framework, the default gender in games is male. This part details that a community mostly composed of men built its masculinity through denying femininity.

The first thing to notice is the support players give to other players as seen for example in “Yeah me too. I can’t wait!!” (2) to answer a negative comment towards women. The informal genre of communication happens through the lexical choice “Can’t wait” which responds to the previous comment by mimesis to feel closer to the author. Furthermore, the casual discourse through words like “Yeah” suggests a dialogue between equals. The double ‘!!’ communicates his excitement about this affirmation. The content of the answer and the informal style of writing permits to blend in the group of unhappy gamers while agreeing with the perspective of the previous author. These type of comments create a collective that supports the statements against the game.

Another example is the comment 15 from Ezionela who received a lot of support being directly tagged in the thread. The extensive engagement from the readers generated short informal sentences often with an internet lexical field:“@Ezionela LMAO” (20) (LMAO meaning Laughing My Ass Off), or “@Ezionela, made my day xD” (21). The use of internet slang is for the authors one way to be part of the internet community. The sarcasm, which is humor frequently used online, is also perceptible through the genre of communication. A very low key
tonality, assumptions, and irony can be seen in comment 5 "[…] Yes it definitely reminds me of wwww", misspelling found in “personally offended” (15). On the opposite side, the few positive comments (7, 16) are dismissed or hardly criticized. The answer to comment 7 “@RodriguezConnie, didn’t EA say that “this is the most historical accurate game ever” and “forget everything you learned in history class” or something?” is, through the genre of communication, a warning sign to Rodriguez Connie to stay part of the group. Through the discourse, whether it is negative comments or strong attacks on positive ones, a negative stand is over and over reproduced. The construction of a community is made through constant support of players that use the same internet language and answer each other comments.

Another important finding is the building of a powerful figure of men that do not identify with women or other genders. This develops a form of masculinity within the community. The comments showed a strong interest in the number of genders. The comment “[…] 2) There are TWO genders; no more, no less.” (24), and “2) There are THREE genders, not less.” (25) argue about the number of genders. The genre of communication is formal except for the quantities that are written in capital letters to draw attention to this specific information. Indeed, the first comment excludes all potential other genders than women and men, and the second one seems to include the transgender. The “Us” and “them” division shows that the authors of comment 24 denigrate the genders. Some comments even decided on stressing this distinction by insulting what is not male. “[…] Only 2. Abnormalities is not a new gender, it’s a deformation.”(26) expresses through connotation that transgender is abnormal, and even deformed.

Furthermore, the community of players is criticising openly defenders of diversity defenders. The comment “[…] if they don’t add a tractor i will be offended” (19) chooses to compare gender with a vehicle. Similar to the previous example, gender is compared to a vehicle to appear foolish. The objects are interpreted here as an “Us” and “Them” division because they create a distinction between “us”, male, and “them”, the rest. Females and objects. In addition, the term “offended” is used with sarcasm to mock the people that are offended when their category is not represented. In presupposition, it is assumed that the readers recognize the term attributed to feminists. On the same model, the comment “[…] i can’t wait for the “safe space” DLC” (23) employs the term “Safe Space” used by minorities, and especially feminists, to describe a place where minorities can be themselves.

The findings above correlate with the theory that masculinity is built through what is not feminine. The discussion around what is gender and what is not is an identification process for the authors. Male players identified stronger with male characters and so the addition of a new gender in the game impacts the players that evolve in a culture where communities are divided
distinctly by type of players and genders. The construction of a community over the values of masculinity happens to be through gender criticism. The CDA revealed that criticism is given to people of other genders other than male or those people who support gender diversity in the authors’ discourse. The discourse of video games, here the words surrounding Battlefield V, is motivated by social constructions and participates to the building of identification. The players’ engagement permits support from players with a comparable mindset. Comments are answered and, mimed, in order to create a dynamic atmosphere between the authors.

**DEVELOPERS VS PLAYERS**

The analysis of the comments shows a strong focus on persecuting the developers for the game they have conceived. The community address their complaints and critique about the game content directly to EA in their discourse.

