



LORE I SOCIALA OCH LIVS- SIMULATIONSSPEL

Fallstudie av The Sims och Animal Crossing

LORE IN SOCIAL AND LIFE SIMULATION GAMES

Case Study of The Sims and Animal Crossing
Franchises

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Abstract

Many video games have elaborate plots and storylines with intricate world-building and lore for the players to explore. However, some games are about doing real-life activities in a virtual world. These types of games belong to the Social and Life Simulation genre of games. Often, games within this genre are considered to be plotless, with the presumption that they are lore-less as well. Even though these games do not have a specific plotline to follow, there may still be evidence of lore and stories in these games. A case study is conducted, examining community-created content for the Social and Life Simulation games Animal Crossing and The Sims that highlight lore and stories in the games. The results show that the games contain lore which can be used as a starting point for players to create theories and stories of their own during gameplay.

Keywords: Lore, Narrative, Story, Animal Crossing, The Sims, Video Games

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1 Introduction

Lore in itself is not a story or plot, but a background and a starting point for players to understand and immerse themselves in the world of a game. Lore can manifest in several ways, be it through dialogues, visual aspects of characters, the environment of the game, descriptions of characters, items and more. Lore is typically more prevalent in traditional games, where players follow a set storyline or immerse themselves in a rich open world roleplaying game. However, not all genres of games have the 'lore heavy' title, an example being the 'Social and Life Simulation' genre. Two games belonging to this genre are The Sims and Animal Crossing.

Lebowitz and Klug (2011) conclude The Sims and Animal Crossing games as being 'Fully Player Driven' games, through how the story is mainly derived from the player. They do note Animal Crossing as having good dialogue in their games, but state that neither The Sims nor Animal Crossing have a plot or story. But, the question is: Do these games have lore, and with it some level of stories?

This study aims to examine the lore and stories in The Sims and Animal Crossing franchises through player created content, with the purpose of showing that these games have a deeper lore to them than Lebowitz and Klug (2015) concludes. This will be performed using a case study seeking to answer four questions, which are used as a way to analyze the presence of lore and stories in the two games.

Not much formal research has been done regarding the subject in the past, so the results of this study may be useful for game developers and game researchers and others who wish to study the narrative and lore of various Social and Life Simulation games.

2 Background

To understand the importance and value of lore within video games, definitions of what video games and lore will be presented in this chapter. Relevant theoretical concepts for game design, specifically related to lore, narrative design and the Social and Life Simulation genre of games will be defined and explained. This chapter also contains a section describing the games that have been studied and a section presenting some relevant previous research. These concepts and research will be used during the case study and result analysis.

The key authors to the referenced sources in this chapter are:

- Josiah Lebowitz, Assistant Professor at George Mason University specializes in both game design and narrative design, with a particular focus on the integration of plot and gameplay.
- Chris Klug, Teaching Professor at Carnegie Mellon University and a member of the Writer's Guild of America West with more than 21 years of experience of major title game development with focus on narrative and role-playing games.
- Rafael Chandler, Game Design Expert with 20+ years of experience in the games industry, both as a game designer and game writer, having worked for several AAA companies. He is the author of several books and a speaker at multiple conferences.
- Nicolas Esposito, Doctorate and researcher at Gobelins University in France.
- Chengyue Jin (Kimi), Master student at Skövde University in 2021.
- Tobias Heussner, Toiya Kristen Finley, Jennifer Brandes Hepler and Ann Lemay, authors of the textbook 'The Game Narrative Toolbox' (2015). The authors are all Narrative Designers or Game Writers with substantial years of experience in the games industry.
- Matthew Patrick, a double major graduate in theater and neuroscience, is behind the YouTube channel The Game Theorists. This channel focuses on analyzing various video games and their lore by creating theories or analyzing various elements of the games and characters. The Game Theorists channel currently has 17.6 million subscribers, with the videos totaling roughly 3.7 billion views.

2.1 Theoretical Terminology and Definitions

2.1.1 Video Games

In this thesis, the term 'game' is used to refer to video games. Nicolas Esposito defined in an conference paper '*A Short and Simple Definition of What a Videogame Is*' (2005) what a possible video game definition could be: "A *videogame* is a game which we play thanks to an *audiovisual apparatus* and which can be based on a *story*." (Esposito, 2005, pg. 3). Drawing upon past game researchers, Esposito (2005) explains a game as being an interactive voluntary experience, with player(s) following a set of rules with an audiovisual apparatus (for example: Arcade machines, computer, video game consoles).

In video games there are playable and Non-Playable Characters (NPCs). NPCs are typically used within the game for world-building, plot, mechanics and story of the game.

2.1.2 Narrative and Lore in Games

Chengyue Jin, in his Master's Thesis '*Game Narrative Conveyed through Visual Elements in Digital Games*' (2021), points out that there is a distinction between a story and the narrative in a game. Narrative may encompass a story or plot, however is focused more on the manifestation and the way of expression of the story and game as a whole. Alex Stargame in his article '*What game narrative is and what it means in casual games*' (2018) also explains how narrative in games are not the same as the game's plot. In games it is the interactive elements and the direct participation which shape the game's scenarios. The narrative in games include plot, sounds, music, atmosphere, dialogues, player choices and the gameplay. These elements combined create the overall impression of a game and allow the player to feel a part of a story, something reiterated in Jin's thesis, emphasizing the elements that create the difference between games and traditional narrative. Interactivity being the main focus in video games is what makes the narration unique, breaking the constraints of traditional narration, which Jin considers to be passive and regular.

Writer Aiden MC wrote an article titled '*The Meaning and Value of Lore in Gaming*' (2023) explaining the term lore and its importance for games. He states that lore provides backstory and world-building for games, and thereby creates a rich and immersive gaming experience. Lore helps players understand the motivations of characters, the history of the world and creates a sense of authenticity by establishing rules for the game's world. He discusses how lore is used to tell compelling stories and used as an engagement tool for players, which can foster a sense of community, with lore being able to branch out into other mediums than just games. MC (2023) writes that video games do not need to have lore, they can still be enjoyable experiences, however with a lack of lore, the potential of the game would not feel as believable and immersive.

"Games without lore might feel more like a series of disconnected challenges or obstacles to overcome rather than a coherent and engaging story. [...] This could make it harder for players to become invested in the game world or its characters and may lead to a lack of interest or engagement with the game overall."

(MC, 2023)

This description of lore is further supported by journalist Pablo Seara in article '*Telling Stories: The Importance of Lore in Video Games*' (2016), explaining that lore is a part of the games backstory, elements to complement the narrative, with details adding depth and richness to the universe of the game. Seara (2016) believes that lore is at times overlooked by game developers, which according to Seara is a mistake. He states that good lore is essential to engage the players and leave them with a compelling memory and experience of the game.

