



WHAT MOTIVATES PLAYERS TO WRITE GAME REVIEWS?

Master Degree Project in Informatics
with a Specialization in Game Development

Two year Level 30 ECTS
Spring semester 2022

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Abstract

Experience goods are products and services that quality is challenging to observe before consuming. This characteristic of experience goods creates uncertainty about purchase decisions. Games are experience goods as well and players rely on reviews in order to make informed decisions. Game reviews' have an immense impact on sales, purchase decisions, play experience, and even game design. Thus, game reviews can make or break a game. In order to examine the motivation behind writing reviews, a discussion with frequent reviewers about their reviewing behavior has been made. The results indicate some motivations are more prevalent than others in the context of games. The results can help designers and developers that build platforms where players write reviews to tailor reviewers and their motivations to write reviews.

Keywords: *game reviews, games, review motivation*

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1. Introduction

Ever since the start of humanity, games, and play are major factors in human life, and in several countries, game development is an essential part of the industry. (Engström, 2020) With the success of games as a media (Giddings and Kennedy, 2006), entertainment, and overall product, more and more research has been put into games. Games being complex and multifaceted as is, games research has a broad range of subjects to concentrate on. Research on serious games, software engineering, art, user experience, design, narrative, audio, and even administrative and economic side of games are all small pieces of the puzzle that come together to form game studies (Engström, 2020). Although this multifacetedness brings an immense amount of research together it also means there is so much more to potentially investigate and uncover.

Experience goods which are goods that the quality is uncertain prior to consumption (Nelson, 1974), heavily need reviews. As the consumer does not know what the quality will be, checking previous consumers' experiences can give a rough idea of what your experience will be. Games are also a form of experience goods. Player reviews have a positive impact on game sales (Zhu and Zhang, 2006). Player reviews also influence purchase decisions (Roy et al., 2019). Due to this notion, within almost all online game stores users have the ability to write reviews about the games they purchased. These reviews decide the fate of the game, as many potential buyers read those reviews and decide whether or not to buy (Lin et al., 2018).

Existing research indicates reviews are a detrimental factor for purchase decisions but the underlying reason why reviews are made is still a mystery for many industries, one being the game industry. While this thesis is being written there is no existing research that investigates "What motivates players to write game reviews?" So in order to fill this gap in the game research field, this thesis tries to uncover this particular question.

In this study, previous research on what motivates consumers of other services and products to write reviews has been examined. Based on the results from previous research, a questionnaire has been formed and a study has been conducted. Findings from the study and its analysis have been made. Finally, the thesis concludes with what can be further examined in this particular subject has been presented.

2. Background

Experience goods are products and services that quality is challenging to observe before consuming (Nelson, 1970). This characteristic of experience goods creates uncertainty about purchase decisions. To tackle the uncertainty and reduce the risk “consumers search for information when making purchase decisions” (Bronner and de Hoog, 2010, p. 15). Hence, potential consumers use prior experiences from past consumers in order to make an informed decision (Bronner and de Hoog, 2010). These pieces of information that are presented by the past consumers to the potential ones can be called Word of Mouth (WoM), Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM), User Generated Content (UGC), or Reviews.

User Generated Content(UGC) according to Bhandari and Rogers (2016) is a wide-ranging term to describe all the content users generate. Compared to User Generated Content (UGC), Word of Mouth (WoM) is the product-specific or experience-specific content that users generate (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2016). Bhandari and Rogers state that Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) and Word of Mouth (WoM) is comparable in respect to they both serve to pass past consumers' knowledge about the product or the service (2016). Yet, there are some aspects where WoM and eWoM are different. While Word of Mouth is communicated through speech, eWoM usually passes through by typing on a keyboard (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2016). This also leads to eWoM lasting longer compared to WoM as eWoM will stay on the Internet as long as the platform written to is online (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2016). Also, WoM can only reach the social circle the speaker has, yet eWoM’s reach is considerably greater than WoM’s (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2016).

Even though Word of Mouth, e-Word of Mouth, and User-Generated Content all are definition-wise slightly different from each other, they all have a common purpose and effect. All of them inform someone about a product or a service and help potential consumers make an informed decision about whether or not to buy the said product or service. Hence, all these terms can be used for reviews as well. In this chapter WoM, e-WoM, UGC and reviews will be used interchangeably depending on the research referenced. Yet all these terms are used as an umbrella term to explain reviews.

In the following chapter, the impact of reviews on the user, and the company is presented. Also, the potential impact reviews can have is shown. Later, some motivation theories are presented and the motivation for writing Word of Mouth (WoM), Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM), and User Generated Content (UGC) is pointed out.

2.1 Impact of Reviews

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, reviews are a tool to make informed purchase decisions, and it is important to understand the full scope of impact the reviews create. Reviews do not only make an impact on the user but also on the companies as well. In order to display a greater point-of-view on reviews, the following chapter talks about; firstly, the impact the reviews have on users/potential consumers, secondly, the impact the reviews

have on companies that sell goods or give services, and lastly, the potential impacts the reviews can create.

2.1.1. Impact on Users

One of the most anticipated impacts of reviews on users are purchase intentions (Roy et al., 2019). As mentioned before potential consumers of a product or service tend to rely on reviews to determine its quality. In the research done by Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) the effect of positive reviews with comprehensive information on purchase intentions has been investigated. The research also investigates the effect of reviewer agreement on purchase intentions. Reviewer agreement can be defined as the general consensus that is built from many different reviews (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013). An overwhelming amount of reviews agree upon a product or service quality creates reviewer agreement. Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) state that past research on the effect of reviewer agreement on purchase intentions indicates there is an association between reviewer agreement and purchase intentions. Meaning potential users use the “wisdom of the crowd” as a guideline upon purchasing a product (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013, p. 228). The research of Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) is especially precious as it investigates both search and experience products and also investigates them separately. As “previous investigations show that experience products are harder to evaluate than search products.”, some properties of reviews might impact purchase intentions more on search goods and different properties of reviews might impact purchase intentions more on experience goods. Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) found that on search goods, reviews with comprehensive information generate a higher purchase intention compared to common positive reviews. Common positive reviews, in this case, are reviews that do not have information about the product such as “perfect”, “amazing” etc. (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013) The results also suggest that for a search product, the reviewer agreement is positively linked to purchase intention. To piece together, comprehensive information on a review increase purchase intentions more than a general review, a product that has a high positive reviewer agreement “is likely to result in high purchase intentions for both general and detailed reviews” (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2013, p. 230). Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) also assess these phenomenons on experience goods to determine whether or not the same attitudes are relevant to experience goods or not. The results indicate that while comprehensive information does not generate a higher purchase intention compared to general reviews, reviewer agreement is positively linked to purchase intention. Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) argue that the results are due to the “nature” of experience goods. Because every consumer has their own separate experience with the product, a singular review might not project or mimic the potential consumers’ experiences, potential consumers look for whether or not a general consensus has been achieved for the product's quality rather than read a single review to decide.

Another research investigated mixed neutral reviews’ influence on purchase intentions. Roy et al. (2019) define mixed neutral reviews as the reviews that pass on information that has a product or a service’s positive and negative sides, pros and cons. The results indicate that reviews that have pros and cons in it are found more appealing and favorable. Roy et al. indicate that potential consumers prefer reading “reviews explaining positive and negative

features of the products” (2019, p. 675). In terms of reviews, results show that consumers value reviews with comprehensive information and details about the product or service more (Roy et al., 2019). It should be mentioned that this result is also in accordance with Jimenez and Mendoza (2013) as they also found that comprehensive information and details about the product or service positively affect purchase intentions. Finally, results argue that while both positive reviews and negative reviews influence purchase intentions, positive reviews influence purchase intentions positively and negative reviews influence purchase intentions negatively, mixed neutral reviews are always sought before making a purchase decision. The reason why only positive or only negative reviews are not sought but mixed neutral reviews are before a purchase decision is because experienced users might feel that only positive or only negative reviews are biased and on the extreme side of the review spectrum. Very positive or very negative reviews might feel fake and very personal compared to balanced and mixed neutral reviews. Mix-neutral reviews can be seen as more objective and accommodate a broader audience while very positive and very negative reviews might be seen as more personal. This is especially important for experience goods as experience goods tend to be highly different from one person to the other and reviews can not predict potential consumers' experiences reliably.

Research show that, reviews whether it is through showing the agreement of the crowd (Jimenez and Mendoza, 2019) or through content (Roy et al., 2018), influence purchase intentions. Properties and dimensions of reviews are studied to be able to better understand what aspect influences purchase intentions. A study executed by Agus et al. (2021) lists dimensions of reviews using Schepers' (2015) research. The list consists of items such as “argument quality” which indicates the power of the reviewers' argument, “volume” referring to the number of reviews that highlight the sales of the product, “valance” indicating whether it is a negative or a positive review, “timeliness” referring to the review is still applicable present day, and “source credibility” indicating the perceived reliability and honesty of the reviewer according to the reader. The results point out that all items that are listed above influence purchase intentions (Agus et al., 2021, p. 472).

While these are some properties of the reviews that influence purchase intentions, there are other properties of reviews as well, one of them is being anonymous. Erkan and Evans(2018) discuss how the anonymity of word-of-mouth influences purchase intentions. In their research, Erkan and Evans (2018) look for an answer to whether or not word-of-mouth between people that are acquainted with each other on social media is more influential than anonymous word-of-mouth on commerce websites. The results of their first study indicate that anonymous word-of-mouth is more influential in terms of purchase intentions. In the next study, Erkan and Evans identify four rationales why anonymous word-of-mouth on a commerce website is more influential than word-of-mouth on social media from an acquaintance, “information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information” (2018, p. 624).

Erkan and Evans argue that participants highlight the quantity as a rationale for preferring anonymous word-of-mouth, as a commerce website has many reviews for products, there is a chance to compare with different reviews (2018). The participants also indicate that the quantity of the reviews suppresses the disadvantages of reviews being anonymous (Erkan and Evans, 2018). Another rationale that is presented by participants is information

readiness, the information for a product is always available for potential consumers on commerce websites. On the other hand, on social media, the information is not presented when in need (Erkan and Evans, 2018). Detailed information is also a rationale mentioned, as according to participants the input given by acquaintances from social media is inadequate in terms of detail. Moreover, participants state that in social media the information is one-sided, meaning positive or negative. Unlike commerce websites, you can receive both positive and negative information about a product. Furthermore, Erkan and Evans found out that participants think the information on commerce websites has more dedicated information compared to social media (2018). And lastly, Erkan and Evans also argue word-of-mouth on commerce websites has an altruistic motive as opposed to word-of-mouth on social media considered “showing off” or “bragging” (2018).

Reviews do not only influence purchase behavior it also influences the experience as well. In a study, Livingston et al. (2011) investigated whether game reviews affect the game experience. According to Livingston et al., reading reviews cause “players to form opinions about games before having played them” and whether or not these formed opinions about games due to the reviews influence the game experience should be investigated (2011, p. 25). The results indicate that while reading positive reviews does not influence player experience, reading negative reviews does influence player experience. This effect is only produced when the review is about the game, and the “authority of the source does not matter” (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 27). There is no difference in influence in terms of experience between a review written by another player or a critic and there is also no change in mood between before and after reading the reviews. These pieces of evidence suggest that “the content and tone of the review text was causing the difference in player experience” (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 28).

2.1.2 Impact on Company

While it is shown through research that reviews influence consumers by altering purchase decision, how this impact the companies that produce the product is another case. While influencing purchase decisions suggests that reviews also influence sales, according to Zhu and Zhang potential consumers can overlook the reviews as well (2010). Zhu and Zhang (2010) construct a framework that illustrates reviews influence purchase decisions only when consumers’ reliance on reviews is high. The reliance to review is shaped by three characteristics; product characteristics, consumer characteristics, and other factors. In the research, product popularity is selected as a product characteristic, as the product is less popular there is a higher chance of potential consumers relying on reviews (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). For consumer characteristic, the internet experience is selected as consumers that have higher internet experience is more likely to “have greater confidence on the Internet, they are more likely to be influenced by online reviews” (Zhu and Zhang, 2010, p. 137). In their research, Zhu and Zhang investigated whether reviews have an impact on sales, depending on product popularity and internet experience in video games (2010). The results indicate that online reviews increase sales more for games that are less popular and the players have a higher internet experience (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). These results suggest that

reviews do not only influence purchase decisions but also sales, and the effect is depending on the “product and consumer characteristics” (Zhu and Zhang, 2010, p. 136).

In another research, Adıgüzel (2021) investigated the impact of YouTube reviews on video game sales. Adıgüzel points out that due to the fact that videos are “more vivid and rich informative” they can be more influential than text reviews (2021, p. 2100). Adıgüzel claims there is a para-social interaction between the YouTube reviewer and the watcher and this interaction makes the reviewer more credible making the review more influential. The results indicate that YouTube videos do not have a higher impact than text reviews in terms of sales.

While these are studies that claim reviews impact sales, Duan et al. (2008) state that the bilateral relationship or reviews and sales should not be ignored. While reviews lead to sales, reviews are “also the outcome of product sales” (Duan et al., 2008, p. 1008). Duan et al. present two effects that can impact sales, awareness effects, and persuasive effects (2008). Awareness effects mean, that the review created an awareness for the product and displayed it as an option to the consumer for their purchase decision (Duan et al., 2008). On the other hand, persuasive effects “shape consumers' attitudes and evaluation towards the product and ultimately influence their purchase decision” (Duan et al., 2008, p. 1009). The results indicate that even though higher ratings do not impact sales positively, a high number of reviews do impact sales positively. Duan et al. state that the results illustrate while the awareness effect of the reviews influences the consumer, the persuasive effect does not create the same impact.

Reviews do not only impact the sales, they also impact the popularity of the company and the product. As mentioned above due to the awareness effect of the reviews, (Duan et al., 2008) reviews can lead to the popularity of a product or a company. In order to examine whether or not this notion is true, Zhang et al. investigated how reviews impact the popularity of a restaurant (2010). Their results indicate that both a high rating and a high number of reviews impact popularity (Zhang et al., 2010). Zhang et al. also discover that “editor’s comments” or a high “editor’s rating” negatively impact the popularity of the restaurant (2010). This result is contrasting compared to both Livingston et al.’s research (2011) and Adıgüzel’s research (2021), where the results indicated that the “expert” or “critic” reviews are not more impactful than peer reviews. Having said that, Zhang et al. (2010) state the presence of editor content negatively impacting the popularity might be due to the websites having advertisements and the consumers looking at the editor content as an advertisement and not an unbiased form of opinion.

