Narrative Approaches in Contemporary Video Game Reviews

Robert Glashüttner

As journalism wants to both inform and engage the reader through telling stories, video game reviews from different outlets have distinct approaches in their narrative designs and structures. Whereas some media, mostly long-running dedicated magazines, prefer a more straightforward and holistic approach for their review style, newer game culture publications tend to adopt a more personal and selective way of writing about video games. This text will analyze and compare these approaches to narrative design. It will tackle the following questions: How do game reviews motivate their readers, not only by presenting an engaging text/story but also in terms of the way in which they influence how a video game will be perceived and played? How do the writers position themselves and their personal preferences in relation to the respective game? And how is the personal act of individually playing a video game reflected in a text that tries to cater to a broader audience?[1]

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, video game journalism has been integral to the perception and the development of interactive entertainment as a medium. Originating in computer culture, video game critics have come a long way from describing a digital

1 A personal note: This text is an essay that approaches the topic first and foremost from a journalistic point of view. It draws its sources mostly from other journalistic publications and the author's personal experience as a (video game) journalist and university graduate.

game as a software product to reflecting on video games as cultural artefacts. Multiple steps and milestones have been taken that have led from the early days of digital game criticism in special interest print magazines to texts about video games which use a variety of narrative structures and are now published both in general and special interest newspapers and magazines – in print and online.

While there is a lot that could be said about video game journalism in general, this text will focus on reviews. Specifically, reviews from five different media outlets about three recently released games (November 2019 to June 2020) will be compared with each other in order to demonstrate how different narrative approaches to video games and video game writing can be, and indeed are. While special interest media still reign supreme in today's video game culture landscape, general interest newspapers and magazines have devoted increasing amounts of space to covering video games and video game culture over the last five to ten years. General interest media tend to choose a point of view that compares video games not so much with other games but with other art forms and cultural products such as movies or pop music.

This analysis focuses on (digital) newspapers, magazines and websites written in English and published in the US and the UK.

A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEO GAME REVIEWS

Looking back at computer and video game magazines from the 1980s and the early 1990s, it becomes clear that there were no established rules on how to structure a review. A text usually began with an excerpt of the game's story, followed by a description of the interactive elements and a critical subjective statement about the technical and entertaining qualities of the respective game. Sometimes, similar games from the same publishing house were referenced, or a note was added as to whether older titles of the same genre had been better or not. In some cases, this information was provided in separate boxes outside the main text, sometimes it was incorporated. This straightforward reviewing approach was accompanied by rating systems that varied from magazine to magazine. In 1984, *Computer & Video Games* awarded single-digit scores in the categories "Getting started", "Graphics", "Value" and "Playability", whereas two years later, *CRASH* used a more detailed system that also included "Use of computer" or "Addictive qualities" and a percentage rating system (1 to 100 per cent). In 1988 and 1990, *ACE* even used a 1000-point system where a game might, for example, receive a review score of 746. Explanations about what

these categories or numbers meant or should describe exactly were not included in the magazines.

It is interesting to note that in some cases, reviews in earlier video game magazines contained elaborate introductions, where one would usually find a summary of the game's story. In hindsight, this seems like a conscious editorial decision to spice up the otherwise rather dry and technical write-up with narrative artefacts that are comparable with the kind of vivid descriptions of scenes and situations one would normally read in a novel.

"Trapped inside a space ship crawling with aliens, the spaceman wants to escape. Robot patrols are on his trail. Somehow the intrepid spaceman must locate his escape shuttle, refuel it and crack the code so he can flee from the merciless invaders." – Review of Luna Atac; CRASH August 1986: 18.

Historically, reviews published in ACE magazine stand out because they managed to coalesce the descriptions of a game's setting and those of the interactive elements with the respective writer's critique in a cohesive, surprisingly modern writing style. These texts also always had the writer's name printed next to the review whereas the other historical magazines mentioned above named their writers only in the imprint or within special sections.

