DEFINING A NEW GAME GENRE
Ontological approach to identify and define a new genre of games

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the genre classification of Vampire Survivors-like games, focusing on "Vampire Survivors" by Poncle (2021, poncle). The objective is to define their genre and explore the possibility of a new genre creation. The research comprehensively examines genre origins, classification approaches, and significance from design, marketing, and consumer perspectives.

Vampire Survivors and similar games have gained prominence, but their genre remains uncertain. Elements align with Action Roguelike and Bullet Hell, yet definitive classification proves elusive. This study analyzes gameplay mechanics, design elements, and experiences to compare with established genres.

The research provides insights for game developers seeking design patterns and helps players find suitable games. It contributes to the understanding of emerging game genres, promoting innovation in the gaming industry.

Using a systematic methodology, this thesis establishes a coherent genre framework. Findings contribute to genre discussions and inspire future research in this evolving field.

**Keywords:** Genre Classification, Video Games, Vampire Survivors, Gameplay Analysis, Game Mechanics, Game Design, Emerging Game Genres, Genre Ambiguity, Game Development, Player Experience, Genre Definition, Genre Taxonomy, Comparative Analysis, Game Innovation, Gaming Industry, Genre Framework
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1 Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of gaming, certain titles emerge as trailblazers, capturing the attention of both players and developers alike. One such game that has ignited a new wave of creativity and intrigue is Vampire Survivors (2021, poncle). This captivating game has sparked discussions among enthusiasts and experts, prompting a fundamental question: What genre does Vampire Survivors belong to, and does it possess sufficient distinctiveness to warrant the creation of a new genre?

This research embarks on a journey to precisely define the genre of Vampire Survivors and similar games, delving into the mechanical components that make this gaming experience unique and captivating. The primary objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and origins of genres, exploring various approaches to genre classification and proposing a suitable method that serves academic inquiry effectively.

Genres in the gaming industry have a rich history, but they are far from static. As games continue to evolve and innovate, so do the boundaries and definitions of genres. The fluidity of genres poses a challenge when attempting to categorize games like Vampire Survivors, which showcase novel gameplay mechanics and dynamics that defy conventional genre classifications.

Within the realm of genres, the significance of game classification extends beyond theoretical curiosity. It influences design choices, marketing strategies, and the perception of games by players and consumers. Understanding the mechanics that define a genre can unlock new perspectives for game development and consumer engagement.

However, classifying Vampire Survivors and similar games necessitates more than a mere analysis of the individual components. It requires an exploration of existing genres and an assessment of their suitability for accommodating this unique gaming experience. In doing so, we confront the fluidity of genre boundaries, as well as the need for well-defined criteria to embrace and expand the genre landscape.

As we journey through the mechanics of Vampire Survivors, we must differentiate game genres from those found in movies and literature. Games offer a participatory experience, where players actively shape the narrative and progression, leading to a distinct encounter that sets them apart from passive media like movies. This distinction should be considered while defining the genre of Vampire Survivors-like games.

Throughout this study, the complexities of genre classification will be delved into, examining the relationships between genres and subgenres. I will draw from previous scholarly work and conduct personal analysis to gain a comprehensive view.

The scope of this research centers on the game Vampire Survivors, along with games that bear a significant resemblance to its gameplay. A multitude of such games will serve as reference points for comparison and analysis. As genres continue to evolve and defy rigid definitions, this research acknowledges the challenges inherent in pinpointing a definitive system for classification.
In the pursuit of unraveling the genre identity of these games, this study will explore historical contexts, frameworks for genre analysis, and the complexities of genre definitions. We will focus on the mechanical gameplay aspects rather than visual or thematic components to reveal the essence of the genre.

By the conclusion of this research, the aim is to provide a compelling analysis of Vampire Survivors and present a well-grounded proposal for a new genre definition, capturing the essence of this dynamic and innovative gaming experience. Let us embark on this exploration of genres and game mechanics, embracing the boundless creativity that drives the gaming industry forward.
2 Background

Video game genres serve as a means of categorizing games based on their gameplay mechanics, aesthetics, and thematic content. However, the rapid evolution of games and the emergence of innovative gameplay styles have led to new challenges in defining genres accurately. This thesis aims to address these challenges by investigating the defining characteristics and mechanics of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games to propose a new genre that better reflects their unique gameplay features and experiences.

In February of 2021, LEME released the game Magic Survival on the Android platform (Magic Survival Wiki, n.d.). The game follows a homunculus protagonist who must survive against waves of mutated spirits, while collecting experience points (MP) from fallen enemies and upgrading spells and skills during level ups. With a top-down view and pixelated graphics, the game features automatic casting of abilities on cooldown. As the game session progresses, enemies become tougher and more numerous, with no fixed end point except the player’s inability to survive.

This innovative gameplay style quickly inspired other game developers, leading to the emergence of a new subgenre featuring automatic combat. In December 2021, a game with a similar approach was released in early access under the name Vampire Survivors. The success of Magic Survival and Vampire Survivors has helped to popularize this unnamed subgenre, which breaks away from conventional principles of gameplay.

The focus of this thesis will focus on the game Vampire Survivors and not so much on the other games that share characteristics. However other games will be used as examples of how features can differentiate in order to justify why significant features are more defining of a genre than others in order to unnecessarily exclude games that share similarities.

This new genre currently does not have an official definition since in a sense the genre has not been pinned down yet. However, by looking at influencers and their take on this new genre we can gather an idea how it sits at its current stage. A youtuber known as AlaskanBeard’s (AlaskanBeard, 2023) he has shown dedication in playing these types of games and has set his criteria that can be used to define the genre and what is required to fit. In order to avoid falling into the Twin-Stick shooter genre he adds that adding elements from the roguelike genre was essential. These criterias are as followed:

- Automatic Shooting
- Multiple Weapons - Not strict
- Weapon Leveling
- Weapon Evolution - Not strict
- Roguelike elements
- Overall progression outside
- Perspective - Top Down - Isometric

This is something that can be taken into consideration moving on. Reevaluating this current suggestion of criterias with a proper analysis of the game and see if this will still stand after it’s been concluded. At this stage this is the only list found that actually defines the genre step by step and with a few additions can get us closer to a solid list of criterias that defines this genre. These current definitions of AlaskanBeard do not emphasize the shmup aspects of the genre.

Relevance
The reason why I think this topic is relevant is that upon utilizing SteamPeek, a tool designed for searching games on Steam, a total of 323 games were found that bear significant resemblance to Vampire Survivors. Out of these games, 177 have already been released. The input used for this can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Showing input of games similar to Vampire Survivors on SteamPeek

The search was performed based on the release date of Magic Survival on February 13, 2021 and excluded mobile games. The search parameters encompassed the time period from February 13, 2021 to February 18, 2023, with the default similarity settings. However, it is important to note that the algorithm used by Steampeek mostly relies on similar categories, which may occasionally yield misleading results.
In figure 2 we can see how games from a list presented in an article that several games considered similar to VS are categorized in the Bullet Hell genre. The issue with this is that features present in the genre do not reflect the gameplay of VS. This results in games that actually belong to the Bullet Hell subgenre may appear due to overlapping features. As a result of constraints related to resources and time, it is not feasible to test all of these games. Nonetheless, based on preliminary observations, the vast majority of these games do possess the aforementioned features.

Another popular genre to place these types of games under is the Roguelike and Roguelite genre. When it comes to singular defining genre it’s more popular to be placed under the Roguelite but as it doesn’t seem to exist a Action Roguelite tag on Steam it has more commonly fallen under the hybrid Action Roguelike. The original genre of these two is the subgenre of RPG; Roguelike which in the past according to the Berlin Interpretation consisted of several defining game elements such as Turn-based, Permadeath, Randomly generated map, etc. The interpretation of the genre is something that has grown over the years where elements such as having to offer a Turn-based combat system is not as relevant which can be seen in games such as Hades (Supergiant Games, 2020). One aspect that is common in the Roguelike genre is their challenging and punishing gameplay.

2.1 Genres
A genre refers to a classification of artistic, musical, or literary works that share common characteristics in terms of style, form, or content. It serves as a tool for categorizing media content into specific groups that enable audiences to easily identify and locate materials they may enjoy. Unlike quality, genre does
not judge the merit of the content but rather defines it based on a set of criteria that classifies it within a specific category.