2.1.3 Potential Impact

While reviews already have a crucial role in the game industry, they can also be used as a tool for a much larger one. Although most research examines reviews by focusing on volume and rating of it, the content of the review is also beneficial information that can be used.

According to Livingston et al. (2010), one way to use review content is to build a genre-specific heuristic with it. Heuristic Evaluation is one of the industry-accepted ways of

investigating usability issues, due to its “cheap, fast, and reliable” methodology (Livingston et al., 2010, p. 49). Another reason why Heuristic Evaluation is conventionally used is that it is possible to perform at any stage of development (Livingston et al., 2010). Livingston et al. claim by investigating critic reviews, the common usability problems that get noticed by critics can be identified (2010). “The more often critics encounter a specific usability problem within games of the same game genre, the more important we consider that category of a usability problem” (Livingston et al., 2010, p. 48). Livingston et al. also state that publishing a game that common genre-specific usability issues are sorted out is the main objective of game developers (2010). With this heuristic evaluation technique, Livingston et al. claim “critics’ feedback” can be included in the development cycle and common genre-specific problems can be prevented before the release (2010, p. 55). Livingston et al. also highlight that this heuristic evaluation technique is not for co-designing the game with a critic nor informing the design but for integrating reviews into the developmental phase to “critic-proof” games (2010).

Although Livingston et al.’s (2010) research is not a tool that uses reviews to inform design, Bond and Beale (2009) investigated reviews to find out what properties make players write good reviews about the game. Bond and Beale argue that whichever properties of games make players write good reviews can be emphasized in the development of the game “to make it successful” (2009, p. 418). In their research, Bond and Beale identified key elements that are used frequently in games that have good reviews and bad reviews to establish a list of items that developers should incorporate and avoid in their games (2009). Bond and Beale also arrange the items, in terms of importance from “most importance” to “relatively unimportant” (2009, p. 421). According to the results, in terms of properties to avoid, bad pricing is the most important while lack of customization is one of moderate importance and poor environment is one of relatively unimportant. And in terms of properties to incorporate user interaction is one of the most important while technical soundness is one of moderate importance and easy maintenance is relatively unimportant (Bond and Beale, 2009). Bond and Beale highlight that these elements are not solid truths but merely “summaries of human opinion” (2009, p. 421) and findings can be used as a heuristic by developers, reviewers, or players that intend to buy a game.

Game review content can be used not only to develop heuristics but also for identifying cultural differences. Understanding how other cultures play games and what they like and dislike in games is important for localization purposes. “As the game industry has globalized, it has also had to deal more closely with the problem of creating global games that also resonate with local audiences.” (Zagal and Tomuro, 2013). By identifying the preferences of gamers from different cultures through reviews, games can be localized to tailor to local players’ likes. In order to examine the intercultural differences in preferences in games Zagal and Tomuro (2013) studied Japanese and American players’ reviews. The results indicate that in terms of preferences Japanese and American players are mostly alike and players from both cultures have “bias for or against particular platforms” (Zagal and Tomuro, 2013) The results also indicate that Japanese players are more outspoken about bugs and localization issues and American players highlight the replayability of the game (Zagal and Tomuro, 2013). Lastly, Zagal and Tomuro (2013) state that even though Japanese players

appear to prefer western games, review content indicates that there are “inherent negative perceptions” toward western games (Zagal and Tomuro, 2013).

Another way to use game review content is to recommend games depending on what the player wrote about the games they played. Meidl et al. (2021) claim they built a game recommending a system that will help players get game recommendations depending on games that they have written positive reviews for. The results for Meidl et al.’s system indicate “high-quality recommendations to users” (2021, p. 28).

2.2 Motivation

Throughout the time many tried to uncover the mystery of “Why do humans do things?” In order to understand human behavior, the motivation behind it must be examined. Philosophers and researchers that examined motivation formed many different theories that attempt to understand the motivation behind human actions. Most of these theories make an effort to single out a single motivation or a small group of it for the purpose of clarifying human behavior (Gorman, 2004). To show the vast amount of theories that are formulated in the field of motivation, some will be presented in this chapter.

According to Gorman (2004), theories on motivations can be separated into 3 categories; instinct-based theories, incentive-based theories, and arousal-based theories.

2.2.1 Instinct-Based Theories

Instinct-based theories argue that motivations are “an instinctive desire” for bodily needs that are necessary to be fulfilled (Gorman, 2004, p. 2). One example of the instinct-based theory is the Instinct Theory.

Gorman (2004) mentions Darwin’s notion that humans have instincts from birth and these instincts are the reason for human actions and behaviors. Gorman highlights the instinct to survive and argues that Instinct Theory claims most human behaviors can be explained by the instinct of survival (2004). Drinking, eating, or sleeping can be given as an example to defend the notion of Instinct Theory (Gorman, 2004). While there is some human behavior that can be explained by instincts, Gorman (2004) argues instincts can only explain the fundamental behaviors but are unable to answer why humans do act on behaviors such as “art or culture” (2004, p. 9). To give an additional example, the act of writing reviews can both challenge and support the notion of Instinct Theory, while it is fundamental for human survival to prevent others from making crucial mistakes, which can be seen as a very early form of reviewing, like eating a poisonous mushroom or coming too close contact with a predator, but can not be explained the idea of writing reviews for a game with the notion of survival instincts.

Homeostatic Drive Theory is another example of Instinct-based theory. Homeostatic drive theory argues there are biological needs that are required to be satisfied for the human body to operate (Gorman, 2004). Gorman gives “food, drink, sleep, warmth, shelter, etc.” (2004,

p. 13) as examples of biological needs. According to the Homeostatic Drive Theory, when there is a deprivation of these needs, the body acts upon it and motivates humans to balance out the deprivation (Gorman, 2004). The name Homeostatic Drive Theory comes from the “body’s tendency to maintain a state of balance” which is called homeostasis (Gorman, 2004, p. 13). Homeostatic Drive Theory is discussed further in the upcoming part of this chapter.

2.2.2 Incentive-based Theories

Incentive-based Theories argue that the behavior is done for the benefit of doing the behavior (Gorman, 2004). Meaning if there is a visible positive outcome that comes from doing a behavior, humans are motivated to do the behavior (Gorman, 2004). While Instinct-based theories are centered around the physiological needs of humans, Incentive-based Theories are more centered around cognitive needs that need to be satisfied (Gorman, 2004).

One of the Incentive-based Theories is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Gorman claims Maslow took into account cognitive elements that drive behavior and “identify the needs that ‘pushed’ people into behavior beyond the most basic fulfilment of survival needs” (2004, p. 45). Gorman (2004) states that Maslow believed humans are developed further than the basic survival motivators and push themselves into bigger conquests. Hence Maslow introduced a pyramid hierarchy that at the bottom there are essential survival needs and cognitive needs towards the top (Gorman, 2004). The hierarchy goes from bottom to top as physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (McLeod, 2018). It is also important to state in order for needs on the top to be treated, the bottom needs are required to be satisfied first (Gorman, 2004). For example, for a human to consider their love and belonging needs, the person must fulfill their physiological and safety needs first.

Many other theories explain behavior through incentives such as the Expectancy Theory. Gorman (2004) suggests that due to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs putting the desire to achieve esteem need as a psychological need rather than “the need for external rewards” (p. 52), discussions arose about whether working is done for the satisfaction that the job grants or the salary that is provided for the work done (McLeod, 2018). Expectancy Theory or Incentive Theory by another name claims humans are driven to work, not because of the satisfaction gained from doing the job but the assumption that there will be a reward for doing it. Another work-related incentive-based theory is the Goal-Setting Theory which is closer to Maslow’s notion of achievement rather than the Expectancy Theory. Goal-Setting Theory argues that to be able to motivate an employee, there need to be achievable goals for the worker to reach (Gorman, 2004). Once these goals are reached it should give a “sense of accomplishment” (Gorman, 2004, p. 54).

2.2.3 Arousal-based Theories

Arousal-based Theories are generated by combining biological-based motivation theories and cognitive-based motivation theories (Gorman, 2004). One example of Arousal-based

Theory is Drive Reduction Theory. Drive Reduction Theory is considered to be the “Grand” Theory due to the notion that it explains all human behavior (Gorman, 2004, p. 60). Gorman states Drive Reduction Theory can be considered a combination of the Homeostatic Drive Theory and Learning Theory (2004).

Drive Reduction Theory claims “behavior is directed towards reducing the tension that is associated with unpleasant drives” (Gorman, 2004, p. 59), and the behavior that manages to reduce the tension most is learned and used for the unpleasant drive repeatedly. Gorman claims according to Hull, every human behavior in some sort of way is an attempt to reduce tension (2004). While this is the case, according to Gorman many examples can be given to argue against Drive Reduction Theory, one being gambling (2004). Gorman argues gambling can be considered an attempt to get amusement rather than reduce tension or eliminate an unpleasant drive.

Another example of a theory that can be considered a combination of biology and cognition Optimal Level of Arousal Theory considers arousal as a fundamental need that is both innate and gained later on (Gorman, 2004). The theory argues if a certain activity delivers arousal that would overcome the negative outcome that might happen as a result, “then there is an incentive to do it.” (Gorman, 2004, p. 66).

2.2.4 Self-Determination Theory

One important aspect of all the aforementioned theories is while they try to explain motivation itself, they fail to take into account the lack of motivation a particular person can have. Self-Determination Theory investigates not only the impulse that builds the foundation of self-motivation and the circumstances that influence it positively, but also the circumstances that influence it negatively (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan, two factors can make people motivated to do an activity;

- the person can have intrinsically motivated to do it, meaning the action in itself is an enjoyable activity,
- there can be an external element that incentivizes the action (2000).

Because of the functional and experiential differences between self-motivation and external regulation, a major focus of SDT has been to supply a more differentiated approach to motivation, by asking what kind of motivation is being exhibited at any given time. By considering the perceived forces that move a person to act, SDT has been able to identify several distinct types of motivation, each of which has specifiable consequences for learning, performance, personal experience, and well-being.

Intrinsic Motivation, CET, and Extrinsic Motivation

Deci and Ryan (2000) define intrinsic motivation as the fundamental predisposition to discover and overcome challenges, enhance abilities, and discern. As previously mentioned

Self-Determination Theory not only examines intrinsic motivation but also the circumstances that influence it positively and negatively. The Cognitive Evaluation Theory framework is designed as a sub-theory to the Self-Determination Theory that focuses on the circumstances that influence intrinsic motivation. According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory, three factors promote or impair intrinsic motivation. These three factors are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan also state in order for someone to be intrinsically motivated for an activity, they need to have a personal interest in them (2000). Also, the three factors that promote or impair intrinsic motivation only apply to intrinsically motivated activities and not extrinsically motivated ones (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (2000) argue when someone tries to “foster certain behaviors in others, the others' motivation for the behavior can range from amotivation or unwillingness, to passive compliance, to active personal commitment” (p. 71). According to Deci and Ryan, this range is dependent on how much the behavior that is trying to be fostered is “internalized” (p. 71).

Self-Determination Continuum

As mentioned previously according to Self-Determination Theory, there is a range of motivations depending on how internalized the behavior is. Deci and Ryan (2000) identify six levels that have different internalization for a behavior. From least internalized to the most, these 6 levels are;

1. Amotivation
2. External Regulation
3. Introjected Regulation
4. Identified Regulation
5. Integrated Regulation
6. Intrinsic Regulation

In the state of amotivation the person do not aim to perform the action (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Yet according to Deci and Ryan, this does not mean a person in the state of amotivation would never act, someone in the state of amotivation can act but “without intent” (2000, p. 72). External regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation are all under extrinsic motivation. The first type of extrinsic motivation is external regulation, these actions are executed only to please an external request or in order to get a reward (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Introjected regulation is another type of extrinsic motivation that is executed to escape “guilt or anxiety” or for self-enhancement (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 72). From this point, the behavior starts to become more internalized, with identified regulation the person acknowledges the act is important for themselves, and with integrated regulation, the person completely agrees the act is one of their “values and needs” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 73) Even though integrated regulation is quite similar to intrinsic motivation, what separates them from each other is, intrinsic motivation is done for the gratification obtained from the behavior while in the integrated regulation the behavior is still done to “attain separable outcomes” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 73).

2.3 Previous Research

In this thesis, the previous research done for investigating the motivation to produce word-of-mouth will be presented chronologically to give a better picture of how the information is passed on from one research to another. It is also worth mentioning that definitions for terms that are given by past researchers will be used heavily as every researcher uses different definitions for the same terms or uses different terms to define the same term, these occasions are pointed out when there is such a case.

2.3.1 Traditional WoM Research

One of the earliest and most influential research to investigate the motivation for word-of-mouth is done by Dichter. Even though Dichter's work is an early effort to uncover motivation to produce word of mouth, what this research has proposed is still considered well established given that it still influences research on word-of-mouth and motivation. Dichter's main premise was no one would suggest or oppose a product they "get something out of it" and argued this something is some kind of satisfaction (1966, p. 148). Dichter presents four major categories that all motivations to speak about a service or a product would fall into Product-Involvement, Self-Involvement, Other-Involvement, and Message-Involvement (1966). Dichter believed that when a consumer uses a product or a service, a "tension" emerges and the only way to "restore the balance" is to talk and recommend the consumed product or service (1966, p. 148). This balance idea is used in other papers as well to explain different tensions between the reviewer and the community or reviewer and the service provider (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Lampel and Bhalla, 2007). "Distinctly pleasurable (but also certain un-pleasurable) experiences have a tendency to call for mental repetition in the form of speech whenever a fitting occasion offers itself" (Dichter, 1966, p. 149). He also argued the talk itself can also "serve to relive the pleasure the speaker had obtained" (Dichter, 1966, p. 149). These motivations fall under Product Involvement. In this research, Self Involvement is expanded as the emphasis on self than the product and used as a tactic to "gratify certain emotional needs" (Dichter, 1966, p. 148). Dichter also argues these "emotional needs" can all be included under "self-confirmation" (1966, p. 148). Self-confirmation is frequently questioned for whether or not it is a motivation factor for producing word-of-mouth (Dellarocas and Narayan, 2006). Some studies indicate that self-confirmation is in fact a motivator for word-of-mouth production (Dellarocas and Narayan, 2006). Dichter (1966) gave the reason why people self-confirm via talking about products and services as; "Gaining attention, Showing connoisseurship, Feeling like a pioneer, Having inside information, Suggesting status, Spreading the gospel, Seeking confirmation of own judgment" (p. 150). While Dichter (1966) used these as a reason to self-confirm, there are studies that also show "to gain attention", "show connoisseurship" as a means for people to self-enhance themselves (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 527).