2.1.3 Social and Life Simulation Genre

Social Simulation games are a subgenre of Life Simulation games, however the terms are used interchangeably. In an article published by the game development company Juego Studio, '*Why Social Simulation Games Are Popular*' (2020), Social Simulation games are explained

as a genre of games that simulate certain aspects of human social life. Two well-known games in the Social Simulation genre are Animal Crossing and The Sims. The genre has risen to popularity in recent years, with Juego Studio stating the reason for its popularity being rooted in the genre's general aspects of: an open-ended narrative, in-depth customization, social aspects, relaxing gameplay and escapism. In Social Simulation games, mimicking real life, there is no pre-made storyline to follow, nor any objectives that you need to complete. Everything done in the game is by the player's choice and will. In many Social Simulation games, there is a lot of focus on the customizability of the player's character(s). A unique feature to Animal Crossing that Juego Studio (2020) points out is the social aspect of the game, with the ability for players to visit and interact with each other in real time, which was a popular feature and replacement of real-life interactions during the quarantine of the COVID-19 pandemic. The popularity of the Social Simulation genre also derives from their peaceful nature. Juego Studio (2020) explains how the genre is non-violent, with the games focus on everyday life with a leisurely pace and that many games in the Social Simulation genre allow for escapism; it may allow players to live the lives of someone different and enjoy things that they perhaps do not have in their own lives, such as a mansion or private island.

2.1.4 Open World Design

Rafael Chandler in his book '*Game Writing Handbook*' (2007) discusses the term 'open world design'. It refers to games that allow the player to explore the world at their own pace, with the game experience being dictated by the player and is decidedly non-linear. The narrative is typically presented when the player completes certain quests, leading the narrative to develop at the player pace, rather than the developers. Chandler (2007) explains that in games with an open world design, the storyline simply provides context for the player's action, but it is not the focus on the game experience and could even be ignored while the player explores the environment of the world. However, Chandler (2007) highlights how there are many players who become highly interested in the storyline and follow it deeply. He emphasizes how open world design allows for a lot of freedom for the player to explore and discover the game, and guarantees that no two players will have the exact same experience.

2.1.5 Fully player-driven stories

In their textbook '*Interactive storytelling for video games: A player-centered approach to creating memorable characters and stories*' (2011) Lebowitz and Klug explain the term Fully Player-Driven stories as games that do not have any main plot at all. They clarify that a game needs to have a main plot, to a certain extent, but the main plot in fully player-driven games is the plot created by the players actions within the given setting. They draw from both The Sims series and Animal Crossing series as examples. What the player does in the setting is entirely up to them, however there is a need for the writers to create the world, backstories for characters and their personalities, to mention a few.

“Also, keep in mind that most settings are nothing without the characters that inhabit them. Just because there’s no main plot doesn’t mean your fully player-driven story can’t be full of characters for the player to talk to, work for, befriend,

fight and the like. In fact, it's the NPCs that serve to give a fully player-driven story much of its charm and personality.”

(Lebowitz & Klug, 2011, pg. 232)

Lebowitz and Klug (2011) explain that even while there is no main plot, it is still important to create a setting and rules for how the players can interact with the setting, thinking of how a player would enjoy exploring the world. This type of design often grants players more freedom and control of their actions. Thus, within reason, the player can do whatever they please and create their own goals and story. Along with optional quests and distractions, it grants a near infinite amount of replay value as players will always find ways to keep them occupied. However, this type of design is heavy for the development team with every action possible to perform by the player needs to be predefined and developed during the development process. With this, there will always be certain things players can and cannot do, no matter how seemingly infinite options there seem to be, thus limiting the players' freedom and control.

2.1.6 Environmental Narrative/Storytelling

Lore has an essential role in environmental storytelling. Tobias Heussner, Toiya Kristen Finley, Jennifer Brandes Hepler and Ann Lemay discuss the term environmental storytelling (also known as environmental narrative) in their book *'The Game Narrative Toolbox'* (2015). Environmental storytelling aims to immerse the player into the world by means of how the world of the game communicates to the player. Using audio, visual and design techniques, the developers can tell the story through the world, characters and exploration done by the player, drawing heavily upon the technique 'show, don't tell'. Through the use of 'show, don't tell' the developers can deliver a plot and story through ambient dialogue, NPCs acting strange, revelations of plot points, foreshadowing of events and other mechanisms. Heussner et. al. (2015) explains that the environment which characters inhabit can tell the player a lot about the specific character, with the characters' actions giving insight into their development or characterization. Game mechanics can be integrated into the environmental storytelling, with the player learning about the narrative through gameplay. However, the audience and genre of the game must always be kept in mind when implementing environmental storytelling, as Heussner et. al. (2015) points out. Not every player wishes to be an explorer, thus important information needs to be clear and obvious, with core messages needing to be accessible and easily understood by all players. Though, Heussner et. al. (2015) does mention the importance of rewarding players who do like to explore.

2.2 The Games

2.2.1 The Sims

The Sims series is a franchise of Social and Life Simulation games developed by Maxis, published by Electronic Arts (EA). There are 4 games in total: The Sims (often referred to as the original Sims), The Sims 2, The Sims 3 and The Sims 4, with many expansion packs for each to add new content to the games. The original Sims game was released in 2000 and the

latest expansion pack to the latest game, the Sims 4, was released in July of 2023. In this study, the term ‘The Sims’ is referring to the game franchise as a whole rather than a specific installment of the games, unless specifically stated.

The Sims is not a multiplayer game, however the gameplay offers countless social interactions available in the game with other premade Sims, delivering on the social aspect with virtual characters. Players begin the game by creating a new Sim or choosing to play a premade single Sim or a household of Sims. The player then can move into a house or build one from the ground up, with there being a large selection of materials and items for the player to choose from. Items that may be too expensive for a newly created Sim can be acquired by the Sim acquiring a job and earning ‘Simoleons’, the Sims franchise equivalent of money. The player then proceeds to play the Sims acting out their daily lives, such as going to work and home life. The player can control any action they wish for their Sim to do and is responsible for making the Sim eat, sleep, have proper hygiene, have fun and much more, which dictates the Sims mood. The games focus a lot on the social interactions between different Sims in the game, with players able to invite other Sims over and arrange parties or social gatherings. Sims are able to get married and have children as well. In the later installments of the games, the player gives their Sims specific life aspirations and during gameplay, the Sim will wish for certain things, varying from increasing a skill, to going to a specific location or cooking a specific type of food, among many more. This gives the player a guideline of what they wish to do with their Sim, to achieve their life aspiration and complete their wishes to earn special aspiration points, used to purchase special rewards for their Sim. Each expansion adds new content in the form of a new map, cosmetic items, traits, aspirations and things to do during gameplay, such as new skills, careers and more. The original Sims, Sims 2 and Sims 4 do not have an open world with players able to take their Sims anywhere they wish, only to specific lots. The Sims 3 has a large open world for each of the worlds released through various expansions, with Sims able to walk to different corners of the map.