In the film industry, a genre typically comprises four elements: character, story, plot, and setting. It involves a central character navigating a world with a specific goal and a means of achieving it. However, what a genre implies may vary depending on the medium. In video games, genres are used as a means of breaking down the vast world of games into more manageable provinces (Arsenault, 2009, p. 155).

It can be argued that unlike genres in other forms of media, such as literature and film, video game genres are mainly based on gameplay mechanics and interactive elements, rather than narrative or stylistic elements. There has been an ongoing debate whether aesthetics such as themes are important in relation to the discussing of what defines genres. However aesthetics will be put as a lesser priority as the goal is to dive into the mechanical aspects of presented games rather than aesthetical. How information in relation to gameplay is important, there will be less focus on elements such as music, story, artstyle to name a few aesthetic elements. Due to the abstractness of narration involved in the discussion of genres may run the risk of complicating the discussion. Something that is worth mentioning is that the goal is not to weigh how the player experiences is impacted by the gameplay but which components that define this genre.

Overall, the classification of video games into genres serves as a tool useful for players and developers alike, allowing for better categorization and selection of games, as well as aiding in the development process by targeting specific audiences.

2.1.1 Subgenre

Video game subgenres are more specific categories that fall within a larger video game genre, providing more detailed and specific information about a video game's gameplay and design, allowing players to find games that match their specific preferences more easily (Rehak, 2003). Subgenres often share many of the characteristics of the main genre but have additional defining features that make them distinct (Chandler, 2007). For example, within the action genre, there are subgenres such as first-person shooters, platformers, and fighting games, each with their own unique gameplay mechanics and design elements. Similarly, within the role-playing genre, there are subgenres such as open-world RPGs, strategy RPGs, and action RPGs, each with their own unique gameplay mechanics and design elements.

The concept of subgenres helps to provide more detailed information about the gameplay and design of video games, which is beneficial for players when searching for games that match their preferences (Rehak, 2003). The development of new subgenres is also not uncommon, and often arises from innovative and unique gameplay mechanics (Chandler, 2007).

The Vampire Survivors game has introduced new and interesting mechanics, but if it is unique enough to inspire a whole new genre remains to be inspected. The more likely scenario after definitions has been figured out is that it could be considered a new subgenre or a mixture of existing subgenres, as is common with the development of new video game subgenres (Chandler, 2007).
2.1.2 Hybrid Genres

Hybrid genres, as the name suggests, refer to a combination of two or more existing game genres to create a new genre. Such genres are important as they allow game developers to create innovative and unique gameplay experiences by blending various mechanics from different genres (Vargas-Iglesias, 2015).

On the other hand, mixed genres are a less structured and more experimental approach to game development, which combines three different functions such as genres. In their paper they express that the term mixed genre is being used interchangeably with hybrid genres, but the key difference is that they’re a mix of more than three genres. (Vargas-Iglesias, 2015). One example of a genre that embraces three different genres is MOBA that relies on Action, RPG and Strategy elements in their games. Examples from this genre are games such as Dota 2 and League of Legends. While hybrid mixes two genres for example Action-RPG (ARPG) that includes games such as the Diablo franchise and Vampire Survivors.

Depending on the source, the structure of what is and what is not a subgenre differentiates. There's also times where discussions around genres don't seem to offer any sort of structure but rather just a broad list of genres. In order to begin there is a need to decide on what structure to use as a starting point. Genres are a broad and ever changing topic that is complicated to pin down a reliable structure to rely on. For this thesis I am going to rely on Juan J. Vargas-Iglesias text on Making Sense of Genre: The Logic of Video Game Genre Organization that focuses on four main genres. These genres being Action, Strategy, Role-playing game (RPG) and Puzzle. Each genre embraces different elements within games that are fundamental in regards of rule, mechanics and function as shown in figure 1. In the paper he explains that each genre focuses on different mechanics and functions as the base level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Chronology and Features of the Four Game Functions.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy (S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puzzle (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPG (R)</td>
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*Figure 3. Table on Chronology and Feature of the four game functions from Vargas-Iglesias*

The idea is to figure out each of VS current genres in a hierarchical level going all the way to the origin. Each of these genres contains multiple levels of subgenres in order to go further into specifics of the gameplay that are present in the game. It is not uncommon that genres share characteristics from multiple of these four genres which makes them into a hybrid. But for this topic it is relevant to recognize the levels of the origins of each subgenre in order to properly offer arguments to VS categorization.
2.2 Discuss the issues with defining genres

The precise number of video game genres that currently exist remains elusive as the very criteria for their classification are subject to constant evolution with the emergence of new and distinctive games. GamePro, in an article on the subject, suggests that there may be over 30 distinct genres, although a tally of the genres listed reveals that there are at least 40 (GamePro, 2023). It is worth noting that this count only includes the subgenres that the publication deems to be the most prevalent. However, given the power of human imagination and the continued expansion of the gaming industry, it is expected that new mechanical or visual characteristics may emerge, leading to the creation of novel genres.

Video game genres are inherently fluid and often intermingle, rendering their delineation complex. This subjectivity is further compounded by the fact that different people hold different perceptions of genre, thus complicating attempts to standardize genre definitions. While being a different platform of media, Rick Altman has stated that genres are fluid but also something that reflects the interests of groups of people (Altman, 2019).

2.3 History of new Genres

The emergence of novel genres is not solely attributed to the introduction of new and distinctive games, but can be traced to several underlying factors. Innovation and experimentation are essential aspects of game development, as game developers constantly aim to create new ideas, mechanics, and themes. Through their efforts to combine existing elements in new and unique ways, they may inadvertently establish a new sub-genre or identify a gap in the market that could be fulfilled by a new sub-genre.

Another factor that contributes to the emergence of new subgenres is audience segmentation. As the gaming audience grows and becomes more diverse, developers and publishers may develop new sub-genres to cater to specific groups of players. For instance, with the increasing popularity of mobile gaming, the hyper-casual games have emerged to players that enjoy simple mechanics and design with short play sessions. A “genre” that has been the most played type of game by far with 30% of all apps downloaded (Karthikeyan, 2022).

Technological advancements also play a crucial role in the establishment of new sub-genres. Developers create games that capitalize on new hardware capabilities, leading to the emergence of new sub-genres. For example, the advent of games like Pokémon GO (Niantic, Inc. 2016) that gave rise to the genre of location-based games with the use of Augmented Reality (AR) with the combination of OpenStreetMap and GPS. Pokemon is a game that by itself increased the physical activity of their player base world wide (An & Nigg, 2017). Lastly, industry trends, such as the growth of indie game development or the increasing prominence of esports, can also contribute to the emergence of new sub-genres. An example of a genre that has been heavily inspired by this is the hero shooter from games like Team Fortress 2 that is a shooter with unique characters with their own unique arsenal of skills and weaponry.

In recent years, there has been a significant and consistent rise in the number of games released annually, with 2014 serving as a turning point. This increase may be attributed to the availability of game engines, such as Unity and Unreal Engine, and the increased access to assets that are free or can be
bought from sites like Unity Asset store which have made game development more accessible by lowering the barriers to entry. Furthermore, the growing interest in game development may have contributed to the surge in the number of games being released each year as seen in figure 4.

![Steam Game Releases by Year](image)

*Figure 4: Amount of games released each year (SteamDB)*

As illustrated in Figure 3, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of games released on Steam, with a surge from 435 games in 2013 to 12,917 in 2022 (Clement, 2018). Despite the impressive number of games released, there are some titles that defy existing categorization and merit further analysis. This paper aims to explore games that challenge conventional categorization.

### 2.3.1 Origins of Genres

Here are a couple of popular genres and their origins.

**Battle Royale**

An example of a new genre that has emerged in recent years is the "Battle Royale" genre. This type of game is a subgenre of action games and typically involves a large number of players who are dropped onto an island or other map and must fight to be the last person or team standing. Battle Royale games often feature elements of survival and strategy, as players must gather resources, equipment, and outwit their opponents to survive. Often the games involve a big map and as the play session goes on an area on the map will be designated and in order for the player characters to survive they need to move there.

The term “Battle Royale” originates from Japanese pop culture and can be traced back to the dystopian novel written by Koushun Takami in 1999 and later got a movie adaptation (Toei Company, 2000) under the same name (Wikipedia, 2023, ‘Battle Royal’). Same as the game genre describes, this novel and movie introduces a death game where one person or a group of people are instructed to kill one another until there is a last man standing which will be presented as the winner/survivor.