Dichter explains other involvement as a "need to give" something, "share" contentment, and "express care, love or friendship" (1966, p. 148). "In these instances, the recommendation takes the place of "gift" (Dichter, 1966, p. 148). This definition of other-involvement is closely matching with altruism as "some explanations for gift-giving have tended to focus on

altruism” (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007, p. 449). It should also be pointed out that according to Lampel and Bhalla (2007) reputation-seeking is a “key motivating factor” for gift giving along with altruism. To clarify further, while Dichter (1966) argues in other-involvement the recommendations are given as a gift and “The product serves mainly as instruments which help express sentiments of neighborliness, care, friendship, and love” (p. 151), the studies show that the gift-giving is not a purely altruistic act it is also an act to seek reputation, seek status and reciprocate (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007; Sherry, 1983). It is also worth noting that while this is an error, it is only a categorization error, later studies prove that all listed in other-involvement as a motivation factor are as a matter of fact a motivation factor to produce word-of-mouth. (Cheung and Lee, 2012)

In another research Sundaram et al. (1998) claim that motivation to produce word-of-mouth depends on the “consumption experiences”. Hence, “Recognizing the possibility that consumers' underlying motivations to engage in WOM may differ depending upon the nature of “consumption experiences,”” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 527). Therefore, Sundaram et al. separated word-of-mouth into two separate categories; positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM). Their research has concluded that producing positive word-of-mouth communication has four motivators;

1. “altruism” which they define as “ the act of doing something for others without anticipating any reward in return” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 529),
2. “product-involvement” was introduced by Dichter (1966) and was defined as “Personal interest in the product, excitement resulting from product ownership, and product use,” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p.529),
3. “self-enhancement” which they defined as “to show connoisseurship, to project themselves as experts, to enhance status, and to seek appreciation” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 527). It is also worth noting that Sundaram et al.’s (1998) “self-enhancement” draws parallels with Dichter’s (1966) “self-involvement”.
4. And the last motivator for producing positive word-of-mouth according to Sundaram et al. (1998) is “helping the company.”.

While Sundaram et al. (1998) also declare “helping the company” is an act of “altruism”, they defend the item as the recipient end of the help being only the company in “helping the company” drove them into making it separate from “altruism”. In terms of producing negative word-of-mouth, Sundaram et al. (1998) identified four motivators as well. First, Altruism which they clarify as “to prevent others from experiencing the problems that they had encountered” (p. 530). Secondly, anxiety reduction which they describe as using word-of-mouth “as an avenue to vent their anger” and “sharing their negative experiences with others helped in easing their anger, anxiety, and frustration” (p. 530). Third, vengeance which they delineate as explicitly advising others not to “patronize a particular business” (p. 530). And lastly, advice-seeking is “to seek advice when engaging in NWOM communications” (p. 530).

2.3.2 e-WoM Research

Hennig-Thurau et al.’s (2004) research is one of the first research on electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM in short. Thus, it became a leading research in the field and is still

cited heavily to this day (Yoo et al., 2013; Cheung and Lee, 2012; Hussain et al., 2022). The research took traditional motivations to produce word-of-mouth and “expected to be of relevance for eWOM” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 40). Hennig-Thurau et al. created five umbrellas that are relevant for electronic word-of-mouth motivators; “Focus-Related Utility, Consumption Utility, Approval Utility, Moderator-Related Utility, Homeostase Utility” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 41).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) established focus-related utility includes four motivators: concern for other consumers, helping the company, social benefits, and exerting power. Focus-related utility involves motivations that “adding value to the community is an important goal of the individual” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 42). Therefore, concern for other consumers which is an altruistic act that is done for the community, helping the company which is described by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) as a way to give something back to the company for the positive experience. It is also suggested in this research that giving something back to the company is in line with equity theory. Equity theory suggests that consumers always try to be in a state of equilibrium with the company. For instance, if a company provides an exceptional service or experience then consumers advocates and recommend in other words help the company the product to equilibrate the “output/input ratio” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 42). As previously mentioned, the idea of balancing and equity is used by Dichter (1966) as well, but in upcoming paragraphs, this bilateral relation between Dichter’s (1966) balancing and Henning-Thurau et al.’s (2004) equity theory will be discussed further as Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) also uses a similar balance theory for different motivations.

Another motivator under the roof of Focus-Related Utility is social benefits. Social benefits can be defined as the reason consumers write comments on platforms to be a part of the platform and become a part of the community in it, in short, a sense of belonging emerges from the interaction within the platform. This subject is further unpacked in the following paragraphs of this chapter. Lastly, exerting power over companies is similar to “vengeance” that was introduced by Sundaram et al. (1998) as a reaction to a negative experience from the product which is “to influence the way a company and its image are perceived,” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 42). As mentioned in previous chapters about how impactful word-of-mouth is, consumers punish companies for negative experiences through exerting power and reward companies for positive experiences by helping the company. Even though exerting power and concern for customers is very close as an activity and result-wise, the target is the customer in one and the company in the other which makes them drastically different motivations. It should also be pointed out that exerting power can also be explained by equity theory, in order to equilibrate negative experiences from the company, the consumer punishes the company orderly.

Another umbrella that is identified by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) is Consumption Utility. Consumption Utility has been described as consumers can also be motivated to produce word-of-mouth after they read a review or comment about the product. Consumption in this context refers to consuming any kind of transcript that is been written by another consumer of that particular product. An example that is given in the research for this utility is post-purchase advice seeking, “This postpurchase advice-seeking motive is concerned with

acquiring the skills necessary to better understand, use, operate, modify, and/or repair a product” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43).

According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) approvals are separated into two; formal approval and informal approval. One example that can be given to formal approval is the “helpful” feature in Steam. With the helpful feature, Steam users can deem a review helpful which means they approve the reviewer and makes the review to be shown more frequently to the other users. Formal approval happens when the approval is presented through the platform and used to create a “ranking”. In the case of Steam, the helpful feature makes it so that the most helpful review on the top of the review section ultimately creates a sort of ranking. Another example that can be given to the ranking system is Amazon’s “Top Reviewers”. Informal approval on the other hand is when an individual reaches out or goes publicly to praise the contributions of the contributor. Hennig-Thurue et al. (2004) claim two motives are under approval utility; self-enhancement and economic rewards. As previously mentioned, self-enhancement is a motive to seek appreciation and gain recognition (Sundaram et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). An Economic reward can be any monetary incentive that comes as a result of contributions. This can be doing reviews on your own website, having a channel where you do review games on YouTube, or getting free games from developers in exchange for reviewing them can be considered economic rewards.

Moderated Related Utility, in the contemporary world with e-commerce/online shopping being the dominant way of acquiring products and goods, “the consumer has been unable to reach the appropriate individual at the company involved in the dissatisfying exchange” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 44). Thus, consumers produce electronic word-of-mouth, for complaining and hoping readers of the word-of-mouth contact them and have a solution to the issue.

Lastly, Homeostase Utility, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) use, similar to Dichter’s (1966) balance theory, a balance theory which claims humans are in a balanced state but when a very satisfying or dissatisfying experience is created by consumption, the state of balance is broken and “balance can be restored by writing a comment on an opinion platform” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 44). In this research, homeostase utility has 2 motives under it; expressing positive emotions and venting negative feelings. Even though Homeostase Utility and Focus-Related Utility are similar, the main difference is, in Focus-Related Utility the balance is between the consumer and the company. If the experience is good, the consumer rewards the company, or if the experience is bad, the consumer punishes the company, in another word the input and output are between consumer and company or service. In contrast, balance theory in Homeostase Utility is internal balance within a human.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) suggest from the past literature eleven motivations have arisen; concern for other consumers, desire to help the company, social benefits received, exertion of power over companies from Focus Related Utility, post-purchase advice-seeking from Consumption Utility, self-enhancement, economic rewards from Approval Utility convenience in seeking redress, hope that the platform operator will serve as a moderator from Moderator Utility, expression of positive emotions, and venting of negative feelings from Homeostase Utility.

Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2004) research indicate only concern for other customers, positive self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, and to a minor degree, advice-seeking motivates consumers to produce electronic word-of-mouth out of eleven motivators found in the past literature.

Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) claim online reviews are a public good meaning an individual put in "time and effort" (p. 2) to create an online review, and the entire society benefits from it. While the entire society benefits from the contribution of the reviewer, this does not indicate the reviewer has a purely altruistic motive to produce word-of-mouth. In order to understand whether or not the motivation to produce word-of-mouth is purely altruistic or not, Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) propose to use the "crowding-out effect" (p. 2). Crowding-out effect is a phenomenon that labels situations as if a contribution from an individual is altruistic, the contributions "tend to diminish if a third-party increases its contributions" (Dellarocas and Narayan, 2006, p. 2). One example that can be given is when organizations donate large sums of money they tend to not give charity names in order to not trigger a crowding-out effect so that the charity can continue getting donations from individuals. Dellarocas and Narayan's (2006) results indicate that altruism and concern for others is in fact not a "primary motivation for posting online product reviews" (p. 5). Self-expression and self-confirmation, on the other hand, is the leading motivation for posting online product reviews.

Lampel and Bhalla (2007) claim past research can not fully capture the social motivations to produce word-of-mouth and highlights motives like seeking status and prestige are not examined enough. In order to fill this research gap declared by Lampel and Bhalla (2007), status-seeking is investigated as an important motive to produce word-of-mouth. In this research, status-seeking is defined as a "social passion" (p. 435) that urges people to invest time and effort in order to give "the gift of their experience to others without a direct benefit to themselves" (p. 435) and claims this "social passion" makes online communities continue "survive and grow" (p. 435) due to social passion is a safe supply for continuous participation (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007). "Status seeking consists of activities designed to improve an actor's standing in a group" hence status-seeking activities produce "prestige" (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007, p. 437). The research claims there are varied reasons why people seek status, it may be for economic reasons, social benefits, or for "psychological and emotional reasons" (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007, p. 437). Lampel and Bhalla (2007) claim and cite that "gift-giving is closely linked to status-seeking (Sherry, 1983)." and continue in online communities, the act of "gift-giving" can be done through writing thoughts and knowledge. As mentioned before some explanations for gift-giving tend to focus on altruism (Dichter, 1966), yet results of Lampel and Bhalla's (2007) research suggest producing word-of-mouth is "strongly associated with building online identity and online status seeking" (p. 444).

Yoo and Gretzel (2008) highlight how impactful electronic word-of-mouth is, due to the nature of electronic word-of-mouth, the information is easily transferable, permanent, and accessible to many. The research indicates seven motivations that are appropriate for word-of-mouth that is produced for the tourism sector. "Enjoyment or hedonic motivation; the exertion of collective power over companies; venting negative feelings; concerns for other consumers; helping the company; expressing positive feelings; and self-enhancement." (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008) are picked to be examined whether or not they are a motivating factor to

produce word-of-mouth. Exertion of collective power over companies, venting negative feelings; concerns for other consumers, helping the company, expressing positive feelings, and self-enhancement all have been mentioned previously and presented in this paper as these motivations are researched heavily. Enjoyment or hedonic motivation is defined as expressing joy and sentiments about an experience is a part of the experience as well and “many people simply enjoy sharing their travel experiences” (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008, p. 287) Even though enjoyment and hedonic motivation are presented as a motivation for tourism (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), enjoying sharing any experience can be considered a motivation to produce word-of-mouth. The results indicate that “helping a travel service provider, concern for other travelers, and needs for enjoyment or hedonic motivation and positive self-enhancement” are the dominant motivations to produce word-of-mouth (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008, p. 291). The results also indicate that venting negative feelings are the least influential motive to produce word-of-mouth.

Cheung and Lee (2012) in order to uncover “why consumers spread positive eWOM in online consumer-opinion platforms” (p. 218) identified four “goal” terms to explain why individuals produce word-of-mouth. While most studies find motivators from past studies or draw parallels to older studies, these studies usually come from customer research and economic research grounds (Sundaram et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Bronner and de Hoog, 2011; Ho and Dempsey, 2012). Although word-of-mouth has a connection to these research areas, it should not be forgotten that motivation is a part of psychology as well. This research is precious in this regard as it uses a rather distinct field of literature compared to others. Based on social psychology, “egoism, collectivism, altruism, and principlism” are established (Cheung and Lee, 2012, p. 219).

Egoism in this research refers to providing a contribution to the public for personal benefit (Cheung and Lee, 2012). Cheung and Lee (2012) also acknowledge researchers in varied different fields consider every action of individuals gravitates toward “self-interest”. Cheung and Lee (2012) claim egotistic motivators are reputation and reciprocity. Both of these motivators are mentioned previously in Lampel and Bhalla’s (2007) research where research claim producing word-of-mouth closely resembles the act of gift-giving and while gift-giving is assumed an altruistic action the results revealed that gift-giving is an action for seeking status.

Collectivism in this research refers to providing a contribution to the public for a group’s benefit (Cheung and Lee, 2012). Cheung and Lee (2012) expand by defining collectivism as people with a motivation to share their “knowledge for the benefit of the whole group rather than personal return” (p. 220). Since the “group” is a vital part of collectivism, a sense of belonging is selected as the motivator. This motivator was also mentioned in the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004).