MILESTONES OF VIDEO GAME CRITICISM

Computer game and video game journalism started out in form of game reviews around the year 1980, so it is safe to say that the review is the primary and most common text form. The major milestones in the history of video game journalism and criticism are as follows:

(a) Printed computer culture tech magazines and early special interest video game magazines (circa 1980-1993)
(b) The introduction of the CD-ROM as a game changer for video game development as well as for journalistic production methods due to new audiovisual possibilities (1993-2005)
(c) A paradigm shift in narrative writing started by the New Games Journalism movement (2004-2006)
(d) The ubiquity of the internet through fast and stable connections (from circa 2006)

(e) The ubiquity of podcast, video and streaming culture, primarily through YouTube.com and Twitch.tv (from circa 2012)
(f) The Gamergate controversy and backlash (2014-2016)

With each of these milestones, video game journalism underwent a change in character, although in some cases only in minor but still significant form. Let's look at these milestones in a little more detail.

(a) Printed computer culture tech magazines and early special interest video game magazines such as *Compute!* (first issue November/December 1979) or *Computer & Video Games* (first issue November 1981) introduced video games as a certain type of software. Aside from publishing reviews of commercial games, these magazines also printed program listings of non-commercial games that every reader/user could then type up on their computer, enabling them to use the game program for free. This was common content for many years and something that often used up a considerable number of pages within a magazine issue. Reviews were written mostly in a straightforward manner: the game at hand was perceived more as an entertainment product and less as an artistic or cultural artefact. Thus, rating systems were introduced that were added to these game reviews quite early on, with the intention to sum up the "worth" of a video game through certain numbers and very short descriptions. These early, classic texts about digital games and the first rating systems can be considered the genesis of video game journalism as a whole. Other milestones have led to the field branching out and becoming more sophisticated, but many (mostly special interest) publications still stick to this straightforward approach, at least partially.

(b) The introduction of the CD-ROM not only changed the essence of many upcoming video games (for Windows) in the mid-1990s by making it possible for developers to use a lot more disk space than before, but it also changed the monopoly of printed magazines as the only method of media publication. Although the first experiments with audiovisual video game criticism only go as far back as the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, videos, podcasts and livestreams have since become ubiquitous and in many cases surpassed the relevance of classic (written) video game journalism. It is important here to note the differences between a person who is a critic and someone who works as a journalist. The difference mostly lies in their respective approach to text creation, with a journalist (who is often part of a larger media house) usually adhering to a list of criteria for their work, whereas a critic (who is often a self-employed internet personality or hobbyist) often does not apply checklists when criticizing a game. A crude way of proving this point and recognizing the differences is by running a Google search for "video game reviewers", "video game

journalists" and "video game critics". Although misleading, with the search term *reviewers*, mostly YouTube personalities will be the result. This is in contrast to *journalists*, which returns around 50 to 60 renowned game journalists of the last 30 years. With *critics*, one gets a mixed result comprising both groups.

(c) In 2004, comic book writer and games and music journalist Kieron Gillen published his manifesto for New Games Journalism (a modification of New Journalism applied to video game journalism) in which he pleads for a new form of narrative for video game texts that is more personal and subjective, and more intertwined with other media and art forms. Reviews should thus treat video games less as software products and more like cultural artefacts that deserve more than being mainly put into numbers. Technical aspects should be less important than game design; personal experiences that come up throughout the playing of a game, and the culture of play in general, should be embraced. Although this was a somewhat radical concept in 2004 that was not taken seriously by many mainstream game publications at first, about ten years later, the narrative approach of New Games Journalism was eventually adopted by many modern journalistic outlets that cover video games like *Eurogamer.net* or *The Guardian.com*. It is now as relevant as the classic text structure of video game reviews as seen in (a). Despite the particular orientation and target group of a publication, a personal approach (first-person narrative) became the norm due to the rising demand of personalized game reviews. Today's media consumers are used to storytelling pieces and opinions that are intertwined within a text. Emotionally and narratively, a written video game review can thus be on par with a comparable podcast, video or livestream, as explained further in (e).

(d) Around 2005, the ubiquity of the internet through fast and stable connections and the general sophistication of websites made it possible to publish journalistic content digitally more and more easily than in printed magazines. This led to the rise of online publications as well as a different feedback culture. In forums and comments sections, online readers' feedback was faster, more immediate and also a lot less editorially curated than in a printed magazine or newspaper. In addition, wikis, blogs and social media platforms made (gaming) news public and multiplied it almost instantly. Journalists had to cope with this new situation by differentiating between offline and online content, and their publishing companies had to decide on how to charge money for which content. To this day, both print and online video game publications fight for attention with a slow but steady decline on the side of print media that has been a constant trend for over 15 years now.