A premade Sim is a single Sim, but can also be a family or a household, which has been created and implemented by the developers directly into the different worlds in the Sims games. When a player creates and plays their own Sim, all other premade Sims around them, in a sense act like NPCs. However, the player can always start to control and play these premade Sims, by either switching to play as a premade Sim household or making a premade Sim playable by adding it into their own household. Premade Sims “live” autonomously using AI in the game, within the predefined constraints provided by the game developers. Each household has a family description, property and some money for the player to start with. Each Sim in the family has preselected traits, family tree, biography, aspirations, careers, and items in their inventory (which is partially randomized). This is a part of that particular Sims’ lore (see Figure 1). Players are free to play and change these Sims as they wish, however the game provides a base players can build upon, having their own Sims interact with the premade Sims. Thus, premade Sims are a part of the lore and world-building of the Sims world.

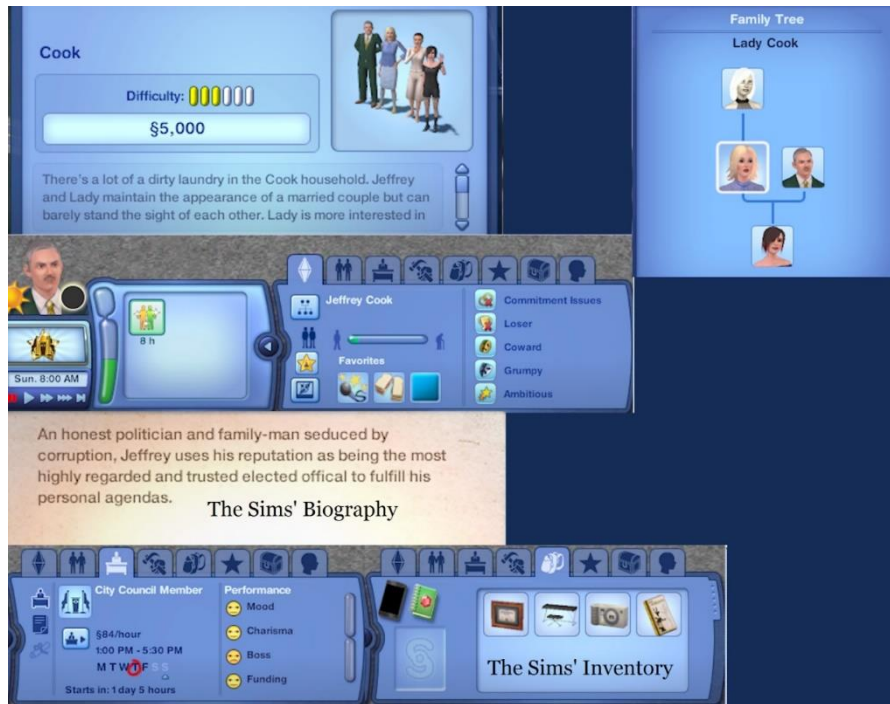


Figure 1 - Showcase of a premade Sims from The Sims 3 (Maxis, 2009)

2.2.2 Animal Crossing

The Animal Crossing franchise is a Social Simulation game developed and published by Nintendo. There have been several installments in the franchise after the first games release in 2001, with Animal Crossing: New Horizons (AC:NH) being the latest release in 2020. In this analysis, the franchise in general will be in focus with occasional references to specific games, such as Animal Crossing: New Leaf (AC:NL) released in 2012.

The game begins with the player creating a character who moves into a small town filled with anthropomorphic animals and takes out a mortgage to be able to buy their first house. As with the Sims, there is no real story beyond the simple set up, with the player able to work to pay off the debt. The player is free to spend their days exploring the village they live in, take part in various activities such as fishing, collecting fruit, gardening, digging for fossils, bug catching and shopping for new clothing and furniture to improve their house, to name a few. Additionally the player can spend their time improving the village through diverse chores which can attract more residents to move to the village. Animal Crossing uses the video game console's internal clock and calendar, connecting it to the gameplay to simulate the passing of real time. This is reflected by specific insects only spawning at certain times, certain NPCs only appearing during certain holidays, flowers taking time to grow and more. Animal Crossing uses heavy customization abilities of the player's character, clothing, house and island (in AC:NH). Players also have the ability to communicate with other players and visit their houses in the game, even being able to have several other players living in the same village at once.

2.3 Previous Research

Lebowitz and Klug (2011) presented a case study observing the game series The Sims, and how it is related to Fully player-driven storytelling. Presenting the game, they explain how the

original game has no story, plot, set goals or victory conditions. The players are the ones to set up their own goals for their Sims characters. Lebowitz and Klug (2011) emphasize how the Sims have no 'real plot', no dialogue and very little writing as a whole. The game is about giving the players near complete control of their Sims and their lives, allowing the players to live out the story of their Sims. This is why they conclude that the Sims is a perfect example of a Fully player-driven storytelling game.

Lebowitz and Klug (2011) did an additional case study regarding the game series Animal Crossing. Similarly to The Sims, they described Animal Crossing to have no plot and minimal backstory, however they stated that it is the various NPCs in the game which is a testament to the games writers. Besides this, similar to with The Sims, there is no real story beyond the simple onboarding. Lebowitz and Klug (2011) explain that it is these residents that provide the Animal Crossing games with its charm. There is a wide variety of possible residents, each with their own distinct likes, dislikes and personalities. Through interactions with them, the player can experience amusing conversations (see Figure 2), optional quests and even acquire rare items if they can befriend the resident.

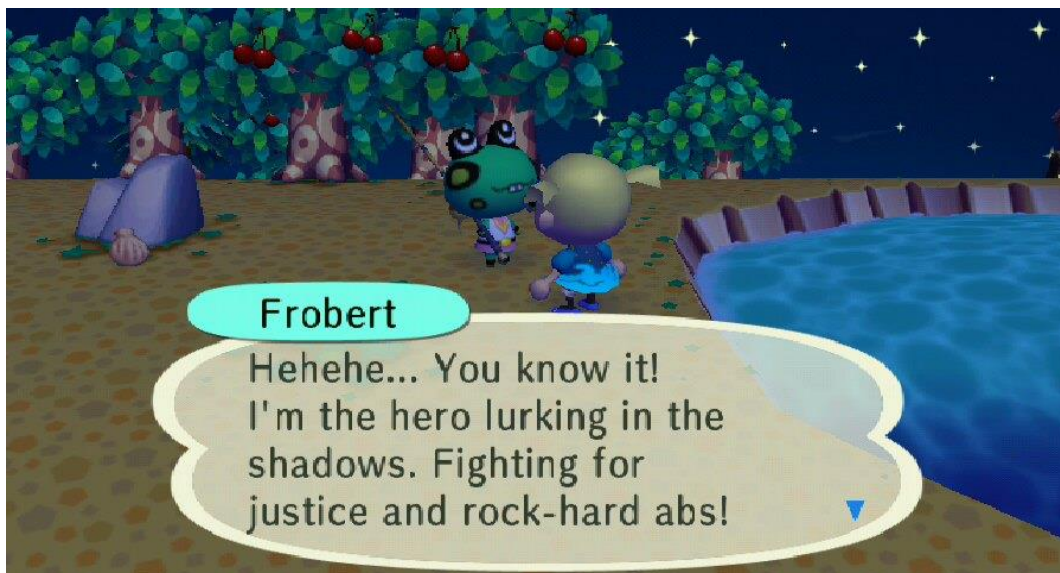


Figure 2 - A conversation excerpt from Animal Crossing (Nintendo, 2012)

These interactions add believability to the world, making the player feel as a real part of the village and that the other residents have their own lives and goals, despite lacking any sort of deep plot or backstory. Lebowitz and Klug (2011) explain how Animal Crossing can entertain a wide variety of players and keep them entertained and busy for a long while with all of its various activities, proving that 'fully player-driven storytelling' can be used to great effect in simple slow-paced titles.