Altruism refers to providing a contribution to the public for one or more individuals' benefit (Cheung and Lee, 2012). People who have altruistic goals are inclined to come forward and share their experiences without anticipating reciprocity (Cheung and Lee, 2012). “Enjoyment of helping has been acknowledged by researchers as an altruistic factor to explain individuals' willingness to share knowledge” (Cheung and Lee, 2012, p. 221). It is important to not confuse Yoo and Gretzel’s (2008) “enjoyment” motivator and Cheung & Lee’s (2012)

enjoyment of helping. While both of the motivators are about gratification for the word-of-mouth producer, Yoo and Gretzel's (2008) "enjoyment" comes from articulating the experience while Cheung and Lee's (2012) enjoyment comes from helping.

Principlism refers to providing a contribution to the public out of principle (Cheung and Lee, 2012). An individual producing word-of-mouth because somebody has to is a great example of principlism. Cheung and Lee (2012) propose "a strong sense of moral obligation" (p. 221) as a motivator for principlism.

Even though Cheung and Lee (2012) present goals and motivations, the research also draws attention to an important term as well, self-efficacy. Cheung and Lee (2012) define self-efficacy as an individual assessing their ability to accomplish a task, in this instance producing word-of-mouth. To capture the premise Cheung and Lee (2012) argue that "the motivations of performing a behavior do not stem from the goals themselves, but from the self-evaluation that is made conditional on their fulfillment" (p. 219) and claim knowledge self-efficacy is also an act as a self-motivator when it comes to producing word-of-mouth. To sum up "higher knowledge self-efficacy about a purchasing experience leads to a higher tendency to spread eWOM in online consumer-opinion platforms" (Cheung and Lee, 2012, p. 221).

The results of the research of Cheung and Lee (2012) indicate three motivations are related to producing word-of-mouth; reputation, a sense of belonging, and enjoyment of helping. The study also claims out of these three, a sense of belonging is the most impactful in terms of motivating to produce word-of-mouth.

Ho and Dempsey (2012) approach differently on how producing word of mouth is perceived. They claim producing word of mouth can be simplified as a "conversation between two sources" (Ho and Dempsey, 2012, p. 1001). This way of viewing the interaction opens up a new way to find and assess motivators. Accordingly to the unique way of perceiving word-of-mouth production Ho and Dempsey (2012) use Schutz's (1966) three-dimensional interpersonal behavior theory called FIRO (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation). Ho and Dempsey (2012) find three interpersonal needs that can motivate an individual to get involved with interpersonal communication. "People engage in interpersonal communication because they are motivated to express one or more of three interpersonal needs: inclusion (need to be part of a group/need for attention), affection (show appreciation and concern for others), and control (need to exert power in one's social environment)" (Ho & Dempsey, 2012, p. 1001).

Inclusion is separated into two, the need to belong and the need to be unique. Ho and Dempsey (2012) defined affection as "the need to be altruistic" (p. 1001). Even though past research suggests altruism as selfless and actions without expecting direct benefit from it, Ho and Dempsey (2012) however argue altruism is an act for "the need for affection" (p. 1001).

The results indicate that the need for inclusion and affection is the most impactful motivator when it comes to interpersonal interaction or word-of-mouth communication (Ho and Dempsey, 2012). This implies that "two of the three key dimensions" of Schutz's (1966) theory are motivators for word-of-mouth communication. In terms of the need for inclusion

only the need to be unique is found to be the motivator for word-of-mouth communication (Ho and Dempsey, 2012).

In the next chapter, the justification for why this particular subject has been selected for the research is presented. Furthermore, the method chosen to investigate what motivates players to write game reviews is explained. Lastly, the pilot study that has been conducted before the actual study and what has improved for the actual study is discussed.

Author	Motivation
Dichter, 1966	Product-Involvement, Self-Involvement (Self Confirmation), Other-Involvement, Message-Involvement
Sundaram et al., 1998	Altruism, Anxiety Reduction, Vengeance, Advice Seeking
Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004	Concern for other Customers, Extraversion/Positive Self-Enhancement, Social Benefits, Economic Incentives, Advice Seeking
Yoo and Gretzel, 2008	Concern for other Customers, Self Enhancement, Social Benefit, Economic Incentives
Bronner and de Hoog, 2011	Self-Directed, Helping other Vacationers, Social Benefits, Consumer Empowerment, Helping Companies
Cheung and Lee, 2012	Reputation, Sense of Belonging, Enjoyment of Helping
Ho and Dempsey, 2012	Inclusion (Individuation), Affection, Altruism

3. Problem

Making a purchase decision for an experience good is risky because of the uncertainty prior to consumption (Nelson, 1974). In order to minimize the risk, potential buyers look for information they can gather for the product (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). As mentioned previously word-of-mouth has an impact on sales (Adigüzel, 2021), design (Bond and Beale, 2009), and consumers' experience (Livingston et al., 2011). It is important to fully understand word-of-mouth because of its impactful nature. Games being an experience good, reviews can make or break a game.

While reviews are crucial for players to make informed decisions about what to play, not a lot of people engage in the activity of producing reviews. It is important to fully capture why some players write reviews so that when designers create platforms where players can review games, they design to tailor reviewers. Further on, reviews have an influence on the potential consumers' purchase decisions and game experiences. Reviews also have an effect on companies' sales and even the design of the game. Hence, reviews are an essential and substantial part of games both from the developers' and the players' perspectives. Thus, it is crucial to understand the reviews and the reviewers.

While there is literature on game reviews' impact (Adigüzel, 2021; Meidl et al., 2021; Zagal and Tomuro, 2013), what motivates players to produce word-of-mouth is lacking in the field. For the purpose of fully capturing word-of-mouth in the game context, there has to be more research centering on game reviews and reviewers. This thesis focus on understanding why some players review games and contribute to the gaming community in a way that most players do not. Due to this obvious missing link in the game literature, "What motivates players to write game reviews?" has been selected as the focus of this thesis.

3.1 Method

In order to understand why a behavior is performed, the motivation behind the act must be examined. In order to examine the motivation behind writing reviews, there should be a discussion with frequent reviewers about their reviewing behavior. To find reviewers, *Steam* has been picked as a platform to search. *Steam* is a game platform where players can buy games and also leave reviews on the games they played. *Steam* also allows players to build themselves communities where players can find other players with similar interests. *Steam* is an ideal platform to find and interact with reviewers due to its accessibility to reviewers. Many games on *Steam* have dozens of reviews that the user can check and reviewers that can be added as a friend to have a discussion with.

While searching for participants, a community has been found that is called "*Reviewers' Guild*". On their *Steam* page, the *Reviewers' Guild* defined them and their members as "*Our members provide superior quality, informative and thorough reviews for all the Steam Community to enjoy. We are the crossroads for Reviewers from all across Steam.*" By the time this thesis is written, the community has more than 800 members and in order to enter the community reviewers must request to join. Players' join requests will be examined by the

Reviewers' Guild Staff and as the *Reviewers' Guild* community page states “only dedicated reviewers are accepted!” Hence, the *Reviewers' Guild* was contacted to find ideal participants for the study. The first person to get contacted in the *Reviewers' Guild* was the “Director” of the community. A message was sent out explaining the intention of the study and the need for participants in order to conduct the study. Due to the Director being an active member of the community and knowing the other members, they have been reached out to find ideal candidates for the study. The Director recommended reviewers who are willing to help out with the study. From the recommendations, ideal members have been selected based on the number of reviews and the content of their reviews. Candidates that had low review numbers and very short review texts have been eliminated. Ultimately, seven participants are picked for the actual study and two participants are picked for a pilot study.

With the aim of understanding the reviewing behavior, a qualitative study has been selected. As a quantitative study might not give the full picture of review motivation, a qualitative study was preferred for the purpose of reviewers explaining themselves and their motives better. Participants have asked to pick between an interview through voice call or answering a set of questions through Google Forms. Every single participant indicated they would prefer writing the answers rather than answering them through voice call due to time differences, not enough available free time, having very hard-to-understand accents, etc. Due to expressing ideas and feelings through text being a common activity for reviewers, writing the answers would not have a hindering effect on the study.

As mentioned previously, by the time this thesis is written there is no research that investigates the motivation behind writing game reviews hence writing reviews of other services and products had to be looked through to find relevant motivations. In the past research, 21 motivational factors are found to be relevant to the act of writing reviews. These motivations are; giving gift (altruism, reciprocity, reputation seeking), self-confirmation and self-expression, inclusion/individualism, affection/altruism, concern for others, self-enhancement, social benefit, monetary incentive, advice seeking, helping the company, venting negative feelings, reputation, sense of belonging, enjoyment of helping, altruism, product involvement, anxiety reduction, vengeance, self-involvement, other-involvement, message-involvement. Of these 21 motivations, two motivations are not applicable to actual game reviews namely advice seeking and message-involvement. Thus, questions are formed in order to examine these 19 motivations. The questions are presented in Appendix A. It should be also mentioned that even though questions are formed through these motivations, a question does not directly query a single motivation. For every single question, the reason why the question was asked and what was anticipated will be clarified in the Results and Analysis Chapter.

3.1.1 Pilot Study

Before the primary research, a pilot study has been conducted with two participants to see if the questions are understood and if the answer match what is expected in terms of clarity. For the pilot study, 29 questions were asked and the questions can be separated into four groups; Demographic, General Questions, Motivation Questions, and *Reviewers' Guild*

Questions. The pilot study displayed some issues. In terms of the phrasing of some questions, some words prevent participants from understanding the question fully, and the formulation of some questions also caused participants to not clarify their answers. Therefore three questions were designed differently in order to receive replies that answer the intended question. After the changes, the participants clearly understood the questions and clarified their answers. Thus, the changes worked as intended. Additionally, “Anything else you would like to say?” to the questionnaire was added as the final question.

3.1.2 Ethical Considerations

At the start of the survey a consent form has been made available for the participants to read. While the survey link has been shared, the participants are also informed about the consent form and asked to read it thoroughly. The consent form states that the survey is conducted for a master’s thesis and clearly states the university and the program of the author of this master’s thesis is enrolled in. Also, the consent form includes information such as a brief explanation of why this study is conducted and how can their answers shape the future of game review platforms. The Consent form also touches on the subject of anonymity and clearly states the results will be kept private and deleted after the thesis is completed. Lastly, the consent form indicates the participants are free to not complete the study or asked to be removed from the analysis. The consent form is presented in Appendix B.

Also in terms of anonymity, participants are asked to give themselves an alias that can be used for the study and stay anonymous. Further on, part of the answers that has private information, like social media, is extracted from the answer.

4. Results and Analysis

In the following chapter results of the aforementioned questionnaire have been submitted and selected answers from participants have been analyzed for motivational factors. Motivations that are found in the answers are presented and explained. Further on, the motivation behind each question and why they have been asked are also discussed.

4.1 Demographic Questions

Six demographic questions have been asked in order to obtain information about the participants. Three demographic questions that are related to the age, sex, and location of the participants have been asked. The results indicate the age range is between 23 to 43. Most participants are in their twenties while only one participant is in their thirties and two participants are in their forties. In terms of sex, all participants indicate they are male except for one who prefers not to say. In terms of location, the research has one participant each from Indonesia, Brunei, the USA, Egypt, the Czech Republic, and two participants from Canada.

Are there other products and services that you review apart from games?

This question has been asked in order to understand if the participants have a tendency to review products and services in general. The answers indicate that most participants do not review products and services other than games. One answer indicates they used to but, they only review games currently. Another reviewer expressed;

“Well I used to be quite active on my IMDB account- so I loved to review movies too. But not really anymore, apart from making entries for the movies' "Parents Guide" section.

Therefore, games are and will forever be my go-to, looks like! I mean do I sometimes watch or look at something (a YT video, Netflix show, or university teammate) and think to myself about the strengths & weaknesses? Yes, my reviewing side never turns off!”

DaRevieweD

The part *“I mean do I sometimes watch or look at something (a YT video, Netflix show or university teammate) and think to myself the strengths & weaknesses? Yes, my reviewing side never turns off!”* indicate that reviewing became a form of habit regardless of inscribed or mentally. It should be also noted that *“strengths & weaknesses”* is very close to how the participant reviews games as well, reviewing games with pros and cons of the game is the consistent template the participant uses. This also supports the idea that reviewing became a habit.

How long you have been writing reviews?

In terms of how long participants are writing reviews, three participants state they are writing reviews for six years, two participants stated three years, one participant stated eight years, and one participant stated more than eight years. It can be said all participants are quite experienced in terms of writing game reviews with the least experienced writing reviews for three years and the most experienced writing for more than eight years.

How long you have been playing games?

In terms of how long participants are playing games, all participants state they are playing for more than 10 years. Three participants state they are playing for more than 30 years while the rest of the participants state a number between 10 to 20. It can be said all participants are quite experienced in terms of playing games as well with the least experienced playing games for more than 10 years and the most experienced playing for 37 years.

4.2 General Questions

This set of questions is asked to understand how and why writing reviewing started. Occasionally there is a particular event and a reason that can lead players into writing reviews.

To give an example for an event, the same set of questions has been asked in the pilot study and one participant stated *“I saw the Mixed rating for Darkest Dungeon, and wrote a short, angry review in its defense.”* while expressing their first game review. And to give an example of a particular reason for writing reviews one participant from the pilot study stated *“I became more aware of the absolutely sorry state of the game journalism industry as a whole, I started doing it to counter the enormous amount of incompetence and superficiality in this line of work.”* These kinds of events and experiences are important to investigate as they can also display some motivations to continue producing reviews.

How did you start writing reviews?

This question has been asked in order to get a general sense of reviewing, whether or not there was a triggering point that pushed the reviewer into writing reviews or if this was something that started out when they were young and continued to progress through different products and services they occasionally use etc. Most participants stated that there was not a triggering moment that they recall for starting to write reviews. While some do actually have a triggering point;

“Once more, if not for IGN- I would have never gotten into it. I don't have the dedication, patience, or tech savvy to have my own website (maybe one day) and so Steam was the ideal choice to connect with people and discuss my reviews. Actually, it was a friend from my A level days who first introduced the platform to me, so they get my utmost gratitude.

I can't quite remember what drove me to it, it's all so vague now... But I think it was because I HAD TO tell people about the brilliance of a game. I believe it was Saints Row IV."