This disagreement is expressed quoting the developer as seen in "But don’t forget, if you don’t like it, you are “uneducated”." (6). The word “uneducated” is perceived negative because it is tainted with disdain. Often these comments are backed up by the community who gives thumbs up to show support of the author. Hence comment 6 got 171 thumbs up and comment 8 had 45.

As similar to the previous examples, the authors establish an “us” versus “them” division by making use of written choices, creating more discourse. Through structural opposition, comment 8 “didn’t EA say that “this is the most historical accurate game ever” and “forget everything you learned in history class” or something?” divide EA DICE and the players.

Many comments expose their knowledge with an informal genre of communication expressed with bullet points to have authority upon the readers. "1) Learn to recognize sarcasm [...]" It’s a process used regularly in the comment section. An aspect to be aware of, when reading the comments, is the frequent use of sarcasm, which is explored through the genre of communication. The discourse online becomes sarcastic when it uses punctuation marks, stylized fonts such as italic, or has an absence of nonverbal cues (Filik et al., 2016). In the previous example, it is seen through the quotation marks.

A similar discourse choice is a long explanation because it is assumed thoughtful and consistent. In the given examples, the authors are threatening the developers.

“vote with your wallet and don’t pre-order games this will make sure they do not sell broken games as they have in the past cuz once you give them the money they won’t have any incentive to fix the f*** for years just like Battlefield 4”
The discourse vote with your wallet means to choose what is best for you financially, and in that context means to boycott the sales by not buying the game. Also the use of negative motives such as “don’t pre-order” or “quit” show the author’s determination to not have anything to do with the game without even playing it. The term "this will make sure” acts as an assurance in the future that people could possibly feel safe hearing. This mentality clearly marks a division between players and the game studio. In this case, the explanation in the shape of a long sentence can be understood as showing commitment from the players, adhering to the group theory of Mäyrä (2008) about gamers.

Among the critique over the presence of women in Battlefield V, there are complaints directly aimed towards developers or the publisher. Based on the findings, reflecting on the analytical framework, it seems that the players are, through the comment section, defining their identities within a group. It needs to be outlined that the “Us” and “Them” division was frequently applied to confirm the belonging of the authors within the established community. The "hardcore" players constitute a group deeply attached to the values of the Battlefield franchise and feel the need to manifest their non-approval of the game after visualizing it. When opposing the developers, the players share their interests with the community. By pointing out an impossible fact, some players identify with the parts of the community that seem to have knowledge in History, and so by extension, what is good for the game.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion aims to provide the answer to the research question, and the implications that stem from the results. This part engages a discussion of the results and construe a proposal for applying the results. The conclusion also exposes the limitations to bring out suggestions for further studies.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed that the perception of women from a role, presence and aesthetic perspective in a virtual space is influenced by gender roles and the reception of history. The knowledge about History is following the perspectives on gender and war discussed previously. It is presumed by a majority that women were not mobilised in the front line. The general idea of women being unable to fight can be traced back into the modern understanding of History in our society, which does not mention women soldiers. However, one of the stereotypes enounced concerning women soldiers seemed to be their Russian nationality. The results are reinforcing Alexievitch’s (2017) believes of men’s notions of war who silence women.
Furthermore, the findings correlate with the gender theory in media, where traditional gender roles are emphasized and believed accurate. For example, the fact that women are healers, assisting in giving their help. Also, the online discourse of Battlefield V has challenged the individuality and sexual independence of women through critique that objectified the woman. The link between sexual objectification and humiliation of women confirms the normality of aggressing women because of their appearance and their presumed functions.

One important result was found in the identification process of the character which is a considerable factor for immersion in gaming, as part of the narrative. Giving a female character the main role, with all the attributes of a male character, seems to confuse the players resulting that they cannot identify themselves with the avatar. In addition, the aesthetic i.e. the physical appearance contributes to identification with a character and confirm the precedent studies about male players identifying with male players.

As previously mentioned, the autonomy of Historical understanding is connected to visual culture. The “autonomy of Historical understanding” through cultural objects such as popular movies and comics have created a stereotyped image of soldiers that is perceived as real and accurate. As a result, many nonconformist aesthetic characteristics in the female character have contributed to the rejection of this female figure. The players have repulsed the war paint, judging to be too unconventional, and attacked the prosthetic arm by comparing it to a robotic asset. Therefore, it can be argued that the makeup and prosthetic arm supposedly not part of World War II contribute to denying the female character. The acceptance of a character is hence intertwined to the stereotypical visual representation of History.