3 Problem description

Lebowitz and Klugs' case studies of Animal Crossing and The Sims concludes that the games are Fully Player Driven storytelling games, where the player generates and creates their own stories. In their opinion the games themselves do not have a narrative or lore, rather the players can tell their stories through the mechanics and rules allowed in the game. However, through player created content, it is observed players perceive that there is lore to the games. This case study will examine the lore and stories presented in the games.

Having a better understanding of how lore is perceived by the players, game companies and developers can improve the games with the purpose of engaging their players more, and thus laying the success for higher player engagement and a better game experience. While this study focuses on Social and Life Simulation games, general knowledge about the subject can benefit other game genres as well.

The aim of this study is to show, based on community-created content, that games within the Social and Life Simulation genre, with the games studied being Animal Crossing and The Sims, have a lore and story to them despite their gameplay not following any particular storyline, narrative or quests for the player to experience.

3.1 Method and Procedure

Using the case study method with observations of community-created content, the analysis aims to identify how these games approach the lore of their worlds (dialogues, item descriptions, biographies etc.) The analysis looks at the following:

- What various visual aspects of characters or environments in the games pertain to there being lore in the games?
- Are there easter eggs of lore hidden within the games, proving lore exists in the games?
- Do players create theories about the game's world and the characters?
- Do players consider lore important?

For this analysis, a case study of online material was performed. Dr. Roberta Haele and researcher Alison Twycross explain in their article '*What is a case study?*' (2017) that a case study is a type of research methodology, commonly used for social and life sciences. The goal of the study is to intensively study a person, group or unit, aimed to be used as generalization for the bigger picture. Case studies are used to examine complex phenomena in natural settings to increase the understanding of them. Writing expert Shona McCombes expands on this in her recently revised article titled '*What Is a Case Study? | Definition, Examples & Methods*' (2023), describing how case studies commonly involve the use of qualitative methods, and case studies are an appropriate research design to gain concrete, contextual and in-depth knowledge about a specific real-world subject.

The disadvantage of performing a case study of only online material without conducting additional qualitative research, such as interviews or a survey, is the lack of a more detailed

basis for the analysis. If interviews or a survey were conducted on players of the two games, focusing on what players perceive about lore in the games, it could provide a more in-depth input for this case study. However, due to time constraints, the case study was limited to online material.

The qualitative research gathered for this analysis included gathering community-created lore videos regarding the two games, *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing*, with the purpose to analyze how the community views the lore of these games, and whether these support the hypothesis that there is lore in a supposedly plotless game. To gather the community-created content, the search terms: “the sims lore” and “animal crossing lore” were input into YouTube. Consequently, roughly 23 videos were watched of the two categories out of which 8 were selected for in-depth study in this analysis. The criteria for the selection process of the community-created videos included that the sources have some sort of reference to story or lore within the two games, with proof in the form of video or screenshots from the actual games. The videos also provided an insight into how lore is presented in the two games, with the content creators referring to the games. Research was also gathered by searching for game related articles, using the search engine Google as well as the University of Skövdes library and library’s search engine Libsearch, to find academic texts, journals and books. Search terms used in various combinations included, but not limited to: “lore”, “animal crossing”, “the sims”, “narrative”, “narrative design”, “environmental storytelling”, “story”, “storytelling”. Roughly 45 works in total of both game development and of academic nature were reviewed, with 2 conference papers selected for the study, as well as 3 books, 1 master’s thesis, 8 game related articles and 3 articles of other nature. The criteria for selection included peer-reviewed sources or credible sources, relevance to subjects in the form of narration and storytelling or lore, either as a definition or in relevance to the relevant games.

YouTube is a free online video sharing platform owned by Google, originally created in 2005. Adam Hayes in his article *‘YouTube Stats: Everything You Need to Know In 2023!’* (2023) estimates that in 2023 there are more than 800 million videos accessible on the platform. Despite the high number of videos, only a few percentile have a viewer count of above 100 000 views. There are several other video sharing platforms, such as Vimeo or Dailymotion. However, YouTube was selected exclusively due to its sheer popularity, which far outranks every other video sharing platform. According to Hayes there are 122 million daily active users of YouTube around the world. To create and publish videos, creators are required to set up a YouTube channel account, which viewers can select to follow and receive notifications when the channel owner uploads new videos. As a consequence of there being millions of creators and videos on the platform, YouTube channels need to be creative and stand out to succeed in an ever-changing environment where everyone is attempting to top the other. This leads to outrageous content and “click-bait” content being popular for its audacity, as it catches viewers’ attention, thus accumulating views. Content on YouTube is unverified, meaning anyone could declare anything as a fact, with no requirements of authenticity. For example, Matthew Patrick has several videos on his YouTube channel *The Game Theorists*, that are heavily satirical in nature or videos with very far-fetched theories, yet they are presented in a way that could make them believable and are made purely for entertainment purposes, not to be taken as outright facts.

Despite this, videos from *The Game Theorists* and other channels have been selected and are relevant for this study as they provide evidence and answers to the questions that this case study sets out to examine. While Patrick's videos may at times seem far-fetched, his theory

regarding Zipper T. Bunny being one of them, the video provides in-game evidence of lore in the form of the character, his dialogue and reactions, proving that this lore is a part of the game and not something fictitious by Patrick. This makes the video reliable for the purpose of exemplifying “Built-In Lore” in this study. The same video also is a reliable source for the purpose of exemplifying how the game community connects these dots of lore to create their own lore theories and distributes these within the community, “Community-Created Lore”. In the analysis, examples of “Built-In Lore” and “Community-Created Lore” are pointed out and discussed (these terms will be defined in Chapter 4). Other YouTube videos used in this study were selected according to this same approach.

4 Results and Analysis

During the case study, it was observed that what was perceived as lore by the players and game communities could be mapped into two categories. In this study, the two terms “Built-In Lore” and “Community-Created Lore” were created and are used to differentiate the two categories of lore.

- “Built-In Lore” refers to when lore is specifically created and implemented by the developers of the games. Examples of such include personalities of NPCs or premade Sims, descriptions and dialogues. Hidden stories or lore is also included in this term, as it is deliberately created and hidden by the developers.
- “Community-Created Lore” refers to lore or theories created by the players of the games and shared with other players. These may be created by players based on “Built-In Lore” and expanded upon by the community, using their own creativity and imagination. Theories are created most commonly regarding NPCs of the games. This is then often shared and can become a topic of discussion within the community.