DaRevieweD

In this response, the part *"I HAD TO tell people about the brilliance of a game. I believe it was Saints Row IV."* indicates that Product Involvement was the triggering point to produce a review. As previously mentioned Dichter believed that when a consumer uses a product or a service, a "tension" emerges and the only way to "restore the balance" is to talk to and recommend the consumed product or service (1966). According to Dichter (1966), this was sorted as one of the Product Involvement motivations.

Why did you start writing reviews?

This question has been asked in order to get a general sense of reviewing as well. To be able to fully capture the behavior the first reason why the behavior is done should be investigated. With this question what is trying to achieve is to identify motivation to produce the first review the participants have written. For example, a participant having a terrible experience with a game who wanted to express their anger might indicate venting negative feelings as motivation and so forth.

"I tend to forget things easily so I wrote reviews to remind myself of what I think of the games that I played and how I enjoyed them."

Tom

As mentioned previously Dichter (1966) argued word-of-mouth also "serve to relive the pleasure the speaker had obtained" (p. 149) and this motivation falls under Product Involvement. The participant stating *"I wrote reviews to remind myself of what I think of the games that I played and how I enjoyed them."* as the reason to write reviews implies the reviews serve as a tool to relive the game experience.

"I grew as a gamer, and writing reviews of the games I play is part of my devotion to gaming. Aside, it's satisfactory to know that people have read your words and found them helpful or informative."

Meyzmo

According to Yoo and Gretzel (2008) expressing joy and sentiments about an experience is a part of the experience as well. Participant stating *"writing reviews of the games I play is part of my devotion to gaming"* implies they also consider reviews as a part of the game experience and hence motivated to write reviews as a part of "gaming".

“I hoped others might benefit from my experience and more thoroughly written reviews, as some games had stupid or paltry ones.”

Fruit N Doggie

In this answer, only one motivational factor is visible, concern for others. The participant indicates that some games do not have quality reviews that would help potential consumers make an informed decision so the participant writes reviews to prevent consumers from making bad purchase decisions.

“1) Experimentation phase- when I first began, it was purely because I was in that "wanting to be a writer" part of my life, but without the writing talent of course. I don't think anyone even read them yet then. It was just for me. Like a diary entry XD

2) Fame seeking- the possibility of becoming popular is definitely a huge daydreaming prospect for me. Of course, I knew zilch about how to rake in an audience or which channels to promote said reviews once I had gotten them up there on Steam. But that didn't discourage me, I was deep into the glamour of what could be~

3) Personal gains- so again, I just had my head up in the clouds. But I thought I could reap some side income, score free games, and whatnot. Though that didn't happen until like 2021 XD”

DaRevieweD

In this answer, two motivational factors are visible. Firstly, as the participant states, fame-seeking. Dichter (1966) argued that there are reasons such as feeling like a pioneer, suggesting status, and gaining attention to write reviews, and combined all of them under Self-Involvement. All these reasons are related to fame and fame-seeking hence Self-Involvement can be considered a motivation to write reviews for the participants. The second visible motivation is a Monetary Incentive. Participant stating *“I could reap some side income, score free games, and whatnot.”* implies money and free games as a reason to write reviews.

4.3 Motivation Questions

15 motivation questions have been asked in order to investigate what motivates players to write game reviews. As mentioned previously, there is no research about review motivation particularly in the game industry by the time this thesis is written. Hence, research from different services and products is used in order to identify review motivations. The motivations that are found from previous research turned into questions. It should be said that even though motivations are turned into questions, the form of the questions allows participants to express different motivations. Meaning in a question that investigates concern for others as a motivational factor, the question is formed in a way that participants can hint at a sense of belongingness as their motivation to write reviews.

What do you personally think motivates you to write game reviews?

This question has been asked to understand whether the reviewers are aware of any motivating factors that are producing their review behavior. The possible responses can show motivators such as; self-enhancement, helping the company, concern for others, etc.

“It depends on the games. For the games that I like, I do it so that more people will know about them. For the games that I don’t like, I do it to give some feedback to the developers. I also did it as a reminder for myself, especially for the games I liked. Sometimes I like to check my old reviews randomly for thoughts like: “oh, I did play games like this!” or “this game was fun”.”

Tom

In this answer, two motivational factors are visible, namely co-creation, and product involvement. *“For the games that I don’t like, I do it to give some feedback to the developers.”* can be considered as a co-creation attempt and a motivation to become a part of the development of the product. Even though not a popular motivating factor in past research, this is due to the nature of the products and services in the research. Zagal et al. state giving feedback is a common characteristic of game reviews and indicate that “game reviews often assume a rhetorical position in which they are a contributing factor to the design and improvement of games” (2019, p. 218). In upcoming questions, additional participants also state the contentment they feel from being a part of the development process as well indicating the idea of co-creation is also a motivating factor to write reviews. The part *“Sometimes I like to check my old reviews randomly for thoughts like: “oh, I did play games like this!” or “this game was fun”.”* is an example of motivation that would fall under Product Involvement. As mentioned before reviews also “serve to relive the pleasure” in this case, the pleasure of a game (Dichter, 1966). In the section *“For the games that I like, I do it so that more people will know about them.”*, even though first seems like a statement that can point to a motivation, the exact reason why the participant would like others to know about the game is not clearly defined. This issue will be further discussed in upcoming chapters.

Another reviewer expressed their idea of what motivates them to write a game review as;

“The idea of sharing my opinion, to know that people can read it to take my opinion into account when making a purchasing decision, to know that the information contains therein helps them in making their own opinion on whether or not to acquire a game.”

CJ

As mentioned previously reviews are for potential consumers to make viable purchasing decisions, writing a review for the sake of helping them is an act of altruism. Altruism as mentioned earlier is “doing something for others without anticipating any reward in return” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 529). As can be seen in the response, the emphasis for the key motivation is on the potential consumers’ purchase decision rather than self, developers, or

other options. It should also be noted that more specifically it can also be considered “concern for others” as the motivator.

“That is probably a combination of several factors, as naming one would be rather incorrect. I enjoy sharing my thoughts with others, and Steam proved itself to be an amazing platform for that because both your friends and followers can easily read them at any time; it feels more “personal”. Writing for some websites is fun too, for sure, but I miss this particular aspect of them. Then, if you become a bit “popular”, the possibility of getting free review copies is motivational, as well; not only because of the free game but because it helps you to reach out to more people due to having an early review.”

Marek

In this response two motivational factors can be seen, self-involvement and monetary incentive. *“I enjoy sharing my thoughts with others”* sharing beliefs and thoughts is called “spreading the gospel” which is a common objective of self-involvement (Dichter, 1966). Another example of self-involvement in the response is gaining attention which is demonstrated as *“helps you to reach out to more people due to having an early review.”* The second motivation that is visible is a monetary incentive, *“Then, if you become a bit “popular”, the possibility of getting free review copies is motivational, as well”* part clearly demonstrates monetary incentive as a motivation.

“It came from a place of having no identity, and I don't mean that to sound so gloomy. It's more like I never felt as recognized in life than when I get validation from my reviews. That was once academia; being a consistent above-average student but then over time, you start to realize there are much more people smarter than you...”

But of course, I always found the idea of a reviewer- having that judgy stance and slight power to sway the opinion of other users to be rather intoxicating! I really have IGN to thank for that initial motivation, though I don't completely agree with their views when it comes to certain games.

Lastly, I cannot deny that I went into it with the goal and agenda of “making it”. So, glory, fortune, and just fanboy/fangirl over me... Of course, I'm nowhere near that at all XD

That said, I am at a stage where I have a very loyal minority of an audience (on Twitter & Steam) and game developers look up to me and value my word. So I feel very good, though at times it is still mighty draining whenever I spent hours on a review and no one bats an eyelash...”

DaReviewed

In this response written by the participant, self-involvement can be identified in three different statements. First, “seeking confirmation of own judgment” is considered one of the objectives of self-involvement, *“I never felt as recognized in life than when I get validation from my reviews”* indicates the participant seeks validation for their reviews hence seeking confirmation (Dichter, 1966). Secondly, *“having that judgy stance and slight power to sway the opinion of other users to be rather intoxicating!”* expresses another common objective

for self-involvement “feeling like a pioneer” (Dichter,1966, p. 150). Third, the part “*I cannot deny that I went into it with the goal and agenda of "making it". So, glory, fortune, and just fanboy/fangirl over me...*” indicates another objective of self-involvement “suggest status”. There is also “*That said, I am at a stage where I have a very loyal minority of an audience (on Twitter & Steam) and game developers look up to me and value my word. So I feel very good,*” which can be considered “suggesting status” (Dichter, 1966, p. 150).

Who do you think you are writing these reviews for?

This question has been asked in order to investigate a broad range of motivational factors such as self-enhancement, self-confirmation, concern for others, and helping the company. A reviewer writing for themselves indicates a motivational factor that focuses on self, hence, motivations such as self-enhancement, self-confirmation, and self-involvement. A reviewer that is writing reviews for others to make informed decisions about their purchases indicate motivations such as concern for others and altruism. And lastly, a reviewer that is writing reviews for game developers indicates a motivation such as helping the company.

Three participants indicated they are writing reviews for other users;

“For people who are still on the fence about purchasing a game, that is trying to get information on the game beyond the description left by the developers, and are trying to get a better understanding of why others would recommend (or not recommend) the game.”

CJ

“Fellow gamers, undecided buyers.”

Fruit N Doggie

“That is kinda hard to answer since some of my reviews are both on Steam and websites. Maybe I would say that I use Steam as a means to bring a bit "longer", descriptive (though spiced up with some quips, so it would not be just a bland "objective manual") work that differs from your average Steam reviews that are either stuff like short pros/cons list (which is the better variant) or wanna-be memes and spam (the worse variant). However, such reviews (like the ones I do) are already the norm on various websites, so there I can only provide what I feel is the best for like-minded readers among the competition.”

Marek

All three answers are indicative of concern for others as a motivational factor.

Some users gave a ranking on who they write reviews for;

“I write it for:

1) Myself- something I can look back on when I am having an off day so that my life is not totally meaningless. And maybe continuously learn from, because my reviewing style and format have changed drastically since my 2016 days. It's also quite cool and embarrassing

to see a game I once "bashed on" or "kissed ass", but then go... "oh my god, what was I thinking!?". Thankfully, that happens extremely rarely.

2) *The developers- I get so happy when a dev thanked me for taking the time and effort to play their games and offer honest insights and things that no one else (players) bothers to point out. Even though, I don't really get much out of it by way of substantial tangible rewards or proper credit. It's cool to feel like an enigmatic masked vigilante because I helped to crush an uncommon bug, or saw a flaw that not many would even have noticed.*

3) *Other reviewers- since reviews are so subjective. It can be a shock to find out that a game I loathed so much was viewed favorably by others. However, it also helped me sharpen and keep an open mind- something that is in scarcity these days due to how PC things can get...*

That said, it also has the opposite effect of being super euphoric. In that, reviewers could be in partial or total agreement on a game's pros and cons. So, everyone's banding together and just being wholesome, exchanging jokes and shoveling out references in the Discord servers.

4) *My "fans" (eww, feels so entitled to say that)- Like I said, I probably only have 50 - 100 (and that's already pushing it lmao). But on the off chance that they spotted my review and left a comment be it on Steam or Twitter, I become like a million bucks!*

I am thoroughly and utterly proud of my online presence. No drama, just being myself and interacting in as civil a manner as I possibly can.

5) *Other users- This is probably the toughest audience to nail down... Simply because they would be the most toxic or most positive. In the former case, I once had someone curse at me because the "review was longer than the game". I mean, they were right but come on! HOWEVER, the good outweighs the bad, because there have been total strangers who popped in on of my reviews and were all "yes, this made me (want to buy/bought it/ wishlist it) and it's as if I have achieved what I set out to do."*

DaReviewed

In this response five motivations are visible. First, "something I can look back on when I am having an off day so that my life is not totally meaningless." indicates reliving the memories of play, according to Dichter, this is a motivational factor called Product Involvement (1966). Secondly, the part "It's cool to feel like an enigmatic masked vigilante because I helped to crush an uncommon bug, or saw a flaw that not many would even have noticed." indicate co-creation as a piece of motivation. As mentioned previously, co-creation is not a common motivational factor in previous research, yet the nature of the product is different in games than the others. Co-creation is encountered once again by another participant this time. Third, a sense of belonging is listed, in "In that, reviewers could be in partial or total agreement on a game's pros and cons. So, everyone's banding together and just being wholesome, exchanging jokes and shoveling out references in the Discord servers." participant mentions reviews bringing people that are like-minded to gather and form a sort of friend group that you can socialize and hang around. Fourth, fans are given a reason for writing reviews and proceed to explain "But on the off chance that they spotted my review

and left a comment be it on Steam or Twitter, I become like a million bucks!” these comments indicate self-involvement due Dichter pointing out suggesting status and feeling like a pioneer as examples of self-involvement (1966). Lastly, other users are mentioned as a group to write reviews for. In the part, *“HOWEVER, the good outweigh the bad, because there have been total strangers who popped in on of my reviews and was all “yes, this made me (want to buy/bought it/ wishlist it) and it’s as if I have achieved what I set out to do.”* concern for others can be seen as the final motivational factor.

“The first is for myself, the second is either to the developers, friends, or potential buyers.”

Tom

This response is also quite similar in terms of ranking compared to the one on the top yet the reason the ranking is not explained adequately to be able to uncover the specific motivational pieces.

One participant indicated they only write for themselves;

“For myself so that I can get my opinions out of my head, and for anybody who is interested in the games I reviewed.”

C

Dichter believed that when a consumer uses a product or a service, a “tension” emerges and the only way to “restore the balance” is to talk and recommend the consumed product or service (1966, p. 148). The part, *“For myself so that I can get my opinions out of my head”* indicates restoration of balance hence this statement can be considered a part of Product Involvement. Also, *“for anybody who is interested in the games I reviewed.”* indicates participants also write reviews for people to make an informed decision for games that they are interested in buying, hence, concern for others is also a motivational factor.

How do you feel when you don’t get “helpful” votes and badges as you anticipated on your reviews?