According to an article written by Acer Corner (Acer Corner, 2022) the “Battle Royale” as a game genre started from mods for games like DayZ (Bohemica Interactive, Dean Hall, 2013) and Arma 3(Bohemia Interactive, 2013), created by game designer Brendan Greene which later on went on to create the popular stand-alone game PlayerUnknown’s Battleground, more commonly referred to as PUBG. Epic
Games released their own game in early access known as Fortnite: Battle Royale (Epic Games. 2017) as a competitive mode to their own zombie-survival game. The game was officially released in 2018 and is now one of the most popular and widely-played games in the world, thanks in part to its unique gameplay and free-to-play model. The term “Battle Royale” originates from an old set of rules that involves eight individuals participating in bare-knuckle boxing where the last man standing is the winner. Something that was later introduced into entertainment in 2000 and has since been a popular genre among a variety of media, bringing movies like The Hunger Game and games like Fortnite (Chaundy, 2023).

Defining elements of this genre is exploration, scavenging and trying to eliminate enemies until the player is the last man standing (Bennett-Cohen. J, (2022).

**Multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA)**

The MOBA genre emerged from Defense of the Ancients (IceFrog. S. Feak. 2003), also known as DOTA, released in 2003, which is a custom game created within the Warcraft 3 engine. DOTA blended elements from real-time strategy (RTS) games, role-playing games (RPGs), and structured multiplayer maps to create a unique gameplay experience. This game inspired other game developers to create games following a similar template such as League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009) and Heroes of Newerth (S2 Games. 2010). Games within this genre rose in popularity using LoL as an example, as this is being written the game has approximately had 1,250,000 active users over the last hour (ActivePlayer, 2022). As a result of their popularity, the term "MOBA" was coined to describe this innovative genre.

The game used controls common in the Real-time strategy (RTS) genre but what made it unique was the gameplay where the player plays in a team against another team, in a structured map and each player controls an unique character with various abilities and serves a variety of roles. This game could no longer be considered as a pure RTS as it broke the norms of that genre and also introduced a variety or elements more common in other genres such as a leveling system and structure that is more common in Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG). This led to the question of how someone could define that game and eventually was settled with the new genre multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA).

Investigations on if Vampire Survivors and similar games have enough uniqueness within their combinations of genres to fall into a unique genre. Looking into previously mentioned genres that the developers of their games puts them under may offer a clearer idea if that is justified. In order to gain a more clear direction, ideas from Juan J. Vargas-Iglesias’ article “Making Sense of Genre. The Logic of Video Game Genre Organization” where he presents an academic approach to how subgenres are categorized under a genre.

There are core genres that are not more focused on Gameplay rather than aesthetics. Examples that would be judged from a more thematic and artistic point of view is the horror genre that more relies on infusing the game with an intense mood to keep their players on the edge.
2.3.3 Summary of Naming Genres

The present discourse highlights the contrasting nomenclature of subgenres within the video game industry, specifically Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) and Battle Royale. The former adopts an academic approach that elucidates the essential components of the genre using apt language. MOBA is a multiplayer online game where players engage in battles within an arena. In contrast, the term "Battle Royale" is derived from an old set of rules that involve eight individuals participating in bare-knuckle boxing until the last person is left standing. The concept of Battle Royale was later introduced into entertainment in 2000, and since then, has been a popular genre across various media, including movies such as The Hunger Games and video games such as Fortnite. Although both subgenres serve the purpose of explaining their respective types of games, their naming conventions differ significantly.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to determine whether "Vampire Survivors" and similar games merit a new genre classification and to explore the defining characteristics of this potential new genre. The ever-evolving nature of genres and the increasing demand from the gaming community to identify the appropriate categorization for these games have driven this research.

To achieve this goal, the thesis will employ Zagal's framework, which offers an ontological approach to evaluate games, focusing on their mechanics and functions (Zagal et al., 2005). This framework will provide a solid basis for analyzing the core elements of "Vampire Survivors" and identifying the genre it best aligns with.

Additionally, the thesis will follow Vargas-Iglesias' structure from 2018, which identifies four main genres that represent distinct functions, rules, and mechanics (action, role-playing game (RPG), puzzle and strategy). These four main genres will serve as a starting point to classify "Vampire Survivors" within a broader genre category.

Furthermore, external sources of genre definitions will be utilized to gain a deeper understanding of each genre's defining characteristics. This approach will ensure a comprehensive and well-informed evaluation of the game's genre.

By combining these methodologies, the thesis will delve into the baseline genres associated with "Vampire Survivors" and explore the subgenres that best represent its unique gameplay features. The goal is to provide a clear and comprehensive genre classification for "Vampire Survivors" and similar games, contributing valuable insights to the ongoing discussions about game genres and aiding developers and players in identifying games that align with their preferences and gameplay experiences. As the research progresses, it will fill existing gaps in genre classification discussions and offer a more cohesive framework for understanding this emerging genre. Ultimately, the thesis seeks to foster innovation and diversity in the gaming industry while providing a foundation for future genre-related research.
3 Problem

Vampire Survivors, a game developed by Poncle, exhibits gameplay elements that align with several genres, including Action Roguelike and Bullet Hell, with a stronger affinity to the roguelike sub genre known as roguelite. Where the key differentiates between the two versions is Roguelite’s incorporation of out-of-run progression (Van Allen. E, 2022) which is something that Vampire Survivors allows. This is a topic that will be discussed further in section 4.2.7. While these genre associations capture certain aspects of the game, a notable uncertainty surrounds the precise genre classification of Vampire Survivors. The inclusion of Bullet Hell as a genre raises questions due to fundamental differences between Vampire Survivors and traditional Bullet Hell games. Unlike the intricate bullet patterns and projectile-focused gameplay of Bullet Hell games, Vampire Survivors emphasizes upgrading features over each session in order to fend off waves of enemies over a period of time.

Currently the genre system of video games lacks a uniform, official and clear identification standard. Something that leads to games being categorized based on people's own bias. There’s also the absence of a detailed definition of each genre turning it into a rather abstract concept (Wu. Q, 2020).

The game's own description on its Steam Page, suggesting that players "be the bullet hell!", further complicates the genre delineation (store.steampowered.com, 'Vampire Survivors'). This ambiguity in genre classification hinders effective communication of the game's unique gameplay aspects to potential players and poses challenges for game developers seeking to position their creations accurately.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of video games, the classification of genres remains an intricate challenge. The diversity and innovation in gameplay mechanics have given rise to hybrid experiences that defy traditional genre categorizations. This raises the question: What genre does Vampire Survivors belong to, and does it possess sufficient distinctiveness to warrant the creation of a new genre? This research delves into this fundamental inquiry, seeking to unravel the complexities of genre classification in the context of emerging game mechanics and gameplay experiences. Therefore, this thesis aims to resolve the uncertainty surrounding the genre classification of Vampire Survivors and similar games by employing a comprehensive analysis of their mechanics, gameplay elements, and comparisons with established genres. The research seeks to provide valuable insights to the ongoing discussions about game genres, offer clarity for game developers, and assist players in identifying games that align with their preferences and gameplay experiences. By developing a more cohesive framework for understanding emerging game genres, this study endeavors to foster innovation and diversity in the gaming industry.

The scope of the research revolves around analyzing Vampire Survivors and other games that share similar gameplay characteristics. By delving into the mechanics of these games, the study aims to propose a more accurate genre classification and, if necessary, suggest the creation of a new genre that appropriately captures their unique gameplay elements. The results of this research can contribute to a
deeper understanding of game genres and provide valuable guidance for both developers and players in the dynamic landscape of game design and classification.

3.1 Method

The primary objective is to identify and categorize a new genre for games like "Vampire Survivors" through a structured analysis of their gameplay mechanics and characteristics. The research aims to determine if the current genre arrangement sufficiently describes the type of gameplay offered or if further description is required.

Methodology:
The methodology involves using the model called The 5-step Approach To Evaluation (Bisset. C, Gilman. L, 2016).

1. Identify Issues with Current Categorization: Discuss the challenges and uncertainties in categorizing games like "Vampire Survivors" under existing genres.

2. Review History of Other Genres: Explore the historical development of genres in the video game industry and any relevant changes in genre definitions over time.