Examples of “Built-In Lore” and “Community-Created Lore” are presented in this analysis. To be noted: all cases presented in the “Community-Created Lore” category, also features “Built-In Lore”.

4.1 Animal Crossing

4.1.1 Built-In Lore

4.1.1.1 Examples of visible lore

Ashley Brown and Björn Berg Marklund discuss in their article ‘*Animal Crossing: New Leaf and the Diversity of Horror in Video Games*’ (2015) how the relatively innocent and kid-friendly game of AC:NL has several darker undertones in the game’s world. In Animal Crossing, there is a specific focus on the characterization of the NPCs and their relationship to the player. This relationship can be explored through dialogues and small requests by the NPCs. However, especially in earlier installments of the Animal Crossing franchise, some of the interactions with the NPC have an unsettling tone. The NPCs will occasionally berate the player or become upset with the player.

An entertainment video titled ‘*Animal Crossing used to be so much darker...*’ (2020) created by Jaiden Animations on YouTube, brought up specific examples of this behavior with various NPCs, showing the behavior of the NPCs in real time in the game. She played the original Animal Crossing on the Nintendo console GameCube. One of the main examples was with a pig NPC named Sue E, with the following conversation:

“I’M BEGGING YOU, WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE CHANGE THAT HIDEOUS TOWN TUNE?!!”

“[player name], I highly doubt you have a talented bone in your body, but you do seem to be able to run fast...”

“So, be a dear and go change that horrible music, would you?”

(Animal Crossing, GameCube, 2001)

Jaiden Animations (2020) also noted and brought up various examples of the NPCs laughing in the player's face and being generally condescending at times to the player. She noted as well that the characters will respond rudely if the player chooses rude dialogue options towards the NPCs. Jaiden Animations (2020) exclaimed her delight in the old games' NPCs, saying that even if they were rude, the conversations felt filled with flavor, explaining that the characters say and do interesting things and connections could be built with the NPCs, something the latest installment AC:NH lacked. This pattern has seemingly continued into Animal Crossing: New Leaf (AC:NL) and supports Brown and Berg Marklund's (2015) observations of the game's world and NPC behavior. They noted that when the player acts rudely to the NPCs they can become upset or angry, with the player unable to interact with them again for a while. The player is also occasionally presented with quizzes, riddles and questions, with an example being that an NPC will ask what the player thinks of their outfit, giving the player several options to pick in between. However, this can be a tricky question as there are no hints if the NPC will take the answer as a compliment or an insult, and if the player picks the “wrong” result, it may lead to the NPC becoming upset. AC:NL has a plethora of choices the player can make in conversation, but sometimes the answers can lead to unforeseen consequences. Brown and Berg Marklund (2015) note a specific interaction with a store owner in the game, the pigeon barista, Brewster. Players have the ability to purchase one cup of coffee per day, and upon receiving the coffee, there are two dialogue choices, drink the coffee immediately or let it cool off a bit. If the player chooses to let the coffee cool, Brewster will proceed to become upset and lecture the player on not knowing how to drink coffee properly.

Besides each character having their unique personalities, some characters have unusual appearances with theories being created by the community regarding the backstory of these characters. One of these includes an NPC who seemingly looks like an inflatable toy rabbit, mentioned by Laura Hudson in her article ‘*Animal Crossing is a dystopian hellscape*’ (2018). She notes that the character profile for the NPC, Hopkins, even states: “*Just a heads up: Hopkins is not to be trusted. He’s always full of hot air.*” (Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp, Nintendo, 2017) leading fans to speculate whether he is real or not (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Hopkins from Animal Crossing: New Horizons (Nintendo, 2020)

YouTuber Izzzyzzz made a video titled 'A Deep Dive Into Animal Crossing' (2021), where among other things, she discusses some criticism that the latest installment of the franchise received. She acknowledged AC:NH worldwide success and some of the criticisms the game received regarded the characters feeling watered down compared to previous games, where the NPCs would often outright harass the player. In AC:NH the NPCs only had a few lines they cycled through and repeated, with the characters feeling as if they had less personality compared to previous games. In her opinion, this made the game feel as if it lacked the charm and personality that the franchise is known for, which is something Jaiden Animations (2020) reflected upon in her video as well.

4.1.1.2 Example of hidden lore

In her article '*I Am Obsessed With a Tragic Hidden Backstory in Animal Crossing*' (2020) Kathryn VanArendonk highlights that while there is no narrative to Animal Crossing, and the main point of the game is to collect items and arrange furniture with the goal to expand your house, there is an underlying backstory to certain characters in the game. While some villages are compilations of personality traits, other characters are fully developed with unique personalities. She explains that certain characters simply give hints about their lives, and it is up to the players' minds to fill in any blanks, drawing on an example of the hamster NPC named Graham who seemingly lives inside a server room and whom VanArendonk (2020) theorizes could be a Bitcoin farmer. However, some character's stories are more concrete; The Able Sisters. VanArendonk (2020) describes their story as filled with drama, tragedy and family tension, a hidden story in a plotless game. The story surrounds two hedgehog sisters, Sable and Mabel. Sable will not talk to the player unless spoken to first, and if the player speaks and persists in speaking to her, her story is slowly uncovered. The parents of the Able family died tragically years prior, leaving Sable, the older sister to care for Mabel. In the game, Sable expresses the feeling of never having a break or being able to relax, feeling as if the whole family's burden is on her shoulders. There is a third sister, named Label, who left the family to pursue her dream of being a fashion designer, tearing the lonely sister family apart. Sable and Mabel still support Label through their thriving clothing business. The story is being told over several of the games in the Animal Crossing franchise, ultimately concluding with all three sisters becoming reunited once again. VanArendonk (2020) notes that many players ignore Sable as a game character as to respect the boundaries the character puts forth, leading to them missing a lot of the character's story. Those who do seek her out often describe her story as a tragic one for an otherwise happy game, with many expressing hate towards Label for her role in the story.

4.1.2 Community-Created Lore



Figure 4 - Zipper T. Bunny from Animal Crossing: New Horizons (Nintendo, 2012)

Another character whose backstory is in question is the NPC character Zipper T. Bunny, about which the YouTuber Matthew Patrick theorized on his channel The Game Theorists, in his video ‘*Game Theory: Animal Crossing’s Scary Bunny unZIPPED! (Animal Crossing New Horizons)*’ (2020). Zipper, as the name suggests, has a zipper on his back, which he is very vocal about not appreciating both the player and other NPC characters looking at. He is the representation of the world’s Easter Bunny and appears on the event day: “Bunny Day”, being parallel to Easter, and he leaves decorated eggs all over the player’s islands for the player to collect and trade with Zipper for goods. Zipper often complains in dialogues about something being uncomfortable, very hot or not seeming to like his role, this shown through dialogue across the various games he appears in. Other NPCs in the game will react to him strangely, noting him to act weird and unusual. Patrick (2020) in his video theorizes that Zipper is the player characters’ father, who is an established character within the game. Patrick (2020) provides his hypothesis to his theory drawing from various translation of Zippers name across different languages and what those names or words mean, and how it seems that Zipper in the games only hides eggs for the player only, supported by the other NPCs finding the eggs strange, proving egg hunts are not an established tradition within the Animal Crossing world. Patrick (2020) concludes his theory that Zipper is the player character’s father who is trying to show his affection to the player.