If reviewing is done for purely altruistic motives then not getting “helpful” votes and badges on reviews would not create any issues. As the reviews are not done in order to get attention, be confirmed by others, or feel like a connoisseur but in order to help others to evaluate the game. So, this question has been asked in order to understand whether or not the participants use reviews to get attention, to feel self-enhanced or not.

Many users indicate they get affected by not getting “helpful” votes as they anticipate and also nearly all that get affected state their discontent about non-review posts such as memes, funny comments, or artwork in the review section getting engagement more than actual reviews.

“It really feels like a letdown. I put effort into them, and when nobody bothers to upvote my work, it's basically saying that it was worthless. Especially when meme reviews get all the attention instead.”

Fruit N Doggie

“It's not a good feeling; it's a mixture of disappointment and annoyance, especially when I find that pointless copy-and-paste ASCII art reviews are much more appreciated than the reviews I put too much effort and time on.”

Meyzmo

A bit let down, but mostly because of Steam's visibility system: a game with too few upvotes will not be portrayed on the game's store page, preventing others those who would find my opinions and comments helpful from seeing my review. Without upvotes, my review is prevented from serving its intended purpose of helping inform potential buyers.”

CJ

While this participant does get affected by a lack of helpful votes, the main reason why this effect is presented is not reaching enough potential consumers and not helping more people. This was not an anticipated response as the main premise was if the person is influenced by the lack of helpful votes it is because of a lack of self-enhancement achieved by it. Yet this response demonstrates that altruistically motivated individuals can also get affected but for a different reason.

Do you from time to time get free (gifted) games to review? If yes, how does that affect your reviewing?

This question has been asked if getting free games is a motivator for reviewers. Getting free games can be considered a monetary motivation and results might indicate whether getting gifted games from game developers to review is a motivating factor for the participants.

Only two participants stated they never received a gifted game to review;

“No, I've never received a gifted game for me to review.”

Meyzmo

All the other reviewers indicate they had games gifted to them in the past;

“Yes, but it does not affect anything. I might state that a game might be too expensive or cheap based on my standard, though, with the price on the store page as a comparison.”

Tom

“If anything I might be harsher on these reviews because I don't want the fact it was a review copy make me go lenient and ignore flaws.”

Fruit N Doggie

“I believe there's an unspoken trust by the developer when giving the game, whether a review key or through Curator Connect, an understanding that should a review result from the gift, it will be an honest review. Therefore, while giving a game will not sway my opinion of the game, I admit to making an extra effort in neutrality when writing my review and to include as much useful information to potential buyers as possible. Should the game be in early access, I make an extra effort to supply constructive criticism behind any point or feature that didn't appeal to me.”

CJ

Yet, all participants that got a free game also indicate they try to review gifted games as neutral as possible.

What do you think about reviewing as a professional one day and earning money from it?

This question is also asked in order to investigate the monetary incentive of reviewing games. But this time the potential of a monetary incentive. Reviewers might look at writing reviews on *Steam* and getting popular to jump-start their careers as professional reviewers. Most of the participants in this research are quite popular in reviewing scenes and very successful in terms of reviewing.

Some participants indicated that they would be very much open to the idea of earning money from reviewing games. One participant actually stated they are already earning money per review;

“I think it'd be fantabulous. A dream come true. I'd never have to worry about working ever again... In other words, there are definitely good prospects in that and it would certainly make the act of playing games more incentivized besides the fun factor!

I don't mean to toot my own horn, but I already do consider myself one; a professional, I mean. It just takes years to continue to hone the craft, build a brand, following, etc.

For one of the reviewer groups that I am a part of, I get to earn \$5 per review on top of getting the aforementioned game key for free. And I am deeply enjoying that at no expense and jeopardy to my reviewing quality.

So, I could envision it right and I for sure am a big advocate for it~”

DaRevieweD

“Sure! I would love to.”

Meyzmo

“I would consider it a dream job, because others suggest it's really unlikely, let alone for me to make a living from it. Maybe some spare spending cash, if that.”

Fruit N Doggie

While some participants indicated they are not willing to do reviewing as a daily job mostly because firstly they assume playing games and reviewing will stop being fun if it becomes a job and secondly the income would not be satisfactory;

“Nah. I review games for fun and changing it into a job will just stress me out. Besides, I don't think you can earn that much just by doing that.”

Tom

“No, thank you. I love my day job and I don't want to become a professional game reviewer unless I'm in desperate need of income.”

C

“I found it doubtful. People who write on a professional level do it as a side gig, often as freelancers, other times with the intended goal to have more visibility for their personal website or channel. One cannot hope for worthwhile pay without spending a lot of time playing games for the sole purpose of reviewing them. I do not want gaming to become work, to become a chore. For me, gaming must remain a hobby, it must remain entertaining.”

CJ

Do you feel more inclined to review games that have high reviews or low reviews?

This question has been asked to investigate the phenomenon of self-expression and self-confirmation. Reviewing low-review games can be displayed as a good place to self-express. According to Dellarocas and Narayan, this is the case because it “allows consumers to showcase their eclecticism and sophistication” (2006, p. 5). As the reviewing for a low-review game might indicate you have a chance to be seen and heard more easily. On the other hand, reviewing a low-review game can also indicate a concern for others as a low-review game are much harder to evaluate for the purchase decision.

Many participants indicated that they review every single game that they play and do not get concerned with review numbers.

“I honestly don't care; I mostly just review what I finished playing, no matter the number of reviews.”

Marek

“I’ve been reviewing all games I’ve played regardless of the game’s review count, except for the odd one I asked for a refund.”

C

“No. I reviewed all games that I played.”

Tom

This possibly means two things, either the participants have a high moral obligation to produce reviews hence they do not care about possible external influences and only focus on the reviews or they perceive reviewing as a part of the experience of gaming. In the first possibility, Cheung and Lee (2012) argue that people that have a high moral obligation are likely to write reviews.

As mentioned before, according to Cheung and Lee, principlism is a form of motivation and principlism refers to providing a contribution to the public out of principle (2012). Reviewing every game that participants play might indicate an example of principlism. And for the second possibility, Yoo and Gretzel state that expressing joy and sentiments about an experience is a part of the experience as well and named it enjoyment or hedonic motivation as a motivation factor (2008). Reviewers might possibly identify writing reviews as a part of the game experience and write reviews for every game they play.

Yet there are some participants that prefer writing reviews for low-review games as anticipated;

“I’m only slightly more inclined to write a review on a game with low reviews, to begin with, as it is more to have few if any, useful reviews, or reviews with a lot of upvotes. This allows my reviews to stand out a bit more among the comments and memes, making it more likely to be useful to potential buyers, and more likely to get upvotes that will prolong its stay on the game’s Steam store page.”

CJ

“In some ways, low reviews, because a thorough review is all the more valuable. However, those are usually on less popular games, so the review doesn’t get much attention.”

Fruit N Doggie

In the first response, the reviewers indicate the usefulness, and in the second response, the value of a review for a low-review game is relatively higher than a high-review one. In both of the responses concern for others is observable. That being said, in the first response reviews in a low-reviewed game standing out more, getting more upvotes and more attention can be argued as a form of self-involvement but the main advantage of said perks of writing a review for a low-review game is argued as “making it more likely to be useful to potential buyers” indicating it is more likely that the motive is “concern for others”.

Do you feel more inclined to write a good review for a game that has bad reviews or write a good review for a game that has good reviews?

This question has been asked to investigate the phenomenon of self-expression and self-confirmation as well. As an ongoing pattern of writing a bad review for a good-reviewed game can indicate self-expression and writing good reviews for a good-reviewed game can be considered seeking validation hence self-confirmation.

“No, and even forego looking at the game's current rating while writing my review. I also try to avoid reading others' reviews as much as possible in order to prevent myself from accidentally using words or expressions used by that author in my own reviews.”

CJ

“Neither. My reviews are not (at least hopefully they are not) influenced by how many good or bad reviews the games have already received.”

C

All users indicate they do not get influenced or hope to not get influenced by the ratings or the reviews of the game that they are reviewing. As already mentioned and shown in the previous question, responses point out that many participants review every game that they play. This suggests an ongoing review pattern is not really possible for many participants.

Are you more likely to review a very bad game or a very good game rather than a middle-of-the-pack game?

This question has been asked to investigate concern for others and principlism. While a very good game or a very bad game can induce some emotions from either frustration or being content, middle-of-the-pack or neutral games can not bring out these emotions. The case of a very good or very bad game will be discussed in the upcoming question. Reviewing middle-of-the-pack or neutral games indicates motivational factors such as concern for others or principlism. As mentioned earlier, perceiving reviewing as a moral obligation would prevent reviewers from having preferences such as this. While good and bad games have many reviews due to said emotional effect, neutral games have naturally less and neutral reviews. Hence it is harder to make a purchase decision with the information given for a neutral game. In terms of a reviewer that is motivated by concern for others would also review middle-of-the-pack or neutral games due to this notion.

Most answers indicate that they do not usually play a game that is deemed “a very bad game” hence the games that they play and review are mostly games that are accredited as good. This proves once again the bi-directionality that is mentioned previously in this master’s thesis. While reviews lead to sales, reviews are “also the outcome of product sales” (Duan et al., 2008, p. 1008).

“Since many of the games I review are ones I pay for myself, I'm much more likely to get a well-reviewed game to begin with.”

“No, I avoid playing very bad or infamous games.”

Meyzmo

Although most answers were stating they play good games so they end up reviewing good ones, one answer indicated that;

“On the contrary, I’m more likely to review a middle-of-the-pack game, as these are the ones potential buyers will be more worried about, more likely to read reviews for additional information on the game, thus more likely to read my review.”

CJ

Yet, the reason why the middle-of-the-pack game is more likely to be reviewed has been communicated less for consumers but more for a self-centered reason. The ending *“more likely to read my review.”* indicates the motivation for picking a middle-of-the-pack game is not due to principledism nor concern for others but to be able to get noticed.

Are you more likely to review a very bad game or a very good game?

This question has been asked to investigate motivational factors such as vengeance, anxiety reduction, helping the company, and Homeostase Utility (venting negative feelings and expressing positive emotions). While the high likeliness of reviewing very bad games might indicate motivational factors such as vengeance, anxiety reduction, venting negative feelings, and exertion of power over companies, the high likeliness of reviewing very good games might suggest motivations such as helping the company and expressing positive emotions.

Every single participant indicated that they do not buy a very bad game hence they do not have a probability to review a very bad game in the first place.

“Most likely a very good game. Not by design, but rather because I’m unlikely to acquire or play a very bad game to begin with.”

CJ

“Definitely the very good game, because I wouldn’t have bought the very bad game to begin with XD Unless I bought it at launch date and I didn’t have a clue as to how it would end up being at all XD XD”

DaRevieweD

Yet these answers can be argued to contradict the questions “Do you feel more inclined to write a good review for a game that has bad reviews or write a good review for a game that has good reviews?” and “Do you from time to time get free(gifted) games to review? If yes, how does that affect your reviewing?”. Firstly, all the participants express that they do not get influenced by the game reviews and scores and many stated they do not even look at reviews to not get influenced by them. While specific reviews might not influence the participants, they do get influenced by the overall score of the game as they already perceive the game as

“good” in order to acquire them. As there is no other possibility of comprehending a game being “good” or “bad” without checking the reviews or the score of the game. Secondly, all participants apart from one indicate they do receive gifted games from game developers and some from fans to play and give their honest opinion, naturally, there should be bad games that get gifted to the participants as well as good games. One possibility gifted games cover a small part of games reviewed compared to the rest hence they did not get recalled when asked.

Do you feel like you write these reviews as a gift to the community?

This question has been asked to investigate the gift-giving behavior that is mentioned previously. In this master thesis, two gift-giving notions are presented. Firstly, Dichter’s motivational factor “Other Involvement” where the reviewer has a tendency to give something and share satisfaction, and “recommendation takes the place of “gift”,”(1966). Dichter’s gift-giving behavior can be considered an altruistic act as altruism “is the act of doing something for others without anticipating any reward in return” (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 529). Dichter (1966) argued that gift-giving behaviors are done to convey affection and love. Secondly, Lampel and Bhalla’s research on gift-giving suggests that gift-giving can be done through writing thoughts and knowledge and is “strongly associated with building online identity and online status seeking” (2007, p. 444). The research claims there are varied reasons why people seek status, it may be for economic reasons, social benefits, or for “psychological and emotional reasons” (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007, p. 437). Hence, this question is asked to investigate participants’ point-of-view on whether they consider their behavior of reviewing as a gift-giving.

Only two participants indicate they do see their reviews as a gift to the community;

“While I'm aware that there's a small part of me that's writing it for self-gratification, my main purpose is to help people, to write something useful, so I can indeed perceive it as a gift to the community.”

CJ

While most of the participants indicate either they are hesitant to call it a “gift” to the community or directly rejected the notion that their reviews are a “gift” to the community;

“That's a poetic way of putting it. At first glance, yes... But the more I think about it, "gift" is not really the best word. Do I want my reviews to help the community make an informed decision before buying a game? No question about that! However, is it really a gift if the act of writing a review is free to begin with? It would be like saying social media rants or anything shared for that matter is a gift to someone. And that just wouldn't be. I would instead say that my reviews are more announcements and warnings to the community XD”

DaRevieweD

“No, I see my reviews as a contribution to the larger gaming/game review community. I don't see my work as anything special that will be seen as a "gift".”

C

“Eh, gift sounds kinda arrogant, so I would not describe it like that. However, I had some praise, whether in comments or in DMs afterward, that they are glad for the "work" I do, so maybe it can be seen that way, although I do not view it like that; the community would exist even without me anyway.”

Marek

One of the most noteworthy points of the answers is multiple users articulating they do not perceive themselves as an important figure in the community, which is also asked in one of the following questions, thus their contribution to reviews can not be considered a “gift”. This indicates that even though gift giving is associated with seeking status, some participants believe, a person must have a high existing status to be able to define their contributions as a “gift” (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007).

Do you write reviews in order to help other gamers?

This question has been asked to investigate the motivational factors of concern for others and altruism. Helping potential consumers make intelligent purchasing decisions is mostly the outcome of reviews, yet sometimes this is not the motivation to write reviews. As mentioned previously in the background chapter, there are many factors that motivate reviewers to produce reviews. Thus, this question is asked to uncover, whether the participants' motives to produce reviews are altruistic and due to concern for other gamers.