3. Analyze Target Games: Explain how you will analyze "Vampire Survivors" and other similar games, focusing on their gameplay mechanics and characteristics.

4. Identify the Need for New Genre Classification: Explain the reasons why there is a need for a new genre classification and the gaps in the current genre landscape that your research aims to fill.

5. Assess Uniqueness of the Games: Describe the criteria you will use to assess whether these games are unique enough to warrant a new genre classification.

3.1 Ontological Approach

An ontological approach is a useful way to analyze games and game genres as it focuses on understanding the fundamental nature and characteristics of games. By using this approach researchers can gain insights into how games are structured, definitions of their genre and how they function. Analyzing from an ontological perspective allows for a systematic examination through various components that makes up a game such as rules, mechanics, objectives and player interactions. It will aid in understanding the core elements that define said game genre and what differentiates it from others. This also may serve as an instrument to better identify commonalities and patterns among games within genres and how their definition grows and/or changes.

Zagal's framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of games and their genres by allowing us to organize elements of a game, uncovering structures that contribute to gameplay experience and identifying their relationships. It emphasizes the importance of considering both
objective and subjective dimensions of games in order to gain an understanding of their interactivity and understand their function as part of a genre.

Zagal's framework, consisting of rules, goals, entities, entity manipulation, and interface, is utilized to analyze games and organize their elements. The framework helps in understanding the gameplay experience and the interactivity of games within their genres.

**Interface**
The interface acts as the convergence point for players and the game, facilitating their physical and cognitive interactions with in-game elements. It encompasses the player's actions, interactions, and the communication and feedback mechanisms employed by the game. It encompasses the player's experience, input devices, visual and auditory presentation, and the translation of inputs into devices that result in action in game. The input method translates the selected signal from the input device into specific game actions, such as manipulating game entities.

**Rules**
Rules define the constraints of what can and cannot be done in a game. This does not only dictate what kind of actions that can be done, what the player is allowed to do or what they are not allowed to do but how the player interacts with the world in general. Classic example of this is the amount of times a player character can fall off a cliff before it is Game Over or how many times the player needs to hit their enemy before the enemy has been defeated. This also includes basic rules of physics. Be it that if the player jumps that there is a gravitational force pulling the player down towards the ground again or perhaps the player floats in space.

**Goal**
In simple terms; goals are the objective or conditions that the player is required to meet in order to succeed in the game. Gathering a certain amount of collectibles, getting from point A to point B, what the term of success heavily depends on the game and the goal may not necessarily be defined ahead of time. Goals are something that the player should be forced to consider in order to achieve victory and that will impact their decision making. Zagal’s ontology does not include self-imposed goals nor goals that only involve the most fundamental level such as go from point A to point B.

**Entities**
Next are entities that are managed, modified or interacted by the player at any sort of level. This includes gameobjects that are not directly controlled by the player such as enemies and collectibles. These are the objects that make up the world such as agents, walls and power ups. Zagal confesses in his article that this section of his framework is the least developed one as entities tend to be mostly defined in relation to Entity Manipulation. Since entity manipulation does not necessarily apply to all objects in a game, it may be a good idea to separate these two categories.

**Entity Manipulation**
Last on Zagal’s list is the entity manipulation which involves the alterations of objects within the game whether it’s done by the player or the game itself. This involves the actions conducted by the player or in-game entities. This involves a lot of attribute change for entities that involve movement, damage, health, life, death, destruction, resurrection, amongst many other things. This section covers a wide area of actions and responses to situations that occur during a session. In its essence this category is defined as the “altering the attributes or abilities of game world entities”. Zagal also continues to explain that this ontology also includes more abstract examples such as To Collide, To Create, To Own and Compound Actions. In Zagal’s example, to distinguish attributes and abilities in Zelda: Wind Waker is if the tool is used by choice or not. Within many games it is popular to differentiate these two as passive (attributes) and active (abilities) as passive happens by itself while active requires the player to activate the ability. Receiving a bow does allow the player character to shoot range which could be considered as an attribute but since it requires the player to activate in order to use he considers it an ability. For Vampire Survivors it is more black and white however. While the only actions present is the player’s ability to move around or not, the weapons the player uses activates passively. Meaning that it is activated in intervals rather than by giving the correct input. This begs the question if every action beside movement should be considered an attribute. For this game it would be easier to consider weapons/features as abilities.

By analyzing games from the perspective of these five elements there is a possibility that it may lead closer to an understanding of this type of games’ unique qualities and if their combined characteristics qualifies a new genre. So how do we make use of this Framework in order to gain an understanding of the game’s game components?

The foundation behind the ontology is to make entries that embrace core elements of a game. The entry should include the title or name, a description of the target element and strong and weak examples of games that make use of this element, an already defined Parent and several Child elements that embrace the idea.

The idea is to use this framework in order to get an idea of Vampire Survivors and similar games’ gameplay mechanics with a focus on the categories previously mentioned and eventually find out if they fit into their designated genres.

So what are the genres that the game will be compared to? The answer to that is the genres the games have been placed under. The goal of this project is to get an idea if these genres are suited to define the type of gameplay the games in question offer. Common descriptors of games are broader genres that could mean anything that fits within a broad definition. Using a relevant genre as an example in this case is that if the game emphasizes hand-eye coordination and reaction time? If it does then it belongs in a category that is broad and includes plenty of subgenres that offers more specific descriptors of what the game is. If a game would be satisfied with classifying a game as purely action, the customer is not informed how that action is played out. Is it a shooter, beat ‘em ups or any other sort is not explained.
3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The majority of data collection has been gathered through in-game observations. Observations of the game’s gameplay mechanics were conducted and as a complementary tool used reviews. The game was played, notes were taken and the results used in order to conduct a comparative analysis of games that share similar traits. For sources regarding reviews, etc will focus on professional reviews and dedicated Youtubers that covers the Vampire Survivors amongst other games that fall into the same category. This paper will collect data from various sources of scholars and experts within the field to deepen the reliability of the results presented.

The gathered information went through a process of analyses where the game is taken apart into components using Zagal’s framework. By doing this a list of components was gathered that further could be used in order to compare with other similar games and figure out what the defining characteristics of this new genre could be. With the use of this list defined of criterias identify which genre this new genre would be a subgenre of. The analysis used was a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one as it will focus on the writer’s interpretation rather than a broader audience.

After completing the analysis of Vampire Survivors, gameplay will be analyzed and identification of what categories the game falls into. After completing this the results will be compared to games that share strong similarities of Vampire Survivors and find overlapping elements, distinguishing features, and understanding how they align or diverge from existing genres. Look into genres and their subgenres until a suitable level that defines Vampire Survivors has been identified.

3.3 Limitations

As previously stated, there’s no silver bullet to game analysis and defining a new genre. The field known as genres is ever expanding where new definitions and genres are being molded regularly. What doesn’t help is that this field that is currently missing a proper structure and definitions of a genre can vary depending on the source of which there are many. The subjective nature of the analysis and the ever-expanding nature of game genres are noted as limitations of the research.

There are also limitations to using Zagal’s framework that may need to be highlighted before going into this. The framework relies on subjectivity which in this situation relies on my own interpretation of in game components and that may not lead to consistent results. It also presents inflexibility by the way the framework is designed. It offers a broad list of in-game components but still runs the risk of not including unique key game design elements that may be present. It’s also time consuming as the framework requires a detailed analysis of a broad array of game components and the process can become quite challenging. Lastly the framework focuses heavily on gameplay mechanics rather than game design elements such as aesthetics, sound design and narrative which may not gain as much attention.

Zagal’s framework certainly doesn’t offer a silver bullet to how to analyze games, especially in a field that has proved to be ever changing such as game genres and design. However it still remains a useful tool in order to analyze and discuss gameplay mechanics and find connections in design.
3.4 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcome of this research is the gain of a structured categorization of this new genre and a definition that comes with it. Through the use of Zagal's framework, the hope is to identify the important game design elements that makes the game unique and properly define them in a way that is strict while inclusive. As previously stated this new genre will likely be a hybrid of action and RPG however it remains to be seen. Through the application of Zagal's framework, it is expected that the unique gameplay mechanics and characteristics of 'Vampire Survivors' will be clearly defined, leading to the identification of a new genre that combines elements of action and RPG genres. The potential contributions of this research may potentially voice a concern in this field of genres and their inconsistencies.