Izzzyzzz highlights that several other theories are created by the community surrounding the game. “*Despite Animal Crossing having virtually no plot, there is a surprising amount of theories about the world and characters*” (Izzzyzzz, 2021). One theory is that the island is a symbol for purgatory, welcoming new animals to the afterlife. Another theory regards an NPC who is a captain of a ship and can repeatedly be found washed up ashore, with the theory being that his crew is trying to kill him over and over again.

4.2 The Sims

4.2.1 Built-In Lore

“[...] there is more to the Sims 2 than meets the eye. [...] While the mainline Sims games don’t have any plot or storyline to follow, there aren’t any quests or objectives and it’s up to you to make your own fun, there’s still plenty of lore. We can learn a lot about the various neighborhoods and the families that live there through descriptions, bios, memories, family trees and even environmental storytelling within the different lots. All of the Sims games have lore.”

(The Mysteries Of The Sims 2, Izzzyzzz, 2022)

YouTuber Izzzyzzz explains in her video ‘*The Mysteries Of The Sims 2*’ (2022), that within the Sims franchise, there is a lot of lore and information about the various pre-made families that are available for the player to play if they choose. This lore is presented through the characters’ relationships, biography, memories and personality traits (which shape their story). However it is up to the players who play these characters to decide where their stories will go, and they often create theories and stories about them. Izzzyzzz (2022) expresses fascination in the world-building of the Sims 2, noting how it does not make the lore obvious or spell it out to the player. She continues to explain how the developers have left tidbits and clues for the players themselves to piece together the bizarre memoirs of the Sims, nonsensical family trees, or odd descriptions, allowing the players’ imagination to go wild. The player can play the various households however they please, with the game giving the players the freedom to make the stories they choose, while still giving the pre-made characters enough lore to make them mysterious and intriguing.

In the video by Izzzyzzz titled ‘*The Creepy Lore Of The Sims 3*’ (2022), she praises The Sims 3 in its world-building, explaining the large difference of the open world of the Sims 3 compared to the closed world of the Sims 2. In the Sims 2 world, Sims were confined to only the plot of their house, and if they wished to visit other places of houses in town players had to wait for a loading screen to load in the plot. However, in the Sims 3, an open world of the whole town was introduced, where players were able to take Sims to any corner of the map which was accessible. This allows for a strong world-building in the Sims 3 game, with Izzzyzzz (2022) showing various examples of eerie nature and atmosphere of the world. She highlights an example of existing boarded up mineshafts, which unfortunately cannot be explored, however rare minerals spawn outside of it, and at times a pair of glowing yellow eyes can be seen in the darkness of the mineshaft.

In this video, Izzzyzzz (2022) also showcases the premade Sim Agnes Crumplebottom. Izzzyzzz (2022) explains how Agnes is a premade Sim featured in the original Sims, Sims 2 and Sims 3 game versions, with her character being known for becoming angry at Sims who show public affection. In the original Sims and Sims 2, there is no specific explanation to Agnes’ personality. The Sims 3 provides an explanation with her biography description explaining how her husband died suddenly in an accident during their honeymoon, leading Agnes to become bitter and lonely. Izzzyzzz (2022) shows how in Agnes’ house, there was an unfinished baby room, providing evidence to the theory that Agnes and her husband wished for a baby. Izzzyzzz (2022) exclaims the tragic story as “fantastic environmental storytelling”.

4.2.2 Community-Created Lore

The video *'The Unsolved Mystery of Lolita Goth | The Sims Lore'* (2020) of a YouTube channel called The Sims Lore, explores the lore of a deceased pre-made Sim named Lolita Goth. The Sims Lore (2020) explains that Lolita Goth is a Sim whose gravestone is located in the Goth family's backyard in the Sims 3. Lolita died of electrocution, which The Sims Lore (2020) notes as odd as the Goth Family does not have any electronics. She explains how the Sims community create theories and plausible explanations for the Lolita's relationships based on her personality, items in her inventory, biography and family tree as well as theories to how and why she died.

With there being some lore in the Sims games, Izzzyzzz (*The Mysteries Of The Sims 2*, 2022) explains that this has led to many fan theories about various pre-made characters. An example is the character named Bella Goth. There is a lot of lore surrounding the Goth family as a whole, but the main focus point being Bella and the mystery surrounding her. The YouTuber Plumbella created the video *'The Entire History of the Goth Family'* (2021) where she also discusses the theories of Bella Goth's disappearance. *"The writers of the Sims are actually very clever of sprinkling out tiny little bits of lore that you can find within the game, so there is lots of little lore easter eggs."* (Plumbella, 2021)

Matthew Patrick on his YouTube channel The Game Theorists discusses the Bella Goth mystery and provides a theory to what happened to her. In his video *'Game Theory: The Unsolved Lore of The Sims (Bella Goth Mystery)'* (2022) Patrick (2022) begins with explaining that in the Sims 2, it was stated in the family description of the premade Goth family that Bella Goth suddenly disappeared, leading players to theorize why and what happened. Several theories were mentioned, such as Bella Goth's husband Mortimer murdering her, due to her finding out he was unfaithful. Patrick (2022) points out that, while this is a compelling theory, there is no in-game proof to support it. His second theory points to another pre-made Sim named Don Lothario, who is a known womanizer within the Sims community, is a murder suspect based on his memories and relationships. Among his memories in the Sims 2, there is a section showing he tried romantic advances towards Bella Goth but was rejected. Don's household description also openly states that *"Bella was last seen scaling the deck to his condo"* (The Sims 2, EA, 2004). This led to a popular theory being that Don murdered Bella over her rejection of him. However, Patrick (2022) remarks that within Bella's memories in the game's system files, it is openly stated that she was abducted by aliens. Aliens are an Occult species that do exist within the Sims franchise with Sims having a chance of being abducted when stargazing. This led to Patrick's (2022) theory number three, with the spotlight now facing two other pre-made Sims; Dina and Nina Caliente, who are half alien, evident through their family tree. Their family description reads: *"Was it just a coincidence that the Caliente sister arrived on the eve of Bella's disappearance? And is their interest in Mortimer physical... Or fiscal?"* (The Sims 2, EA, 2004). The lifelong aspirations of Dina Caliente supports this as well, with her wishing to be a gold digger. The theory states that the Caliente sisters abducted Bella to be able to marry Mortimer for his money. Bella Goth can be found in the alien focused town of Strangetown in the Sims 2, supporting the theory of abduction. Patrick (2022) draws attention to an official promotional interview for the website Sims Social, where Bella Goth herself confirmed her abduction, stating she was missing many memories, but remembered how Dina and Nina were making advances on Mortimer and trying to pull him away from her. Bella stated she believes the sisters were after the 'Life Elixir' which Mortimer supposedly could

create, and with Bella standing in the way of the sisters acquiring it, they got rid of her, sending her back in time. With the Sims 3 being a prequel to the Sims 2 in the franchise's official timeline, it is logical when Bella appears in the Sims 3 as a child, while also appearing in another Sims 3 world as deceased by old age. Patrick (2022) points out several other pieces of evidence to support the theory of time traveling between the Sims games in the timeline, with a former producer of the Sims confirming that it is the same Bella Goth across both all the Sims games.