All participants apart from one indicated that they do write reviews in order to help other gamers;

“Yes, and help inform them before they make a purchase decision about a game.”

CJ

“Yes, kinda. I tend to mention what I don't like about a game so people know what to expect from it.”

Tom

“Yes, after all, it's nice to be nice, right!? There are so many reviews that are just clever one-liners plaguing and hogging all the attention from actual, honest-to-god "review" reviews. Which is why I think my reviews: a) Give a helpful and detailed rundown of the game b) Give me a chance to connect with and further discuss said game c) Give me good karma because the video game industry is actually pretty capitalistic and I for one, know the temptation that is a good deal on Steam (or other online stores), especially now during the Summer Sale now... So if I can help even one or two save their time and money. I know I'd be thankful if someone did that for me.”

DaReviewed

Only one participant indicated that they partially write reviews in order to help other gamers;

“Partially. I know some non-professional game reviewers offer more nuanced opinions, and they have similar tastes in games as I. I value their opinions and recommendations, and I hope my reviews will do the same for them in deciding what games to play or buy next.”

C

The reason why the answer is “partially” is that the reviewer is writing reviews for not the whole game community but for other reviewers. As other reviewers also help them make a purchase decision, participant reciprocate by writing a review to help other reviewers.

Do you feel like you are an influential member of the game community? If yes, do you think this is the case because you write reviews?

This question has been asked to investigate the motivational factors of a sense of belonging, inclusion, and social benefit. Past research indicates reviewers can write reviews to gain social benefits, feel included, and consider themselves as a part of a group. Yet, thinking too influential about one's self might indicate self-enhancement and self-confirmation.

Most of the participants indicate that they do not believe they are influential at all;

“No. I'm merely a single, quieter voice in a large community that has more prolific, more vocal, and more spotlighted gamers/reviewers.”

C

“Not so much. I do put efforts in encouraging others to write good reviews, take steps within the Steam Reviewers' Guild to attempt to give more visibility to other reviews, but not being an extremely social butterfly on social media (which includes Steam Community Groups), I think my influence is too subtle to consider myself influential.”

CJ

“My work surely has some influence, but that widely differs from review to review, as some are more influential than others. However, the community would continue to exist without me, as there are other people who try to write reviews like me, so it is not like my stopping would suddenly change it. Maybe a few loyal readers would be sad for a while, but that is about it.”

Marek

One participant also indicate they do not feel like they belong in the community either;

“No. I feel disconnected from others and like I'm mostly unimpactful.”

Fruit N Doggie

Only one participant indicates they hope to be influential and expressed they belong more to the game community than any other community and that is due to their reviewing;

“GOD I HOPE SO. I do, obviously and it could well be my ego doing the typing right now... But I feel more seen in the game community than I do anywhere else. Developers actually make time for me, trust my judgement and recommend me to other developer friends. Whereas other reviewers that I am well acquainted with (or even foreign and new faces) see me as a hoot. I'm actually in the process of "training" as part of a reviewer group's initiation to establish a potentially greater reach. AND YES as well to answer the 2nd part. I sure think so that it is because I write reviews, for the most part like 85%. Since, it's what I use to introduce and promote myself on Twitter. Though I guess I am also more of a Steam curator now as well. So that's not really just lengthy reviews but succinct and punchy blurbs. I like to think that I am more than my reviews too. With the other 15% of my charm being split between my polite, friendly and goofball manner of interaction. Also, posting game clips and carrying out giveaways.”

DaRevieweD

As far as I know, there is no reputation-based classification for reviewers on Steam. For example, Amazon has a “Top Reviewer”. What do you think about a ranking system for reviewers?

This question has been asked to investigate reputation as a motivational factor. Reputation is one of the egotistic motivations according to Cheung and Lee and if someone would like to boost their reputation on a platform where you can post your thoughts such as *Steam*, they are more likely to post reviews (2012). While there is still an indirect way of gaining a reputation on *Steam* as people can follow you and your reviews, there is no direct label that indicates you are a “Top Reviewer”. Hence someone that motivated to write reviews for gaining a reputation might want a classification system that shows top reviewers.

Only two participants stated that it would be a good idea to have a ranking system;

“It would be nice if Steam would implement something like that, or if it at the very least tried to promote hard-working reviewers and got rid of the "meme curators" that just gave the system a bad reputation.”

Marek

“It's a very good suggestion. I vote.”

Meyzmo

The rest of the participants indicate that the system would be exploited by people that do not deserve it such as “meme curators” mentioned in one of the answers above;

“Not interested. I prefer it to be simple like how it is now. Besides, with so many meme reviews on steam, I don't think it will be relevant.”

Tom

“No. How do you determine who gets the title of Top Reviewer? Quality? Quantity? Popularity? On Steam, we've seen unhelpful reviews get upvoted (many times) because they're funny. People can simply post many single-line reviews, or make funny reviews that aren't informative, and have them upvoted by many followers to earn Top Reviewer. The title means nothing. I think as consumers, it's better to be more critical and analytical about reviews we read than simply go with the title of Top Reviewer. Besides, you can already tell who are the more prolific reviewers on Steam, and people who are curious about these reviewers could/should read their together works to see if those reviewers are serious about what they write.”

C

“I don't think this would be successful. Steam Reviewers are gamers, and gamers find exploits. Already, there are Steam curators that use bot accounts to increase the size of their followers and make their group appear more important than it really is, others have questionable ethics with the writing of their reviews (stealing other people's work, writing reviews for games they haven't even played, etc.), or find funny memes that immensely swell the quantity of upvotes and badges they get for what is essentially a one-liner they repeat over and over, outshining actual reviews. Valve doesn't curate the Steam Community. They depend heavily on exploits to do their work for them, whether figuring out if a game is review-bombed or lowering the value of the ratings of reviews written by some users, even lowering the effect value of upvotes and downvotes of reviews by some users. If Steam offered the prestige of being titled as a Top Reviewer, it would obviously be dependent of some algorithm, and it wouldn't take long for some Steam users to exploit it and get the title without actually deserving it.”

CJ

Either too dependent on the popularity of the reviewer in the first place;

“I think it would just be a popularity contest instead of doing as intended. If Markiplier wrote short reviews, he'd be a Top Reviewer in no time, even though he had no prior experience.”

Fruit N Doggie

Or create more conflict than what it is now;

“And you would be right! For now, the knowledge of which reviewer is excellent or trustworthy is known and disseminated only amongst reviewers and those who follow the

aforementioned Steam groups! It's kind of cliquey and petty. I think a system such as that would be ideal, but at the same time it's impossible to picture due to a number of confounding factors. a) Steam curators with hundreds of thousands of followers but they're memey b) 1000s of helpful votes mean nothing half the time because the content of the review was meant to be comical. c) It would give a further edge to already established reviewers. Meanwhile the smaller ones such as yours truly would be pushed aside even more. d) It would cause a lot of conflict and distrust. Like, people would assume all these top reviewers are corrupt. And therefore, I think there should be a formal process of application and stringent rules. But then again, I kind of dig how it is now. It doesn't feel very territorial or daunting in the slightest.”

DaRevieweD

Do you feel a particular way when you don't review a game?

This question has been asked to investigate product involvement as a motivational factor. In the answers to the previous questions, some examples of Product Involvement have already been encountered. As mentioned previously, interaction with a product or a service creates tension, in order to dissolve this tension, the consumer must talk about the product and reduce the tension (Dichter, 1966). If a reviewer is motivated by product involvement to write reviews then they would feel uneasy and anxious due to the tension that emerged from playing the game.

“Relieved that I will have more time for myself, haha”

Marek

This answer indicates that reviewing is not a particularly fun activity to do but an activity that must be done. The answer indicates the participant might feel a high moral obligation and be motivated through principlism.

“I feel that I left something unfinished, and a slight compulsion to eventually write the review. There are a few games I don't want to review, but that I keep in my active Steam playlist to remind myself that one day, I will need to write a review for it.”

CJ

In this answer, “I will need to write a review for it.” can be given as a good example of product involvement. As mentioned the consumer “must” talk about the product, likewise, the participant indicates they “need” to write a review.

Another participant gave a list of different emotions they feel when they do not write game reviews:

“That's rather vague. But I think I know what you are getting at. I experience a surge of feelings when I am not writing... - Guilt - Joy - Freedom - Fear (of getting rusty) - Pride I am well aware that I don't have to write a review. It's our prerogative as users who

purchased or received a game! But somehow, I have become so synced with reviewing that not leaving a review can make me feel so ambivalent to myself and to the respective devs.”

DaReviewed

Do you enjoy writing game reviews? Do writing game reviews make you remember the good times while playing the game?

The first part of the question has been asked to investigate enjoyment and hedonic motivation as factors when producing reviews. In the answers to the previous questions, some examples of enjoyment and hedonic motivation have already been encountered. As mentioned previously, enjoyment or hedonic motivation is defined as expressing joy and sentiments about an experience as a part of the experience as well and many consumers enjoy sharing their experiences with others (Yoo and Gretzel, 2008). The second part of the question has been asked to investigate product involvement as a motivational factor. In the answers to the previous questions, many examples of Product Involvement have already been encountered.

All reviewers indicate they enjoy or at least mostly enjoy writing reviews;

“I enjoy writing game reviews, and usually try to write it as fresh out of the game as possible, often launching the game while writing it, reloading previous save files to remember a certain experience, which inspires me in what I write.”

CJ

“I mostly enjoy it, but there are rare cases where I am just stuck, and at that moment the writing becomes rather annoying and tiresome than enjoyable. Yes, it sometimes brings me the summary of the "good times" I had... or the atrocious time I had, heh.”

Marek

“It depends on how easy it is to write the review. Some are more troublesome or take more effort, so they aren't as fun. I think the review-writing process emphasizes whatever feelings I have towards the game already. If it was fun, that tends to stand out. If it was horrible, that ruminates in my mind.”

Fruit N Doggie

“Yes. That's how I remember the game after not playing it for so long.”

Tom

4.4 Reviewers' Guild Questions

Four questions are asked that are related to the *Reviewers' Guild*. As mentioned previously, past research indicates a sense of belonging, social benefit and inclusion are some motivations to write reviews. *Reviewers' Guild* is a community that provides all these to a

reviewer. These set of questions have been asked not only to investigate the aforementioned motivations but also to understand the dynamics of a massive review community.

What do you think about the *Reviewers' Guild* as a community?

This question is asked in order to investigate the dynamics and functioning of the community. Even though the community is visible to everyone, there is a difference between being an observer and a member. Hence, this question is asked to the members of the community to get informed about the inner workings of the community and overall get more informed about the Reviewers' Guild.

Most participants state their contentment with the *Reviewers' Guild* even though some indicate complaints about the social aspect of the community is lacking;

“While the Guild has had a much more socially active side to it in the past, it remains a hub for sharing reviews among like-minded individuals, helping to stay motivated. A certain part of the membership diligently shares each and every review they write, others read each and every review that is shared, upvoting other reviews when they are well-written in order to give them more visibility on game store pages. I do wish the social aspects of discussions, forums and chatrooms would reignite to the activity levels of the past, the Guild continues to serve its purpose in promoting the writing of useful and interesting reviews and encouraging newcomers that make an effort to double down on their efforts and thrive to write better reviews.”

CJ

“It's a nice concept where reviewers can help each other when needed, but the community is not really active in some daily, social way. Which is a bit sad, I guess.”

Marek

“I like the guild. The members there take writing reviews seriously and I generally appreciate the opinions that they share about the games I'm interested in.”

C

“It is a friendly and mature community where people can talk about anything related to reviews.”

Tom

How did you feel when you got the invitation to the *Reviewers' Guild*?

This question is asked in order to investigate a sense of belonging, social benefit, and inclusion. In previous research sense of belonging, social benefit, and inclusion are considered to be motivations to write reviews. As mentioned previously *Reviewers' Guild* is selective in terms of its members and reviewers are hand-picked to join the community. Due

to the *Reviewers' Guild* as a community providing these motivations, the invitation to the *Reviewers' Guild* would be quite notable memory. Hence this question is asked to investigate the reactions to the invitation to identify whether the aforementioned motivations are relevant motivations to the participants.

Some users indicate they were quite happy to be noticed and honored to be invited to a community like the *Reviewers' Guild*;

"My entire life flashed before my eyes and my exact words were "OMFG"... Because by that point, I was just a "nobody" and I wasn't even sure my reviews were being viewed much less read. In hindsight, I jumped the gun by thinking that, as there were I'm sure 100s of other reviewers were being recruited concurrently. However, it is undeniable that it provided that initial stim shot and confidence boost for me, so as to not give up yet! How good things were just awaiting me at the corner. That hope still burns ever so strongly, though it grows faint with each passing day."

DaRevieweD

"I was honored! To know that I had been noticed, that the reviews that I had written were judged as good by people who had been at it for much longer than me, and that I had a place among people who are so better than me at this. It motivated me to write more reviews, it motivated me to write better reviews."

CJ

"I was surprised to be invited because I never thought my reviews would catch someone's attention to that degree."

C

While some regarded it as a natural event;

"If I remember correctly, I applied to join by myself, and I knew I would be accepted due to my work. Sounds a bit arrogant, I guess, but since some of my friends and colleagues were there, I did not expect any trouble. Seemed like a formality to me."

Marek

"Nothing."

Meyzmo

It seems like asking for feedback for reviews is quite popular, have you ever asked for feedback as well and why was that the case?

While observing the *Reviewers' Guild*, it is noticeable to see community members asking for feedback on the reviews they have written. This question is asked in order to identify the reason behind this request from the community members.

Most participants indicate they do ask for feedback or they used to;

"I did, and it was to see if there was a way to improve what I wrote. I also wanted to make sure I was still doing a good job at writing reviews, that I hadn't strayed into self-importance, that others actually liked what I wrote, or that they would help me do better if they didn't."

CJ

"Yes, I'd very much welcome any feedback regarding any of my works. I like to know what people think of my work and listen to their criticism. I believe it helps very much in improving your quality and skills."

Meyzmo

"Yes, it helps to improve my reviews. Sometimes you can't see what's wrong with your reviews without others' help."