3.5 Relevance to Research Question

The proposed methodology directly aligns with the research question posed in the Problem section, which is to identify and categorize a new genre for games like "Vampire Survivors" by analyzing their gameplay mechanics and characteristics. The steps outlined in the methodology are specifically designed to address the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the genre classification of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games. Each step contributes to the overall goal of offering a more cohesive framework for understanding emerging game genres and fostering innovation and diversity in the gaming industry.

1. **Identify Issues with Current Categorization**: The first step of the methodology focuses on discussing the challenges and uncertainties in categorizing games like "Vampire Survivors" under existing genres. By critically examining the current genre classifications and comparing them to the gameplay mechanics of "Vampire Survivors," this step aims to pinpoint the areas where the existing categorizations fall short and identify the need for a more accurate and nuanced classification.

2. **Review History of Other Genres**: Exploring the historical development of genres in the video game industry and any relevant changes in genre definitions over time allows for a comprehensive understanding of how genres have evolved. This historical context provides valuable insights into the ever-expanding field of game genres and helps to identify emerging patterns and defining characteristics that may be relevant for the new genre classification.

3. **Analyze Target Games**: The core step of the methodology involves a detailed analysis of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games. By focusing on their gameplay mechanics and characteristics, this analysis aims to deconstruct the games into their fundamental components using Zagal's framework. This approach facilitates the identification of key elements such as rules, goals, entities, and entity manipulation, which are crucial for understanding the unique qualities of these games.

4. **Identify the Need for New Genre Classification**: Drawing on the findings from the analysis of target games, this step articulates the reasons why there is a need for a new genre classification and the gaps in the current genre landscape. The identification of gameplay elements that do
not fit existing genre categories highlights the potential for a new, more specific genre that accurately captures the essence of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games.

5. **Assess Uniqueness of the Games:** This step involves describing the criteria that will be used to assess whether these games are unique enough to warrant a new genre classification. By comparing the identified gameplay elements with established genres, this assessment aims to determine if the games offer a solid foundation for defining a new genre or if they can be adequately categorized within existing genres.

In conclusion, the proposed methodology directly addresses the research question by systematically examining the gameplay mechanics and characteristics of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games. The step-by-step approach, along with the use of Zagal's framework, ensures a comprehensive analysis of the games and contributes to the understanding of emerging game genres in the context of the broader gaming industry. By following this methodology, the research endeavors to shed light on the uncertainty surrounding genre classification and provide valuable insights for game developers and players alike.
4 Analysis

The Analysis section of this thesis aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the game design elements within "Vampire Survivors" through the adoption of Zagal’s ontology of game analysis. By systematically dissecting the game and establishing relationships between its components, this analysis seeks to shed light on the intricate interactions that shape the gameplay experience. The primary focus lies on specific aspects, including the interface, rules, goal structure, entity manipulation, and scoring system. Using Zagal's framework as a guiding tool, we will explore the various in-game components of "Vampire Survivors" and identify the significance of mechanics and their relationships, with the ultimate aim of providing insights that can be compared with other games that share similar characteristics.

Through this analysis, we hope to contribute to the broader understanding of game design in the context of "Vampire Survivors" and similar games that belong to the emerging genre. By identifying defining elements and exploring their impact on the gameplay experience, this analysis aims to offer valuable insights that can be applied to the design and development of future games within this genre.

With the groundwork laid, the dissection of VS was followed in order to uncover the intricacies that make it a thrilling and engaging gaming experience. The source of Zagal’s framework’s components can be found at GameOntology.com (gameontology contributors, (Game Ontology), 22 September 2020).

4.1.1 Interface

2-Dimensional Gameworld : This game uses a 2-Dimensional gameworld meaning that the game makes use of 2-axis (height, width) and does not rely on the third which is depth, giving it a flat look. (gameontology, '2-Dimensional Gameworld')

Targeted Camera: The game uses a targeted camera that follows the player character around from a third person, top-down perspective with an orthographic view point. (gameontology, 'Targeted Camera')

Input Devices: VS is a game that exists on several platforms which requires accessibility to be able to control in a variety of ways. As it exists on Steam, it allows the player to control the character using the keyboard with WASD as the standard keybinds. It also allows the player to plug in a controller and control the character using the stick. Since it also exists on the consoles Xbox and soon for Nintendo Switch platform naturally it needs to be able to play with a controller. As for iOS and Android it requires the player to be able to play using the touch sensitive screen. (gameontology, Input Devices')

Input Method: Depending on the platform the controllers change. As previously mentioned there are a number of ways to control the player character but what the character can do is rather limited as the only thing they can do in game is moving in x- and y-axis with exceptions like leveling and maneuvering through the menu. (gameontology, 'Input Method')

Single Entity Manipulation: The player controls a single entity within which the world in a sense revolves around. Projectiles shot out are based around this one entity’s direction and position, enemy spawning
around the entity and moves towards the entity's and lastly pickups are removed from the game upon collision with the player character. (gameontology, 'Single Entity Manipulation').

**Third-person Point of View:** VS relies on a third-person point of view in a top-down angle. Meaning that the player sees and follows the character and top-down that it’s an orthographic view perspective in the sense that there’s no 3D aspects present. (gameontology, 'Third-person Point of View').

**Two Dimensional Frame:** As previously mentioned, VS relies on a Two Dimensional Frame in order to present their graphics, depicting the game in two dimensions (gameontology, 'Two Dimensional Frame').

**Head Up Display (HUD):** VS uses their HUD to present a variety of information such as timer, number of kills, coins gathered, equipment and lastly experience bar together with what level. While it may not be significantly presented, the player’s hit points-bar (HP-bar) is also presented but underneath the character. If the player collides with a hostile entity like enemy or projectile the player will lose hit points which are represented through the previously mentioned HP-bar. Remaining HP being presented through a common (Current HP / Max HP). (gameontology, 'Head Up Display').

![Figure 5: Image from Steam of Antonio from Vampire Survivors (Steam, ‘Vampire Survivors’)](image)

**Health Indicator:** The player character's health level is visualized through a health bar that is shown just below the entity's sprite during play sessions. It’s very straightforward where the red color represents the current amount of hit points and the black fill represents the total amount of hit points. Naturally the
black fill is not shown when the entity has the maximum amount of hit points. (gameontology, 'Health Indicator')

**Map Display:** The player has the possibility to watch the areas the player has traversed through. As secrets are unlocked that will increase the amount of information displayed on the map. (gameontology, 'Map Display')

**Points Indicator:** VS does not necessarily have a points indicator but it allows the player to see the amount of enemies they have defeated during their play session. While the amount of kills does not go towards a high score and necessarily does not mean that the player won, it shows at some level the level of efficiency the player’s skills and build has accomplished. It also shows the amount of coins that has been gathered. (gameontology, 'Points Indicator')

**Time Indicator:** The time indicator allows the player to foresee incoming threats and lets the player know how much time remains of the level. Normally bosses appear after a set amount has passed. After time is up the Reapers begin to appear to quickly finish off the player character. (gameontology, 'Time Indicator')

**Special Weapon Indicator:** This is a rather unique one as the selection of weapons is what builds up this UI element. This also goes to show at what levels each weapon and feature unlocked are at in terms of level. This is a gameplay element that can be seen in the upper left corner beneath the experience-bar. (gameontology, 'Special Weapon Indicator')

4.1.2 Goal

This looks into the game’s in-game objectives and conditions that the player requires to complete in order to “win” the game. This also looks into the AI’s goals with what they need to do in order to complete their objectives. Vampire Survivors contains a couple of goals in game that the player can aim towards in order to progress.