(e) First with YouTube and later with Twitch, video game criticism saw a major paradigm shift from written text to audiovisual and audio content around

2010 when these forms of publication started to gain greater popularity. Today's major video game personalities like PewDiePie or Jacksepticeye produce very personal videos about video games, and they can be watched while playing those games live on stream on a regular basis. These personalities have a major influence on digital game consumers that surpasses the impact of written text. As mentioned in (b), the work of a YouTube and/or Twitch personality is more immediate and often does not follow many rules or guidelines. In a written text (within a certain publication), a journalist composing a review often follows a specific structure or checklist or tries to underline a specific point by providing additional explanation. While a video and/or streaming content producer might do the same, in many cases the criticism is presented as a casual, instantaneous opinion that plays out as if it were a personal, informal conversation between two people. This also very much applies to podcast culture where listeners often expect and prefer this interpersonal narrative approach to video game criticism to a more analytically written review piece.

(f) When video game culture became more inclusive and multifaceted at the beginning of the 2010s, this progressivism received a backlash called Gamergate. It started out as a harassment campaign against certain video game developers and activists like Zoe Quinn or Anita Sarkeesian in August of 2014. This cultural war was fought intensely, mostly publicly, for about two years before it started to slowly ebb away in the following months and years. As an excuse for their long-lasting campaign, some harassers would often state that the actual controversy was not about reactionary philosophies concerning the absurd question of who should "own" video game culture and who shouldn't, but rather about the issue that video game publications needed to be more transparent regarding their reviews policy. While many people within digital game culture tried to unmask this argument as a false excuse, a lot of magazines and blogs like *Polygon* or *Kotaku* nevertheless applied new review transparency guidelines shortly after the peak of the Gamergate controversy, for example, requiring the information of whether the reviewer of a video game was provided a free copy (and which one) or not.

RATING SYSTEMS

Throughout the roughly 40 years of video game journalism history, several rating systems have been tried out. While some oddities like the 12- (*ASM /Aktueller Software Markt*) or the 1000-point system (*ACE*) did not last longer than a few years, some other rating systems established in the 1980es are still in

use today. In German-speaking countries it became common to use a percentage (or 100-point) system, but many publications written in English eventually settled on applying a 10-point system. Some magazines and game websites alternatively use a 5-star system, yet also award half-stars, which basically again makes for a 10-point system that is only visually different.

It is notable, however, that even though most of the video game rating systems used by different media outlets and publications are easily mathematically comparable to each other, certain ratings within certain systems often have different meanings in practice. This especially applies to the average score which should either be 5 points, 50 points/per cent or 2,5 stars. But when comparing different video game reviews from different publications and periods, it turns out that a purely mediocre game (in the eyes of the reviewer/s) rarely gets these scores. Throughout the last 20 to 30 years, these numbers have experienced some curious kind of inflation process. A mediocre game would therefore mostly receive 6 out of 10 points or sometimes even a 70 per cent rating. As a trend, it can be said that this inflation process is more pronounced when a system is (theoretically) more nuanced. Where 5 out of 10 points is mostly considered only slightly subpar, a 50 per cent rating is perceived worse than that. When looking at scores on the review aggregator website *Metacritic*, which aggregates all scores (rating systems) into a 100-point system, a combined score of around 50 points (+/- three points) is uncommon. In these rarer cases, the games in question are considered bad by the majority of the (professional) reviewers even though the numbers alone would suggest otherwise.

METHOD

For this essay, 15 video game reviews have been analyzed and compared. They had been published online by five different media outlets: *Destructoid*, *TheGuardian.com*, *Polygon*, *Slant Magazine*, and *VICE.com* (United States edition). These media outlets were selected based on diversity in terms of the following parameters: rating system, editorial structure and audience. The five publications include ones with and without (different) rating systems, they are special interest as well as general interest, and they all have different target groups.

The reviews cover three recent video game releases: *Death Stranding* (November 2019), *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (March 2020) and *The Last of Us Part II* (June 2020). These releases were chosen due to their high public relevance not only for special interest media but also for publications that cover games in addition to other cultural fields. Two of these three games (initially)

came out exclusively for Playstation 4, and the third one (*Animal Crossing: New Horizons*) exclusively for Nintendo Switch. This fact is a coincidence; it did not play a part in the selection process and is not considered in the analysis.