Tom

While few state they do not ask for feedback;

"I generally don't like feedback, because people seem to fixate on things they dislike. However, it's easy to find them doing the same thing themselves, so it can be very hypocritical and unhelpful. Additionally, if someone is looking for problems, it's easy to spot them, especially when they don't know anything about the game themselves. "Are you sure the game was too difficult? Maybe you just need to git gud, scrub."

Fruit N Doggie

In the community, you can get exposure for good reviews. Did you ever get the exposure and how does it feel to get exposure or not getting exposure?

This question is asked in order to investigate self-involvement as a motivation to write reviews. As mentioned previously in both past research and results sections, gaining attention is also a motivation to write reviews. In the *Reviewers' Guild*, reviews written by members are controlled by a moderator. The ones that are deemed worthy are published in the community's curator where the whole community can read and vote "helpful" to the review. This can be considered a massive exposure and participants that are motivated to write reviews for gaining attention might have a high opinion of the system and feel more intense about getting or not getting exposure.

Only a few participants state they feel positive about receiving exposure and the idea of it. One participant stated that due to the system of *Steam* reviews exposure only feels good because it means the review will be useful for more people;

“While there is a certain gratification felt when one of my reviews is picked by the dedicated moderator to be featured on the Guild's curator, it is knowing that the exposure will increase the likelihood that those that would find my review useful actually find my review. Again, this goes back to the upward spiral of how Steam works: the more upvotes your review gets, the more exposure it receives, the more people read it, the more upvotes it gets, etc.”

CJ

While most participants indicate they do not care or like to get exposure;

“I don't write to get exposure, though I do have guild members befriending me on Steam because of what I wrote. When people like my reviews, it feels good knowing that somebody liked the content and/or my writing style. I do get slightly disappointed when I don't get upvotes on reviews that I put a lot of thought into, but that could also in part due to the popularity and age of the game I reviewed.”

C

“A couple of my reviews have gotten rather popular, but it seems to coincide with games that are really popular. Plus, it's all about lucky timing, because I've posted early reviews that have taken off and ones that were overlooked. The enjoyment is fleeting when it's so arbitrary.”

Fruit N Doggie

“Yes, and it wasn't pleasant.”

Mezmo

Anything else you would like to say?

For the last question, an open-ended question has been asked. Participants can state their thoughts that are associated with the questions or all state something completely different. All and all giving participants an open platform to speak their mind is picked for the last question.

“It'd be great if Steam paid more attention to what reviewers say. We've asked for more space to write longer reviews and have been ignored. We've reported people for bad behavior, such as stealing review copies with no intention of doing a review and being ignored. Not being treated more seriously, when reviews help popular games get good reputations and increase sales, is rather aggravating.”

Fruit N Doggie

“I have read tens of thousands of reviews in the past few years, from without the Guild and elsewhere on Steam. I am humbled by the quality of the work I have seen others put into their reviews. I believe such reviews are invaluable contributions to the Steam community, and hope that the system will continue to be improved upon, whatever shape that may take in the future.”

CJ

“There are quite a lot of dishonest curators who somehow use the system to their advantage, whether it is posting purely positive reviews to get more games, or "selling" the copies to others. People lot of say that journalists are paid and such (I personally don't believe it much), yet they overlook this existing issue that is perhaps worse.”

Marek

4.5 Summary

The results indicate some motivations are more popular than others in terms of writing reviews. Motivations such as concern for others, product-involvement, self-involvement, and principlism are found to be more frequently stated than other motivations investigated. Thus, different users have different motivations to write reviews. Moreover, from the answers to the questions, multiple motivations can be found for a single participant. Hence, the results indicate not a single motivation is the sole cause of writing reviews. Just like different users have different motivations to write reviews, users also have multiple motivations to write reviews as well. That being said it is also visible that, different users have a primary motivation to write reviews and also a few accomplice motivations as well. For example for some participants concern for others is the primary motivation yet there are also some other motivations that they exhibit.

The primary or dominant motivation and accomplice motivations notion is also provable by participants who answer the questions with an importance rank. Some users in their answers gave a list of factors or categories of individuals (such as other players, other reviewers, developers, and fans) and rank them by how much of a motive these factors and categories of individuals are. With these rankings which motivation is the more influential and which is less can be understandable. Or some participants state a single motivation multiple times in different questions but when a question comes up with a specific motivation examined they also state that is also a contributing factor. In these situations, which motivation is the more influential and which is less can be understandable as well.

5. Limitations

There are five main limitations to the research. First and foremost, survey questions are formulated through the findings of past research. As mentioned previously, there is no research that examines the motivation for writing game reviews hence, past research that examined different services and products are used in order to form the questions. The results of past research indicate some motivations that are a factor to write reviews so those were picked and questions are written in order to investigate those said motivations. Different products and services can lead to different emotional responses and different circumstances. For example, a movie or a food experience is much less of an investment in terms of both time and money compared to a game, and a holiday can be a much larger investment in terms of both time and money compared to a game. There are not only time and money investments when you experience a product as well, for example, but a user can also have a similar emotional investment in a game and a movie but less emotional investment in a dining experience. All these differences between products and services might lead to different motivations to write reviews in their own respected manner.

Secondly, due to all participants are from the same community, the participant selection has a strong sampling bias. *Reviewers' Guild* was picked as a community to select participants from because the community has standards in terms of picking reviewers into the community. This might have led to the sample becoming too similar with regard to how users approach reviews and write reviews. All the participants were quite serious about writing reviews and experts in game reviews. This might be the reason why motivations such as venting negative feelings, vengeance, and anxiety reduction are not visible motives in the answers. Also, motivations such sense of belonging, inclusion, and social benefit might not be visible as a result of the participants being picked from a community. Participants are already being included and belong to a large community hence they might no longer be motivated for it.

Third, the number of participants is not sufficient enough for a concrete conclusion. In the results section, many motivations are found in the answers of participants. Even though a participant can have more than one motivation which is noticeable even in a single answer from many participants, it is also distinguishable that there is a dominant motivation in answers. As you look at the answers of a single participant there is a pattern in their answers that hints at a dominant motivation and few accomplice motivations. So seven participants are not enough to examine the wide range of motivations the different users might have. More participants might lead to different dominant and accomplice motivations.

Fourth, among the seven participants, six identified themselves as male and one participant preferred not to state their sex. The research not being diverse enough can also lead to problems in terms of the reliability of the study. Yet on the internet, everyone has their own unique personas and nicknames it was impossible to know someone's information such as gender, sex, age, and location. Hence, the participants' demographic information was unknown until the results have come.

Lastly, all the answers are gathered through text as a result of all participants preferring to write their answers rather than articulate them. Even though all participants are accustomed to writing their thoughts and feelings, this method has prevented follow-up questions to be asked. Follow-up questions could have prevented some misinterpretations or helped to clarify some answers to questions. Further, some follow-up questions can lead to finding more motivational factors from the ambiguous statement. There are a couple of ambiguous statements in the answers that point to more than one possible motivational explanation. Yet, an interview with participants through voice call would be difficult to execute on the grounds of time-zone differences, and some participants are not from an English-speaking country hence not being comfortable speaking English or having hard-to-understand accents.

6. Conclusions

The goal of this study was to fill a gap in the game study and to uncover what motivates players to write game reviews. As mentioned previously, game reviews are quite substantial information for potential consumers to make informed purchase decisions. The reason why reviews are this important is because of the nature of game products. Games are experience goods and experience goods are ambiguous products prior to consumption. Learning about other consumers' experiences becomes vital upon deciding to buy a game or not. This notion is also supported by past research that indicates reviews influence purchase decisions, sales, and even the experience itself. Considering how altering reviews are, reviewing itself is mostly a voluntary act that most players do not engage with. It is essential to understand reviewers so that they contribute to the game community with their reviews.

In order to accomplish this goal, from previous research the motivations that are found to be influential to consumers to write reviews have been gathered. Then a list of questions that are related to review motivations and examines the motivations that are gathered from previous research is formed. After that, a game community called *Reviewers' Guild* has been found on Steam. *Reviewers' Guild* is a community that has more than 800 members who are dedicated to writing reviews as professionally as possible. Based on the preference of the participants the list of questions is turned into a questionnaire and sent to the participants. After the results have been received, the analysis of the results has been made.

The results indicated results such as concern for others, product-involvement, self-involvement, and principlism are found to be motivations that are frequently stated by participants. The results also indicate that all participants have a dominant motivation and a couple of accomplice motives that also factor in when writing reviews. Some participants rank their motivations while some stated a single motivation for multiple questions but when a question arises about their accomplice motive they also indicate the motive as a factor.

For future studies, research that has a larger participant pool and also a method that benefits follow-up questions such as semi-structured interviews can contribute to the game research further. It is important to state the motivations that are found in this research can not be the sole motivations to produce reviews, hence more research must be done to investigate more motivations.

6.1 Discussion & Future Work

Deci and Ryan (2000) state the reason why motivation is so precious is because of what motivation generates. If a person is writing game reviews, the more motivated he is the better the review will be. It is crucial to be able to identify what motivates players into writing game reviews to be able to support them with the appropriate motivational factors to have better quality reviews. In the future, what was gathered from this study can be used to build systems for reviewing games with motivational factors found in mind. A way to turn the motivational factors that are found in this study into incentives can lead to a better-operating review system for reviewers, which in return lead to happier reviewers, and better reviews.

One issue that bothered nearly all participants was meme reviews, funny reviews, and reviews that only contain art in them. Basically, anything that is not reviews in the review section of *Steam* bothers participants. Participants also express their frustration with the reviews that have non-review content getting lots of engagement. This cause these reviews to be displayed more frequently than others and hinders the visibility of actual game reviews like the ones left by the participants of this research. Not only does this effect cause the information that is needed to make an informed decision about the product harder to access to potential consumers, but it is also visible that participants are losing their motivation to write reviews.

For future work, research that benefits from semi-structured interviews would contribute to the field further. As this research indicates there are many motivations that can be found through statements, yet this research also demonstrates the need for follow-up questions at times participants use ambiguous statements. Research that uses semi-structured interviews as its method can lead to uncovering more motivations by asking follow-up questions when there is an ambiguous statement.

Furthermore, research that has not only more participants in general but also more diverse in terms of both gender, sex, and how they approach reviews would be beneficial to the game research field. Firstly, this research has seven participants, and even though the results gave extensive information about reviewers and their motivations to write reviews the participant pool is not considerable enough compared to how large the game and review community is. More participants can lead to uncovering different and new motivations to write reviews hence conducting research with a larger participant pool would be beneficial. Secondly, even though the research is diverse in terms of geography and not western dominated, with regard to gender, the research is too homogeneous. Even though there is no available research that investigates the demographic of reviewers, the research can be conducted with a more diverse participant pool to ensure the participant sample is as realistic as possible. Lastly, in this research, participants were all considered dedicated to reviewing and most of the participants review all games that they play. Yet not all reviewers are this dedicated to the act of reviewing, a more diverse participant set that some review from time to time and some review occasionally can offer results that are more in line with reality. Also, it is equally important to understand what motivates players that review from time to time. Due to the participants being dedicated reviewers, motivations such as vengeance, venting negative feelings, and anxiety reduction are not found in this research. A future work that solely investigates players with a low number of reviews to examine “What motivates players to write reviews to those games and not to the other games that they have played” might uncover more reactionary motivations such as vengeance, venting negative feelings, and anxiety reduction.

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Appendix A -

Actual Study Questionner:

Demographic Questions:

1.	Your Steam Name
2.	What would you like to be called in the Thesis? (For anonymity purposes)
3.	Age
4.	Sex
5.	Location
6.	Are there other products and services that you review apart from games?
7.	How long you have been writing reviews?
8.	How long you have been playing games?

General Questions:

9.	How did you start writing reviews?
10.	Why did you start writing reviews?

Motivation Questions:

11.	What do you personally think motivates you to write game reviews?
12.	Who do you think you are writing these reviews for?
13.	How do you feel when you don't get "helpful" votes and badges as you anticipated on your reviews?
14.	Do you from time to time get free(gifted) games to review? If yes, how does that affect your reviewing?
15.	What do you think about reviewing as a professional one day and earning money from it?
16.	Do you feel more inclined to review games that have high reviews or low reviews?
17.	Do you feel more inclined to write a good review for a game that has bad reviews or write a good review for a game that has good reviews?
18.	Are you more likely to review a very bad game or a very good game rather than a middle-of-the-pack game?

19.	Are you more likely to review a very bad game or a very good game?
20.	Do you feel like you write these reviews as a gift to the community?
21.	Do you write reviews in order to help other gamers?
22.	Do you feel like you are an influential member of the game community? If yes, do you think this is the case because you write reviews?
23.	As far as I know, there is no reputation-based classification for reviewers on Steam. For example, Amazon has a "Top Reviewer". What do you think about a ranking system for reviewers?
24.	Do you feel a particular way when you don't review a game?
25.	Do you enjoy writing game reviews? Do writing game reviews make you remember the good times while playing the game?

Reviewers' Guild Questions:

26.	What do you think about the Reviewers' Guild as a community?
27.	How did you feel when you got the invitation to the Reviewers' Guild?
28.	It seems like asking for feedback for reviews is quite popular, have you ever asked for feedback as well and why was that the case?
29.	In the community, you can get exposure for good reviews. Did you ever get the exposure and how does it feel to get exposure or not getting exposure?

Final Question:

30.	Anything else you would like to say?
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Appendix B -

Consent Form:

This survey is conducted for my master's thesis in Game Development at the University of Skövde.

This thesis focuses on understanding why you review games and contribute to the community in a way most people do not do. While reviews are crucial for players to make informed decisions about what to play, not a lot of people engage in the activity of producing reviews. I would like to learn more about why people write reviews so that when designers create spaces where people can review games they design in a way that tailor reviewers like you. I would appreciate if you can fill the questions based on your experience with reviewing games. The responses will be kept private and deleted after the thesis has been completed. By answering the questions and submitting the results you consent that your answers will be used in the study and your answers will be quoted without your real identity. You can leave anytime during the study without completing and removed from the analysis.

The responses will be used for analysis purposes in order to answer the question "What motivates players to write games reviews?".