**Score:** VS employs a scoring system to track player performance, including the number of kills, levels completed, time played, and coins accumulated throughout the play session. While the score does not directly determine victory, as observed in many other games, it serves as an indicator of the efficiency of the play session’s build and progress during the session. The score acts as a reference point for evaluating player performance, irrespective of the ultimate win or loss outcome. (gameontology, 'Score')

**Game Goals:** The game structure of VS is founded on a series of diverse and intriguing goals. The most common goal is survival for a specified duration. However, certain maps require the fulfillment of different objectives to progress. These objectives encompass locating specific items, evolving weapons, defeating maps with particular characters, or targeting and eliminating specific enemy types. The variety of required goals contributes to the game's replayability, even though it lacks a narrative-driven progression. Completing objectives unlocks new challenges and opportunities for players to engage with. (gameontology, 'Game Goals')
**Optional Goals:** VS incorporates a plethora of optional goals that offer different rewards, such as coins, new weapons, and characters. These optional goals, akin to the required goals, may be attained through diverse means. Often, these goals remain hidden until accomplished, prompting players to explore and discover these concealed objectives. This feature enhances the game's replayability, enabling players to unlock various gameplay possibilities. Examples of optional goals include completing a level with a specific character, achieving a set number of enemy kills, leveling up a weapon to a specified level, or interacting with hidden objects on the map. The presence of optional goals motivates players to experiment and explore while facing the relentless onslaught of challenges. (gameontology, 'Optional Goals')

**Agent Goals:** In VS the AI controlling enemy agents demonstrates a straightforward behavior pattern. Their primary objective is to defeat the player, and their approach involves moving directly toward the player character's current position. The enemy AI does not attempt to evade projectiles or outmaneuver the player, relying instead on sheer numbers to pose a threat. Although certain outliers in behavior exist, the overall simplicity of enemy actions involves straight movement towards the player. (gameontology, 'Agent Goals')

**Overview:** The overarching goal of VS is simply to survive until a specified point in time. Notably, the player's character will ultimately succumb to a relentless adversary known as Death by the end of the play session. Interestingly, being killed by Death, rather than a common minion, is considered a victory rather than a game over. When the timer reaches a specific mark, such as 30 minutes, all common enemies are removed from the game, and an immensely powerful enemy, Death, appears. This new adversary follows the same approach as other enemies, heading directly towards the player character to eliminate them. While it is theoretically possible to defeat Death, subsequent waves of this enemy will spawn at intervals, ultimately leading to the player's defeat. However, if the player manages to vanquish Death, they may receive achievements and rewards as recognition of their accomplishment. Analyzing this description reveals key elements that contribute to defining the game's end goal, and each of these elements warrants detailed examination to determine their relevance to the genre's defining criteria. (gameontology, 'Overview')

**Finish Line:** Firstly, the play session has a defined duration, typically determined by time. In "Vampire Survivors," victory is achieved by surviving for a predetermined period rather than ensuring the player character's survival. Rather uniquely, the decisive factor in victory is whether the player is defeated by the appropriate adversary. This approach to the finish line may not be universally applicable and might differ in other games of a similar genre. For instance, in another game like Holocure, analogous to "Vampire Survivors," the opponent at the finish line may be a final boss specific to a particular map. (gameontology, 'Finish Line')

**Success Level:** While the game does not actively reward the player with a success level in the sense of grading the player's success, the game presents variables that may be used as a measurement. VS is unique in their gameplay in multiple ways and how a player grades success falls more into the player's own observation. The amount of time the avatar survived or the amount of kills are two examples of ways that a player could grade the success. (gameontology, 'Success Level')
4.1.3 Entity Manipulation

Game objects contain attributes and abilities and this section analyzes how attributes may affect gameplay and abilities can be used during gameplay. Abilities have the possibilities to affect other entities' existence which is common in a game like Vampire Survivors with the massive amount of projectiles that is fired off during a play session.

In "Vampire Survivors," Zagal's framework can be applied to analyze different dimensions of entity manipulation:

**Compound Action:** In "Vampire Survivors," the player can manipulate the direction of an automatic action, which involves the firing of projectiles. While the player does not actively press a button to shoot, they can indirectly control the impact of projectiles by positioning the character strategically. This manipulation of the projectile direction can be considered a compound action, combining elements of positioning and automatic firing. (gameontology, 'Compount Action')

**To Shoot:** As a child component of the compound action, shooting is a significant element in "Vampire Survivors." Despite the automatic nature of the game's firing mechanism, shooting plays a crucial role in defeating enemies and progressing in the game. The behavior of different weapons varies, contributing to the diversity of the shooting experience. (gameontology, 'To Shoot')

**To Collect:** Throughout the play session, enemies drop collectibles such as coins, experience points, and buffs. These collectibles enhance the player's abilities and gameplay. Collecting coins allows the player to upgrade attack speed and movement speed, while experience points contribute to leveling up during a play session. Additionally, the game offers collectibles in the form of weapons and unlockable characters, adding depth and exploration to the gameplay. (gameontology, 'To Collect')

**To Collide:** "Vampire Survivors" involves heavy projectile collisions, as the player's projectiles collide with enemies, reducing their hit points. The game's description as a "reverse bullet hell" is fitting, as the player can unleash a torrent of projectiles upon enemies. Conversely, certain enemies also fire projectiles, leading to potential collisions with the player.

**To Evade:** To survive in "Vampire Survivors," the player must skillfully avoid collisions with enemies and their projectiles. Failing to evade enemy attacks results in the player losing hit points, and reaching zero hit points leads to player removal. Evading is crucial for survival, given the game's challenging and numerous enemies. (gameontology, 'To Evade')

**To Move:** The player's ability to change location is essential in "Vampire Survivors." While enemy agents often move directly toward the player character, the player can maneuver in the X- and Y-axes using the chosen controller. Movement is crucial for completing objectives, evading enemies, and reaching certain locations within the game. The movement offers the player the ability to evade harmful objects and collide with beneficial objects such as experience. (gameontology, 'To Move')
**To Pause Time:** A rare component in VS is the ability to pick up a power-up that pauses time for enemies, allowing the player to eliminate them without the fear of losing the game. This component provides temporary relief from the onslaught of enemies. (gameontology, 'To Pause Time')

**To Own:** Over the course of the play session, the player character gains experience and acquires new weapons and features. The player owns these weapons and features throughout the session, and they persist until replaced by more powerful or evolved versions. (gameontology, 'To Own')

**To Possess:** A specific version of "To Own," the player possesses the acquired weapons and features, which behave independently and autonomously within the game. The player does not actively control or activate these features but rather observes their effects. (gameontology, 'To Possess')

**To Traverse:** The player character's ability to move freely in the X- and Y-axes is fundamental in "Vampire Survivors." It allows the player to navigate the game's various objectives, evade enemies, and follow the direction of specific objectives or challenges. (gameontology, 'To Traverse')

By applying Zagal's framework to VS, we can better understand how entity manipulation contributes to the gameplay experience and how different components interact to create an engaging and challenging game.

### 4.1.4 Rules

This section involves the rules and constraints of the game within the world the game gets played. This part of the analysis covers limitations that build up the game and with it possibilities of the gameplay. Rules within games aren’t strictly static but have the possibilities to be broken or evolved over the play session.

**Cardinality of Gameplay:** The cardinality of gameplay in VS refers to the extent of freedom in the player’s movement within the game world. The game is presented from a top-down perspective, allowing both the player and enemies to move along the x- and y-axes, resulting in a 2-dimensional gameplay experience. Specifically, players are limited to movement in two directions, signifying a 2-dimensional environment, rather than having complete freedom of movement in three dimensions. (gameontology, 'Cardinality of Gameplay')

**Challenge Segmentation:** VS employs a structured challenge segmentation, where the difficulty level progressively increases during the play session. This escalation is influenced by the number of enemies encountered and the introduction of new enemy types, often characterized by higher hit points compared to earlier adversaries. Notably, the game features boss enemies with significantly enhanced hit points, often rewarding players with valuable items upon their defeat. The increase in challenge is primarily linked to the passage of time, with difficulty benchmarks typically at regular time intervals, such as every even minute or every five minutes. (gameontology, 'Challenge Segmentation')

**Difficulty Levels:** To manage difficulty levels, VS incorporates various mechanisms. Players can unlock further levels by completing previous levels or discovering secrets, featuring stronger and more
formidable enemies. Throughout the gameplay, the difficulty gradually increases by introducing tougher and deadlier enemies, along with a larger number of adversaries. Additionally, players have the option to unlock "Hyper Mode," which increases enemy hit points, movement speed, and projectile velocity. The increase in challenge is also influenced by the passage of time during gameplay, which is a fundamental aspect of the game design. As players progress and acquire new weapons and upgrades, the difficulty level rises to ensure an engaging gameplay experience. (gameontology, 'Difficulty Levels')

**Evaluation of Ending:** Similar to the success level, the values gathered through, time survived, coins gathered or amount of enemies killed are a few examples that the player could use to evaluate the end of the play session. The game doesn’t offer the player a concrete grade that they can use to evaluate their success. (gameontology, 'Evaluation of Ending')