First, the chosen games and publications will briefly be described. This is followed by a game-by-game analysis of the five reviews for each of the three games and a comparison of their writing styles and narrative approaches.

THE GAMES CHOSEN

Death Stranding is an action game set in the aftermath of a cataclysmic event where the player takes on the role of Sam Porter Bridges, a courier who carries cargo in a fictional future version of the USA. The game is very elaborate in terms of story and gameplay details. It is special because of its well-known Japanese video game director Hideo Kojima and his expressive ideas which are mirrored in the games he directs.

Animal Crossing: New Horizons is a life-simulation video game that takes place on fictional islands where the player tries to build a settlement and host guests, and interacts with other players. The game is meant to be played regularly over the course of many weeks. What makes it stand out is its release at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which subsequently turned it into an escapist world for millions of people.

The Last of Us Part II is an action-adventure game that revolves around the relationship of specific characters within a post-apocalyptic world set in the USA of the near future. It is notable and well known for its epic set pieces, technical capabilities and graphic depiction of human violence and madness as the protagonists constantly fight zombies and each other.

THE PUBLICATIONS CHOSEN

Destructoid is a video game-focused website that was founded in March 2006 and is a self-proclaimed "quirky gaming news website for the savvy gamer with a heavy focus on fun." It uses a 10-point rating system for its reviews and allows for half-points (which essentially makes it a 20-point system).

TheGuardian.com is a news and media website launched in 1999 that covers video games as part of their Culture section (as one out of eight categories). It uses a 5-star system for its culture reviews and allows for half-stars (which essentially makes it a 10-point system).

Polygon is a video game website that was launched in October 2012 and covers video game culture in general as well as movies and TV series with a focus on superhero and fantasy themes. It does not use a rating system for its video game reviews.

Slant Magazine is an online publication that was started in 2001. It features stories about music and movies but also covers TV, theater and video games. The website states that it "has become known for its edgy, irreverent, and often funny pop-cultural criticism." *Slant* uses a 5-star system for its video game reviews and allows for half-stars (which essentially makes it a 10-point system).

VICE.com is part of the digital media and broadcasting company VICE Media Group, online since 1999. The site caters to mostly young adults with topics including politics, food and travel. The Games category is one of 16. *VICE.com* does not use a rating system for its video game reviews.

BASIC REVIEW ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

In general, all reviews chosen here are comprised of one long text each with additional pictures and videos. These visual additions to the reviews are not part of this analysis. All texts are written in a first-person narrative and regularly switch between game descriptions and commentary. None of them try to be objective or try to transparently work from some sort of checklist. The main differences lie within the respective focus, with some reviewers tending to communicate more what the game is about and how it is played, whereas others focus more on the commentary and social or political implications. Reviews written for special interest publications (*Destructoid* and, in parts, *Polygon*) are more likely to thoroughly answer the questions "What do I do in this game?" and "How is this game played?" In contrast, reviews written for general interest publications (*TheGuardian.com*, *Slant Magazine* and *VICE.com*) are more concerned with the question of "What does it mean to play this game?" and are usually more critical towards the object itself. Also, there is a tendency that reviews without a rating system score (*Slant Magazine* and *VICE.com*) are more critical in their analysis and overall verdict.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS: *DEATH STRANDING*

Generally, most of the five reviews of *Death Stranding* consider the setting and story of the game very unconventional and therefore tend to be more descriptive

than in other reviews. Chris Carter in his *Destructoid* review caters mostly for readers who already have a solid knowledge about the game. Quite early on, he jumps to gameplay details and personal experiences he gained while playing.

"Unless you're a huge Kojima nut you probably came here for an actual gameplay discussion, so let's go to it. No bullshitting around: you run about for most of the game as a postman in a quest to reunite America by reactivating internet terminals. You can scan for packages – that's what the fancy arm-like radar thing does – jump, grab stuff, and occasionally fight."

Similar but less straightforward and more reflective is Dan Dawkins' review for TheGuardian.com. Early on in the text and much like Carter, he refers to basic information about the release of the game which the reader needs in order to fully understand the review. Through comparisons with movies the review becomes embedded into a broader pop cultural context.

"In a recent interview, Mad Max director George Miller suggested Death Stranding was too radical for its time. 'The risk is that people don't accept it', he said."