4.3 Analysis

Studying the two games franchises, Animal Crossing and The Sims, the questions set out to be answered by this case study were:

- What various character personalities and visual aspects of characters or environments in the games pertain to there being lore in the games?
- Are there easter eggs of lore hidden within the games, proving lore exists in the games?
- Do players create theories about the game's world and the characters?
- Do players consider lore important?

4.3.1 Character Personalities and Visual Aspects

The term “Built-In Lore” refers to lore developed and implemented by the developers themselves. In the Sims games, it applies to the premade Sims' individual personality traits and their respective backstories which appear in the form of family or household descriptions and individual biographies, memories etc. In the Animal Crossing games, this type of lore is prevalent through the personalities of each NPC and their dialogues with the player, such as NPC Brewster the Pigeon's rudeness and high standard of coffee and the degrading words of the pig NPC Sue E. Even the description of Hopkins is a part of the “Built-In Lore”, as it is a description created by the developers of Animal Crossing. This type of lore is commonly connected to environmental storytelling, as a character's appearance can reflect their personality or story. Zipper T. Bunny is an example from the Animal Crossing franchise. His design indicates something more than just a simple bunny, with a large zipper on his back, along with his behavior regarding it. He does not approve of players or other NPCs looking at his back. This ties perfectly into Heussner et. al. (2015) definition of environmental storytelling, and a case of ‘show, don't tell’. The developers of Animal Crossing do not outright confirm nor deny what Zipper T. Bunny is, however they give visual hints and dialogues and then let the players make their own theories upon this lore. In the Sims franchise, environmental storytelling is a part of the premade Sims and the world, in the form of the Sims appearance and how their house looks. The Goth family's house is a large house with a dark theme both interior and exterior with a Gothic Victorian style. This reflects the household/family which lives in the house and is a part of the lore of the household/family. Agnes Crumplebottoms' unfinished baby room tells the story of a woman who not only lost her

husband, but perhaps a child as well. In this manner, lore creates a foundation and a beginning of a story which the player may choose to continue.

The Sims 3 is the only game in the Sims franchise with an open world, allowing players to take their Sims almost anywhere on the map. Having an open world goes hand in hand with environmental storytelling, an example being the abandoned mineshafts that can be found on the map. While the Sims is not the type of game to have quests for the player to complete in a traditional video game sense, there is still plenty of opportunity for players to have their Sims explore. Yet players may still enjoy the game without ever finding an abandoned mineshaft if they did not venture to that part of the world.

4.3.2 Easter Eggs and Hidden Lore

Easter Eggs and hidden stories are also a part of a game's lore, with both the Sims and Animal Crossing having hidden stories which the players need to go out of their way to find. In Animal Crossing, the story of the Able sisters is concealed at first, requiring the player to speak to an NPC who will not discuss the topic unless asked multiple times. Additionally, the story is drawn out over several games, making it a challenge to piece it all together. In the Sims games, Bella Goth's memory of being abducted by aliens is not one that can be found directly in the game, but rather in the game's code, a hidden easter egg. In Animal Crossing, the hamster Graham is hinted to be a BitCoin farmer, evident through his home in AC:NL being filled with servers.

4.3.3 Player Created Theories

As observed in the case study, community members of the two games create theories about the game's world and the characters, this leading to the term "Community-Created Lore". The analysis of the cases categorized as "Community-Created Lore" show how community members analyze what is created by the developers in the game, taking individual pieces of information, piece them together and further expand on them using their own imagination and creativity to create their own theories or lore based on it.

This is clearly seen with the two different Sims in The Sims games, Lolita and Bella Goth. There is some "Built-In Lore" surrounding both characters, but it is the players who draw the connections and explain the lore of the Sims and create theories based upon it. In Animal Crossing, various theories have been made and speculated regarding for example, the island the player is on being purgatory, or a specific NPC who is being hunted.

4.3.4 Is Lore Important?

Based upon community interactions and opinions on the lore of these games, the question posed is answered by a resounding yes, in the cases analyzed in this study. In Animal Crossing, several community members express disappointment in the change in dialogue of Animal Crossing's most recent version of the game New Horizons to the earlier installments, with one of the most noteworthy points being that the dialogue feels lackluster. Players enjoyed the more flavorful personalities and dialogues provided by various Animal Crossing NPCs in the earlier games.

"Built-In Lore" is also important to the community when they create "Community-Created Lore". Without lore, the community would not have anything to create and base their theories

upon. MC (2023) explains how lore is important to the communities of a game, and is a form of engagement, as well as useful for the developers to branch out into other mediums. Without lore, games may feel lackluster and empty, a consensus agreed upon by MC (2023) and Seara (2016). Lore adds depth and realism to a game and Seara (2016) describes lore as an essential way to engage players and leave them with a good memory and experience of a game.

4.4 Summary of Analysis

The study confirms that in *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing*, players create their own story as they progress through the game either through creating their own Sims or playing premade Sims in *The Sims*, or through building their perfect island paradise and interacting with the various NPCs in *Animal Crossing*. This makes both games clearly fit into Lebowitz and Klug's (2011) definition of a 'fully player driven' game, with the player creating their own stories based on the premise of the game being the players' free choice to do essentially what they please within a set of rules.

Lebowitz and Klug (2011) consider the Sims and *Animal Crossing* to have no story. However, the results of this study show this to not quite be the full truth. This case study, as does Lebowitz and Klug's (2011) show that NPCs in *Animal Crossing* provide rich amounts of dialogue which adds believability to the world. But contrary to Lebowitz and Klug (2011), the results of this case study show that there is more. Analyzing the results show that both games contain lore and small stories, despite having no overall plot for the player to follow. Several examples show that there is "Built-In Lore" in the form of character lore and hidden stories in the game, which players are experiencing. This is also shown to be true for the Sims.

Thus, the results of this case study provide evidence that players perceive that there is lore and stories in both the *Animal Crossing* and *The Sims* games. It is likely, but not proven in this study, that players' interactions with the NPCs or premade Sims with lore affects how players will play the games. But it is proven that "Built-In Lore" does trigger the communities of the games to talk about or expand the lore of the games, leading to the creation of "Community-Created Lore".

5 Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the existence of lore in supposedly plotless and storyless Social and Life Simulation games, specifically The Sims and Animal Crossing franchises. The results show that even while both games are plotless, they are neither lore- nor storyless, with the lore adding value to the games and players' experience.

The method used was a case study, based on articles and player generated online content such as YouTube videos. 8 videos, 2 game related articles, and 1 conference paper were selected based on the criterion that they showcase the lore in the games with proof in the form of detailed examples.