**Boss Challenge:** In VS, players encounter a continuous influx of enemies, including boss enemies with substantial hit point pools that often yield rewards upon defeat. Bosses usually appear as stronger and larger variations of regular enemies. Occasionally, unique-looking bosses make an appearance. Both types of bosses possess increased resistance to damage compared to regular enemies, and they also deal more damage. Bosses typically follow straightforward movement patterns, similar to normal enemies, with a few exceptions. They spawn at predetermined time intervals during gameplay. Specific maps may feature bosses guarding secrets or serving as challenging objectives for players to unlock additional features. The Reaper, an immensely powerful enemy, spawns after a time limit is reached, boasting high hit points, movement speed, and damaging abilities. Engaging with these scheduled bosses provides players with crucial opportunities to obtain upgrades. (gameontology, 'Boss Challenge')

**Level:** As previously mentioned, VS comprises distinct levels that introduce new secrets and challenges for players to conquer. These levels present increasingly formidable enemy encounters, varied environments, and unique objectives to accomplish. Players can modify the challenge presented by levels by unlocking additional features, such as Hyper Mode. Advancing through the game unlocks new enemy types with augmented hit points, introduces obstacles like patrolling enemy packs roaming the map in diverse patterns, and may exclude commonly appearing items, like healing items or "turkeys." These elements contribute to the game's complexity and foster an engaging and dynamic gameplay experience. (gameontology, 'Level')

**Lives:** In "Vampire Survivors," players encounter limited examples of lives, represented by revival options purchasable using in-game coins between play sessions. This mechanic allows players to return to life after suffering a fatal blow, typically available for a single use per play session. Failing to utilize the revival option results in the conclusion of the current play session, prompting the initiation of a new one. The absence of checkpoints in the game adds significant consequences to facing a game over. However from this perspective and limited use, this mechanic can be considered quite weak. (gameontology, 'Lives')

**Resource Exhaustion:** Within “Vampire Survivors,” players encounter a few in-game resources, with the most prominent and default resource being hit points. Depletion of hit points leads to a game over. However, if players have acquired a revival using in-game coins between sessions, they regain hit points
and return to life. Subsequently using the revival renders further respawning impossible after subsequent depletion of all hit points. (gameontology, 'Resource Exhaustion')

**No Game End:** Technically, VS lacks a definitive end. After approximately 30 minutes of gameplay, an immensely powerful boss enemy named the Reaper appears, capable of inflicting significant damage due to its high hit points and speed. Players have the opportunity to face the Reaper for as long as they can survive, with subsequent Reapers spawning every minute until the player is defeated. Alternatively, the game features an "endless mode" where the Reaper does not spawn upon reaching the time limit. While this approach to game ending is unique, it should not be considered a defining characteristic of the genre. (gameontology, 'No Game End')

**Player Manipulable Rules:** VS offers players a range of settings that can be adjusted to affect gameplay. Examples include the "Endless Mode," where the Reaper does not spawn at the time limit, and "Hyper Mode," which boosts the movement speed and hit points of enemies. (gameontology, 'Player Manipulable Rules')

**Randomness:** Randomness plays a significant role in "Vampire Survivors." Some weapons exhibit random targeting towards enemies. Additionally, players encounter randomness during leveling up, where they are presented with a random selection of weapons and features to choose from. Randomness also impacts damage dealt by attacks and enemy spawn locations, contributing to the game's replayability and variability. (gameontology, 'Randomness')

**Solidity:** While VS displays some solidity by preventing players from passing through walls, trees, and other static environmental objects, players can freely pass through enemies. Enemies can collide with each other, which becomes more impactful during later stages of gameplay when they may push through the player's defenses, posing a significant challenge. (gameontology, 'Solidity')

**Transitive Relationships:** Weapons gained through leveling up or starting character setups in VS can be upgraded. To level up a weapon, players need to select it when it reappears on the selection screen, resulting in various upgrades, such as increased fire rate, more projectiles fired simultaneously, or overall damage boosts. (gameontology, 'Transitive Relationships')

**Wave:** In VS, the game follows a consistent wave structure, with players encountering successive waves of enemies. Waves are continuous and last until the next wave begins, usually involving different enemy types or increased difficulty. Although the relationship to the term "Wave" is somewhat weak, it remains relevant in the context of "Vampire Survivors". (gameontology, 'Wave')

### 4.2 Classification

For the upcoming section the results and their connection to already existing genres that the games of these sorts often are identified as.
4.2.1 Action

“An action game is a video game genre that emphasizes physical challenges, including hand–eye coordination and reaction time. (Wikipedia. 2020. ‘Action game’ section).” With the main goal of avoiding hordes of enemies while using weapons to obliterate the opposition this game definitely falls under the action genre. Looking into the major subgenres that are perceptual engagement of being a first-person or third-person it is a third-person game as the player sees the player character.

With VS being heavily reliant on components such as To Travel, To Evade in a real time environment it goes to show that this is a genre that fits quite well into the action genre.

Examples: Doom (id Software. 1993), Soulcalibur (Project Soul, Namco. 1998)

4.2.2 Shooter

This is a subgenre of Action that covers a wide array of genres such as First Person-Shooters (FPS), Battle Royal and Shoot ‘em up (shmup). The definition of this genre is straightforward with “defeat of the character’s enemies using the weapons given to the player (Wikipedia. 2020. ‘Shooter Game’ section).” Another definition I’ve reached during this is “Conquer challenges primarily by the use of projectiles”. As it is of the action genre it also relies on elements that makes an action game and this is a trend amongst subgenres in that they inherit the characteristics of their parent genre while getting more specialized. It has a long history going back all the way to 1962 with Spacewar! The criterias to be considered as a shooter is fairly straightforward and Vampire Survivors covers that criteria in abundance with the overload of projectiles unleashed during gameplay.


4.2.3 Shoot ‘em Up (shmup)

Also known as shmups and is a subgenre of the action genre. According to Wikipedia there appears to be no clear consensus on what design elements that combined define a shoot ‘em up game. It is however an old genre that derives from Spacewar! from 1962 and which set the template of the genre and has acted as a foundation of what a shoot ‘em up game is. Here are some design elements on what defines it as a shoot ‘em up game.

- Usually top-down or side-view perspective
- Uses ranged weapons and there by the “shoot” in shoot ‘em up.
- Large number of enemies with predictable behavior there by ‘em that stand for them
- Straightforward gameplay
- Large varieties of weapons
- Contains power-ups

There appear to be disagreements on further design elements that must be met in order to qualify as a member of this genre. However for this instance the current definition will need to suffice. Another mention of this is that this is a broad genre in itself with several subgenres. One example of a subgenre of this genre is Bullet Hell, a controversial subgenre that will be analyzed next due to its relevance on this topic.

Examples: Space Invaders (Taito. 1978), Enter the Gungeon (Devolver. 2016), Cuphead (Studio MDHR. 2017)

4.2.4 Bullet Hell

Also known as manic shooter and is a subgenre of the shmup genre with a focus on evading a large amount of projectile, which in turn gives it the fitting name of the genre; Bullet Hell. Due to being a subgenre of shmup we can assume that Bullet Hell inherits all of their parent’s definitions and expands upon it in order to give a more specific description of gameplay.

Figure 6: Collection of screenshots from various Bullet Hell games (Sugay, E. 2023)
During a previous section of this paper the issues with categorizing VS as a bullet hell has been brought up. This is probably the most controversial genre to categorize games such as Vampire Survivors as per definition this should not be classified as such. There is no exact definition of what a Bullet Hell game is but the consensus is that it features a large amount of projectiles, often in intricate patterns that the player requires to evade in order to survive. How accurate this categorization is disputable as the game has been marketed with the slogan “Become the Bullet Hell” which out of itself is correct, is rather misleading as genres are not there to inform the mobs what kind of game it is but rather the player. Since the Bullet Hell-genre puts the players through a hell of bullets and not the enemies themselves this categorization should be considered faulty.

Classifying Vampire Survivors as a Bullet Hell game can be argued derives from their early access trailer where the quote “Become the Bullet Hell” was pitched. Suggesting that rather than avoiding a torrent of bullets that the player needs to avoid, the player character instead is the source of this torrent of bullets. As part of this pitch they have also tagged the game as a Bullet Hell game on Steam. But as earlier discussed, becoming the “Bullet Hell” does not have to mean that this is a bullet hell game as the games does not embrace the game design elements of what that genre defines itself as. Though incorrect, categorizing these types of games as Bullet Hell has been popular amongst similar games as Steam.