In a similar fashion to the other two reviewers mentioned above, Russ Frushtick also assumes some basic knowledge of the game and its importance in his Death Stranding review for Polygon. More elaborate in terms of storytelling and often alternating between descriptive elements, gameplay experience and opinion, he delivers a cohesive review in a narrative style.

"The actual walking in *Death Stranding* is incredibly complex: Each small rock or ledge is capable of tripping Sam, sending his packages flying. I find myself constantly scanning the environment, surveying the landscape to find the smoothest possible route through a perilous rocky outcropping."

This type of vivid description that informs and also tells a personal story of the reviewer's experience of events in the game is sustained throughout the entire review. Small puns are incorporated, too. They spice up an already example-laden text that uses figurative language and shows emotional investment.

"I load up Sam's backpack with a ton of materials and hike out with a plan: I'm gonna build a goddamn highway right over these ghosts."

Justin Clark's review of Death Stranding on the other hand is very unconventional in a different way because it is mostly essayistic and analytical in nature. He focuses less on providing a description of the game and turns his attention instead to the political implications that the setting, the characters and the gameplay elements generate for him. When he tells a personal story, which happens only once in the review (at the beginning), he does it in-depth and refers to it again later in the text when the game is interpreted as a metaphor for work, community service and individual effort. According to the reviewer, all of these matters a lot in the greater scheme of things – in the game and also in real life.

"This is a game that values your work. It respects the people that each tiny sparkling dot on that cursed map represents, the need of those people to connect with others to survive, and the fact that that space between matters as well."

Similarly critical, Rob Zacny's review for VICE.com puts the cart before the horse and starts off with a resourceful analysis of the last part of the game. While not written in the most accessible way, the review is elaborate and goes on to detailed descriptions of the game as a whole and also certain events that occur, followed by corresponding critique. There is no clear narrative here, instead the text alternates between covering many aspects of story, setting and gameplay, and what they mean for the player.

"For two-thirds or more of its length, *Death Stranding* is generally that best version of itself. But the last third's focus on grueling boss battles and sudden resource starvation end it on a disproportionately sour note."

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS: *ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW HORIZONS*

This game was released on March 20, 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown, which led to an immense public interest due to the relaxing and welcoming qualities of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. Some of the five reviews mention this fact. Another recurring topic, if only touched upon briefly by three reviewers, is the length of time the respective reviewer has played the game. This is noteworthy as this game can't be "beaten" by playing through a predetermined narrative. Rather, it is supposed to be played in brief sessions, day in and day out, over the course of many weeks.

CJ Andriessen delivers a wholly service-related review for *Destructoid*. He is very descriptive, bringing in a lot of comparisons with former *Animal Crossing* games, and also comments on how the game can be played by different types of players. The reviewer also touches on the fact that there are no classic gender identities in this game.

"It's all very positive, and along with the poses your character strikes trying on clothes, easily the queerest the series has ever been."

Keza MacDonald's text about *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* for *TheGuardian.com* is no review in the classic sense, which is indicated by the fact that it is not accompanied by a rating (ratings appear to be mandatory in the publication's reviews), and the text is comparatively short. The review is mostly personal, referring to the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning, and overall summing up the basic character of the game and thus catering more to the casual player.

"The absence of noise and urgency on my little island has made it a vital sanctuary, and it looks as if it will be greatly needed in the weeks and months to come."

Also a good read for people who are not that familiar with the game yet is the review from Russ Frushtick for *Polygon*, although his text is more comprehensive. He describes things one can do in the game in some detail through examples, briefly touches on technical aspects when comparing the game to older entries in the *Animal Crossing* series, and also points out an inconsistency in the upbeat and welcoming presentation of the game.

"'Come live here!' he says. The child agrees. It seems nice, after all. But suddenly, the child is saddled with the debt of their first house, and must sell bugs and fish to settle up."

Steven Scaife's review is unconventional in its focus and stands in contrast to the other reviews mentioned above. His text is very political and only provides a broadly outlined description of the game. His quarrel with *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* lies in the game's (virtual) community building which he regards as a step back. He cites older entries in the game series as much more collaborative and also picks up on the fact that you can pillage uninhabited islands for resources. By the way, this review has the lowest score (3,5 stars out of 5; or 70 points) of all 110 professional reviews listed on *Metacritic*.

"The cracks add up, allowing an ugly reality to seep into an otherwise friendly fantasy. The game inadvertently becomes about the cost and upkeep of civilization, about what actions we're willing to turn a blind eye toward just as long as things keep running smoothly."