The findings above correspond with the theory that masculinity is built through what is not feminine. A community is formed around the online discourse and participate in the building of players’ identity through the social process. The construction of a community over the values of masculinity happens to be through criticism of gender. Hereby, the authors of the comments emphasize gender differences by limiting the number of genders and making distinction specifically between men and women. Additionally, the objections addressed to the developers is reinforcing the social identity process when players who are emotionally attached to the game share their thoughts about this impossible female character.

**INTERPRETATION**

The interpretation of the results matters to contributing to a further application of the result in the field of game studies together with feminist studies. The interpretation results in a list of theoretical propositions to be tested in the future. The findings are suggesting that some elements in the game need to be worked out in order to engage the player in the game without
breaking immersion. The elements should, however, embody the more inclusive vision of the developers, who try to create a main female character in order to represent diversity.

The proposal starts with an emphasize on the development of the game itself. The work during the development phase could consist of going more in depth into the overall design of the female character. The representation of a woman, for the score of representation, can risk discourse and misunderstandings as shown in this study. By connecting storytelling to a female character the players would feel that the inclusion is not just artificial but thoughtful. This character could add value to the story instead of just being a playable character. The creation of a background story around the character, and the building of her identity would please the identification process and justify some of the aesthetic choices, for example, the prosthetic arm. With that being said, it still needs to be mentioned that the "uncanny valley" is an important reason for breaking the immersion. Showing different perspectives thanks to gender could enrich the game because the player would have a different experience. Indeed, identification is according to Cohen (2001) an engaging way to take on the identity, goals and the perspective of a character.

One reason why women don't play action games as much as men, is from an identification standpoint, a problem of representation. An abundance of dominant male main characters combined with the insufficiency of powerful female characters can explain the lack of women playing these games. The presence of strong female lead in games has however proved to give an empowering role for women gamers (Jansz & Martis, 2007). Also, previous studies have explored the outcomes of representing accurately women in games. Because women are misrepresented with hypersexualised bodies and traditional gender roles, their interest in games faded. A more authentic representation of a woman in the role of a main character is an opportunity to attract more women into a game where they usually feel set aside.

Finally, including more women in the process of game development would open up opportunities to create more game content with a feminine perspective, and the establishment of main female characters with interesting stories. The previous studies (Carr, 2006; Mäyrä, 2008; Scharrer, 2004) have demonstrated that games are dominated by men and that it starts with the production of the game. The core of the game and the development, being more male than female, should seek to rebalance the amount of women developers who are still underrepresented in the game industry, to give a different approach to game design.

The second part of the proposal focuses on the communication of the game. Working with the communication phase can consist of communicating around the unrealistic interpretation of
the game. A game is as stated by Mäyrä (2008) a work that takes a distance from the real world. Like all visual work, it consists of an interpretation of reality (Mirzoeff, 2009). Hence, it should be viewed as such and not as a mirror of realism of History. The concept of Metahistory from White (2014) is explaining that Historical writing, is still entangled to 19th centuries’ values and should be a reflection upon reality, now and then. Games are in themselves a discourse and includes discourse around it, participating in the reflection of reality. Transparent communication about the inspiration from the publishers could help in pushing gender boundaries. Drawing the attention on the artistic part of the creation of the game would be a way to explain some of the creative choices in the design while giving credits to freely interpret the work.

As an overall conclusion, the present study has enabled us to understand the Battlefield V game from a reception angle. The notion of History differed from traditional action games and had given a new perspective of narrative in action games inspired by real facts. Furthermore, the addition of a main feminine character in a qualitative way has given insights to understand the phenomenon and learn from it.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study brought new elements to be discussed in the study of game together with feminist studies. However, some limitations can be drawn.