Four questions were sought to be answered by the study:

- What various visual aspects of characters or props in the games pertain to there being lore in the games?
- Are there easter eggs of lore hidden within the games, proving lore exists in the games?
- Do players create theories about the game's world and the characters?
- Do players consider lore important?

It was observed that what is perceived as lore could be mapped into two categories. Two terms, “Built-In Lore” and “Community-Created Lore” have been created and used to differentiate the two categories of lore. The case study shows that both The Sims and Animal Crossing contain “Built-In Lore”, i.e. lore that is designed into the game by the game developers. This can be in the form of visual aspects, personalities of characters and hidden lore. The study also showed that the “Built-In Lore” is a starting point for the community to create their own theories that are shared among other players in the community. Widespread sharing of these theories can create its own form of lore, “Community-Created Lore”. Furthermore, the study shows that the players find lore to be important.

Despite not being a genre of game with a traditional storyline and narrative to follow, through world-building, dialogue and visual aspects, it can be concluded that there is lore and hidden stories in Animal Crossing and The Sims.

5.2 Discussion

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3.1, YouTube is in general not a reliable source of information due to its entertainment environment and lack of validation, thus the use of YouTube videos as sources need to be made with care and this in mind. For this case study, the selected YouTube videos are relevant and reliable as they showcase the lore of Animal Crossing and the Sims and provide evidence and answers to the questions that this case study sets out to examine.

Due to time restraints, this case study did not perform surveys or interviews of players of The Sims or Animal Crossing games. Having either of these in the case study could strengthen the results of the analysis of the two games.

Despite this being a small case study based on community-created content, it shows that the games Animal Crossing and The Sims, two fully player driven games within the Social and Life Simulation genre, have a lore and story to them. However, can these results be applied and generalized to other games within the Social and Life Simulation genre? This study suggests that, yes, it can be generalized to other Social and Life Simulation games that have communities dedicated to discussions of lore in the game, such as the popular and well-known game Stardew Valley.

It can be important to note that some players may regard “Community-Created Lore” as facts rather than a simple theory based on “Built-In Lore”, especially when shared to a broad audience. An example of such widely shared theory is Matthew Patrick’s (2022) video regarding Bella Goth which has thus far accumulated 3.8 million views. In the Lolita Goth video and other videos by YouTuber The Sims Lore (2020), with roughly 70 000 subscribers, she shares her theories of various premade Sim families in the Sims 3, including examples of “Built-In Lore” such as detailed descriptions, and encourages her audience to comment and expand on her theories. This study showed that gaming communities value lore and expand on it, however it did not delve into researching whether players perceive “Community-Created Lore” the same way as actual “Built-In Lore”.

Players can choose to create their own futures and stories for these Sims based on what was created by the developers, but evolve these to suit the narrative that the player wishes to present for those Sims, regardless of the “Built-In Lore”. This is what Lebowitz and Klug (2011) meant when referring to Fully Player Driven Storytelling. It is the players who fully create the stories of the characters and what they will be. However, one can argue that it is not “fully” Fully Player Driven Storytelling, as the lore and stories provide a base for the players to move from, as well as a direction and guideline to how the user story can evolve.

Premade sims appearances and backstories may symbolize various archetypes and players may stereotype based upon them. While the impact of archetypes/stereotypes of user stories has not been examined in this study, it is evident that it impacts the “Community-Created Lore”.

5.3 Social and Ethical Aspects

This section contains a discussion some of the social and ethical aspects that are related to lore in Social and Life Simulation Games, namely

- Inclusivity and use of gender
- Use of Artificial Intelligence

5.3.1 Inclusivity in Animal Crossing and The Sims

Regarding both Animal Crossing and The Sims, this case study has not studied how gender-based lore may affect the players and their experience of the world and game. Lore in games

could reflect a gender perspective, in the way of how the characters in the game perceive players gender identity and preferences. Brown and Berg Marklund (2015) note that in AC:NL clothes have a label of 'male', 'female', or 'unisex'. Players may try on and wear clothing of the opposite gender from their avatar, however, NPCs in the game will often comment on it in various ways. Brown and Berg Marklund (2015) explain that the NPCs will not react if the player avatar's clothing is not unconventional (see Figure 5).



Figure 5 - Example of comments regarding player's clothing by NPCs.
(Excerpt from Brown and Berg Marklund, 2015, pg. 11)

NPCs reacting to the player is a reflection of the game's lore and the social values and norms held in the world. The Animal Crossing franchise has been around since the early 2000s, with the dialogue and subsequently NPCs opinions, updated in the latest installment to reflect the current norms and social values. Ian Walker writes in an article '*Animal Crossing: New Horizons Doesn't Care If Boys Wear Skirts, Whatever, It's 2020*' (2020) that in AC:NH, the NPCs no longer comment negatively on unconventional clothing options, instead responding positively to the choice of clothing.

The Sims games are generally more inclusive, which has evolved exponentially in the Sims 4. Same-sex couples have always been an availability in the Sims franchise, however, clothing and hairstyles have been limited to specific genders in the earlier versions of the game. The Sims 4 has increased their inclusivity with the options for players to make their Sims, homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual or aromantic, as well as adjusting their pronouns with options of she/her, he/him, they/them. There is also an option in the Sims 4 to include transgender Sims, as well as Sims being able to wear both masculine and feminine clothing regardless of their gender.

5.3.2 The Use of Artificial Intelligence

The Sims Franchise uses artificial intelligence (AI), as a way to have the player's Sim survive even without player input. Jai Ta explains in an article '*How AI Is Used In Video Games: The Sims 4 And Red Dead Redemption 2*' (2023) that in the latest installment of The Sims, The Sims 4, generative AI (GenAI) is used to mimic real and more believable human behavior. This study shows that players deem lore important, however improving lore to an even more realistic level, especially with the use of the most recent and future powerful AI, could have a

potential negative effect on society. With games becoming more life-like in graphical improvements and more varied dialogue and conversation while providing a controllable virtual reality, players may find themselves wishing to spend more time online than in the real world. Similar phenomenon is already being observed in Japan, through AI holographic “wives”, as Michael Fitzpatrick reports in an article titled ‘*Japanese shut-ins flock to hyper-intelligent interactive anime-style wife bot named Hikari*’ (2023).

5.4 Ideas for Future Research

The results of this case study could have been strengthened through surveys or interviews of players of *The Sims* and *Animal Crossing* games, however due to time restraints it was not performed. For future research within the subject, surveys and interviews should be performed, and measured against the results of this case study.

A topic not examined in this case study was how “Community-Created Lore” may affect players and whether or not they view it as “Built-In Lore” or not. Through the study of this topic, it would examine how players view “Community-Created Lore” and how these types of videos and content affect the players of the two games. Does it affect the players perceptions of the game and the existing “Built-In Lore”, and does it change how they play the game?

Broadening and deepening the subject of gender may be an interesting study to conduct on how the inclusivity and lack thereof affects the players of the game, and whether or not it affects their impression of the game’s world and impacts the player’s story.

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