Gita Jackson's review for *VICE.com* takes the same line as Steven Scaife in terms of the critique of the overall sociopolitical implications.

"You're essentially given a carte blanche to wreck the place."

In addition to that, she goes into more detail when describing her play experience and ends on a personal, conciliatory note about the importance that should be given to community building in the game and in real life.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS*: THE LAST OF US PART II*

This game was perceived very positively overall by the press, although it also stirred controversy due to the ambivalence produced by the intense violence depicted throughout the game, and the player's complicity in it. The opinions on what that means for people who play *The Last of Us Part II* differ widely across the five analyzed reviews.

In his review for *Destructoid*, Chris Carter mostly delivers a detailed write-up on what is offered to the player. He describes specific gameplay elements and cites examples, however he refrains from going into narrative details.

Keza MacDonald uses a more narrative approach in her review for *TheGuardian.com*, although she also informs the reader about the gameplay. Her emotional involvement becomes apparent in her take on the grim setting and the corresponding heavy violence, while she manages to avoid any story spoilers.

"No video game has ever gone to these lengths to humanise the enemy, or to interrogate the violence that it asks the player to perform."

The review for *Polygon* by Maddy Myers is very elaborate and reflects thoroughly on the effects that the constant depiction of the intense violence has (on her). Describing many of the game's scenes, she keeps insisting that nothing can be learned through the choices and the tenacity of the game's characters, and that this sets a bad example for our society and humanity in general.

"It's a missed opportunity to explore how the rage of a marginalized character might take on a different form. [...] While the game was made with great skill and craft, we are actually much, much better than [game developer] Naughty Dog thinks we are."

Justin Clark sees more philosophical value in the game's depiction of human madness in his review for *Slant Magazine*.

"At what point do we determine the cost of hate, chaos, death, and vengeance to be more or less than the cost of simply *stopping*?"

This is the only review out of the five selected for *The Last Of Us Part II*, that goes into a remarkable amount of detail when describing the game's story. An editor's note announces these spoilers at the beginning of the text.

In his review for *VICE.com*, Rob Zacny writes about his overall disappointment with the sequel. His write-up makes it clear that he finds the choices and reactions of the main game characters understandable, but the development of the story itself does not surprise him overall. Similarly, he thinks that not much has changed in terms of gameplay compared to the original game from 2013, and thus he ends on a rather sour note.

"It sets out to surpass its predecessor, but the only meaningful contrast between them is in its even more oppressive bleakness and violence."

CONCLUSION

While all the reviews examined here share common traits, such as a first-person narrative and a tendency toward providing a well-readable and engaging text, they differ distinctly in length, style and focus. Whereas some reviewers (and publications) feel obliged to offer first and foremost service-related reviews to mostly keen video game players through elaborate descriptions of contents and gameplay possibilities, other reviewers choose to reflect more on the setting and the most important player choices and ask questions like: What political implications does this game have? What do these gameplay possibilities say about our society? The existence or absence of a rating system also has an effect on the reviewer's verdict, although in the cases at hand, the content of the text always has a bigger impact than its respective rating number.

There is no clear indication that the five publications selected for this analysis use specific review systems that their reviewers must adhere to. Still, the bal-

ance between service content and analytical reflection within a text varies between these media outlets. *Destructoid* mostly uses the straightforward (special interest) approach whereas *Slant Magazine*, *VICE.com* and, to some lesser degree, also *TheGuardian.com* and *Polygon*, grant their reviewers more freedom to sometimes also bring their texts up to a meta level that steps away from the question "Is the game fun?" and rather tries to answer the question "What do we learn from the game's setting and its interactive elements?" Reviews from *Polygon*, *VICE.com* and *Slant Magazine* alternate between these two approaches more often and thus create a more sophisticated and varied style of writing.

All of these analyzed reviews only offer the reviewer's perspective on the subject matter – they do not try to compare possible perceptions of different player types. Most reviews require the reader to bring at least some basic information about the respective game with them – this also applies to *VICE.com*, *Slant Magazine* and *TheGuardian.com*, although these publications are general interest and also cater to an audience with less information about video games in general. Overall, the examination and comparison of these 15 reviews show that video game journalism – regardless of where it is published – has become more approachable thanks to its narratively driven writing styles, but still mostly requires an effort, even from a more or less dedicated audience.

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