The identity of the researcher has influenced the interpretation of data. First, the researcher is a non-native English speaker which means the approach to the discourse is formed by their native language. The Linguistic Determinism states that different languages are not just different signs to the same objects, but are distinct worlds. The thinking is determined by the language we speak (Leach, 1964; Sapir, 1929). For instance, language can shift the way of processing motion events. At 14 months of age, English-reared and Japanese-reared infants are equally sensitive to whether someone is walking across a bounded space (e.g., a railroad track) or a flat, unbounded space (e.g., a grassy field) — instances that are denoted by two separate verbs in Japanese (wataru and tooru, respectively) but not in English (Göksun et al., 2011).

Some aspects of the phenomenon have been left aside. The researcher has analysed the reception angle only.

Due to its qualitative methodology, the analysis is constrained to a small sample, which can decrease the generalization of the findings.
FURTHER RESEARCH

Regarding the limitation of the research further studies could be done.

A researcher who is a native English speaker might produce different results. In fact, this could mean the criteria selected for the presentation of results might change as well as the insights.

To rectify the study’s single approach, additional studies could conduct an analysis of the phenomenon from a developer perspective. The method could still be a qualitative analysis with an orientation to understand the developers’ perspective thanks to interviews. Hence, the next study could explain the creative process and decisions.

The method employed could be different. In the light of these elements, a further study could focus on the representation of women in the Battlefield V game with a different method, for example, a content analysis of the articles related to the game and its controversy.
REFERENCES


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Appendix 1: Comment Sample

The names have been changed for anonymity.

1. Can’t wait to see Female medics carry tampons just in case any other woman have period blood in the next update.
   405 Thumbs up

2. Yeah me too. I can’t wait!!
   3 Thumbs up

3. Leave my one arm girlfriend alone plz
   2 Thumbs up

4. Hey since your Joseph Stalin you should know a lot about female soldiers
   0 Thumbs up

5. A face painted woman with a prosthetic arm, a black guy with a katana, and a half naked Viking looking guy....yes this is definitely reminds me of ww2
   1,6 k Thumbs up

6. But don’t forget, if you don’t like it, you are “uneducated”.
   171 Thumbs up

7. It is historical fiction...
   2 Thumbs up

8. @Rodriguez Connie, didn’t EA say that “this is the most historical accurate game ever” and “forget everything you learned in history class” or something?
   45 Thumbs up

9. There were women in the French Resistance and rarely British Commandos
   0 Thumbs up

10. 1. Women did not fight on the front lines
    2. No one had robotic arms back then
    3. If you want women in your WW2 game, then make them Russian and sniping Germans from rooftops or put them in the French Resistance! Don’t put them in the D-day landings or in the Pacific fighting the Japanese cause that NEVER HAPPENED!!
   102 Thumbs up

11. Soviet women as field medic would be correct still
    1 Thumb up

12. @Tsinummoc but they were not in frontlines you retarded commie, they were behind lines in camps
    14 Thumbs up

13. I really don’t care if I see one or two girls fighting on frontlines that aren’t Russian or german snipers, but keep it at minimum. also many BF fans are acting like 2 year olds only pointing at the girl.
14. There will be more genders than vehicles and weapons
   2,6 k Thumbs up

15. If DICE is not gonna add any biracial wheelchair Allied soldiers, then I will be personally ofdended.
   271 Thumbs up

16. There was a few chicks in a video game now everyone is going batshit crazy, its like cave men who discovered masturbation my God
   1 Thumbs up

17. vote with your wallet and don’t pre-order games this will make sure they do not sell broken games as they have in the past cuz once you give them the money they won’t have any incentive to fix the f*** for years just like Battlefield 4
   2 Thumbs up

18. @Kciwg uhm...promised accuracy, this is not accurate, at all
19. @The Character if they don’t add a tractor I will be ofdended
   9 Thumbs up

20. @Ezionela Lmao
   1 Thumb up

21. @Ezionela, made my day xD”
   1 Thumb up

22. Ezionela, asfo Im not allowed to be a bear either, even though more bears fought in the war than handicapped females.
   0 Thumb up
23. @Ezionela i can’t wait for the “safe space” DLC
   0 Thumb up
24. + YixYo
   1)Learn to recognize sarcasm
   2)there are TWO genders; no more, no less.
   1 Thumb up

25. 1)This isn’t funny
   2)There are THREE genders, not less.
   0 Thumb up
   0 Thumb up