Key points of Bullet Hell is that enemies

- Player needs to avoid a large amount of projectiles
- Enemies often fires projectile in intricate patterns

Vampire Survivors

- Player fires a large amount of projectiles
- Enemies does not fire projectiles except for a few exceptions
- Player fires projectiles in intricate patterns.

There are situations where enemies fire projectiles and it is especially rare that they fire them in any sorts of patterns. The occurrences begin when the player is reaching a certain boss but this should be considered not enough to be considered to belong to the Bullet Hell genre. However this definition will still be relevant when we are discussing this new but currently unofficial definition of this genre.

Conclusion is to stay away from calling VS and similar games as Bullet Hell as the term is in actuality flipped. The one commonality these two styles of games share is that they are subgenres of the shmup category.

Examples: Bullet Heaven 2 (Matt Roszak. 2011), Batsugun (Toaplan. 1993), Ikaruga (Treasure. 2001)
4.2.4 Multi Directional shooter

So far arguments have been made for why it does belong to the following genres but it is here it gets trickier as remaining game design elements do not match with existing subgenres within the shoot ‘em up genre. The most fitting type being Multidirectional shooter where the player is allowed to move around freely in x and y-axis. An expansion of this subgenre that allows the player to direct the character towards the direction of where they wish to fire by using the right stick is known as twin-stick shooters. Like VS and similar games they rely on a Isometric or top-down camera view and offers the player to move around in 360 degrees, the games qualify to belong to the multidirectional type of shmup.

Per this definition a consistent reappearance for Vampire Survivors and the like makes this a definite “Multi Directional shooter” and going further putting this as a twin-stick shooter. While many of the mechanics in the game do not rely on using a secondary tool for aiming such as the mouse or the right analog stick it is still a commonly reappearing requirement needed in order to use features.

Conclusion: VS and similar games definitely belongs to the shmup genre and is of the type Multidirectional shooter due to the fact that the movement is in both x- and y-axis. This is a common trait in the grand majority of games similar to VS. However through further analysis, categorizing this new genre as strictly a multidirectional shooter would limit the possibilities of game design innovation and exclude several games that relies more on a twin-stick shooter approach. Such an example would be the game HoloCure that allows certain weapons to be directed via a secondary input device such as mouse or a secondary joystick.

Examples: Asteroids (Atari. 1979), Mad Planets (Gottlieb. 1983)

4.2.5 Role-Playing Game (RPG)

During a play session of Vampire Survivors the player is gathering experience that once it reaches a threshold results in a level up. This common feature in games is generally falls under the category of Vampire Survivors contains a couple of features that commonly fall under the category of RPG. During a play session the player gathers experience that once it reaches a threshold leads to the player character to level up. Leveling up allows the player to choose in what direction the character will grow. Which fits into Margaret Rouse (Techopedia, 2019) 5 pillars of traditional RPGs in her article about “What is a Role-Playing Game”. In there she defines it as; “The ability to improve your character over the course of the game by increasing his statistics or levels.” Another mechanic that would fit the mold in her article is regarding her second pillar that she defines as; “The existence of certain character classes that define the characteristics, skills, abilities, and spells of a character (e.g. wizard, thief, warrior, etc.).” While the game does not include classes, Vampire Survivors offers the choice of characters that each offers unique features that makes them unique. An example of a character is Antonio. Antonio starts with +20 Max Health and +1 Armor. He gains +10% Might every 10 levels until level 50. The maximum Might gained this way is +50%. His starting weapon is also the Whip which is short ranged that can only be targeted left or right (Vampire Survivors Wiki, ‘Antonio’).
However it is needed to point out that there are ways that VS is played that directly contradicts elements of traditional RPGs in Margaret Rouse’s list which is world interaction, menu based combat and a central quest that shapes the narrative. Meaning that out of the 5 pillars that shape the traditional elements of RPGs, 2 are correct out of 5. While she states that modern or hybrid RPG games usually feature at least one or two of these elements, having the minority of the features of what defines a genre and still be categorized as such. This may raise the question regarding the state of the definition of RPG if a majority of the elements can be considered irrelevant when a game is categorized to this genre.

Another definition of RPG that falls more in line with what VS is from the definition brought by Ben Stegner’s article[https://www.makeuseof.com/what-are-rpgs-role-playing-games/]. These are a list of criterias that are required to be considered as a RPG and are as follows:

- There must be some kind of character development where your character gets intrinsically stronger as you play. This often means you increase your health, experience points, stat attributes, or similar.
- Your combat experience must be affected, at least in part, by your character's attributes. This might mean that the damage you do is influenced by your player's strength or agility, for example. Combat effects from items, or the player mastering inputs, doesn't count.
- Your character should have a flexible inventory, consisting of a variety of weapons, armor, spells, healing items, and other tools to use as you see fit. Items you have to use for puzzles don't count for this.

Conclusion regarding RPG: While only embracing 2 out of 5 points from Margaret Rouse’s list. Containing all 3 of Ben Stegner’s criterias required to be considered as a RPG, the conclusion is that VS falls under this genre.


4.2.6 Action Role-Playing game (ARPG)

Naturally as the game makes use of both genres of Action and RPG it naturally falls into the subgenre that combines both the Action and RPG genre known simply as Action Role-playing that often is abbreviated as Action RPG or ARPG.

This can be considered as a description of Vampire Survivors’ genres at its most fundamental level and it is from here on it gets a bit trickier. But so far this game is considered as Action, RGP and ARPG. Further on there will be a need to bring out specific mechanics that are included in the game to pinpoint to what subgenres the game belongs and does not belong. Arguments will be made and definitions are needed to be interpreted in order to correctly categorize this game. To begin this exploration I will first discuss the current genre the game has placed itself under.
Conclusion regarding ARPG: In the sense that VS and the similar games relies on action in combination with an avatar progression it naturally puts these types of games into the ARPG genre.

Examples: Diablo 4 (Blizzard. 2023), Elden Ring (FromSoftware Inc.. 2022), Fallout 4 (Bethesda Softworks. 2015), Monster Hunter Rise (Capcom. 2021)

4.2.7 Roguelike and Roguelite

During the play session the player struggles through hordes of enemies in order to survive until the timer has run out and “Death” comes out to kill the player. However how well the player progresses, the end result will be the character’s death only to start all over again. The feature of “Permadeath” which means that the character starts from level 1 upon death is common and probably what most people think of when they define a game as Roguelike. This means that there are more than one feature that should be present to be considered as belonging to this genre.

The Berlin Definition was formulated during the International Roguelike Development Conference in 2008. This definition clarifies that the term “Roguelike" does not imply being "like-Rogue," but instead denotes a specific genre. It acknowledges various canons for Roguelike games, including Rogue, ADOM, and Angband. While the Berlin Definition outlines several high-value factors, it’s important to note that not all of these factors are mandatory for a game to be considered a Roguelike. Criticism has been directed at this interpretation due to its inclusion of features that might not align with the genre's original focus on gameplay mechanics rather than aesthetics or setting (Berlin Interpretation - RogueBasin, n.d.).

Features present in Vampire Survivors such as Complexity, Permadeath, Player vs World and Random environment generation can be considered plenty enough to put this game into this genre. However, the Berlin Interpretations standard stating that a roguelike should be turn-based movement on a grid shows that there is a need for updating how Roguelike is defined as popular games such as Dead Cells and Risk of Rain 2 identify themselves as such. The element of turn-based actions derives from the RPG-genre as a whole and as previously stated does not require to fulfill

So in conclusion by interpretation Vampire Survivors deserves to belong to the Roguelike genre if the interpretation of Dead Cells and Risk of Rain 2 are being followed. Taking this one step further, there is a subgenre of Roguelike that fits Vampire Survivors which is Roguelite. According to Wiktionary (Wiktioonary, ‘Rogue-lite’), Roguelite is defined as “A subgenre of roguelikes that has most of the game design philosophies of roguelikes but also has at least one progression element that persists after failure.”. This is due to the fact that Vampire Survivors allows the player to gather coins during each play session that can be used to upgrade attributes between play sessions such as Move Speed, Damage and Health.

Conclusion regarding roguelike: Vampire Survivors falls under the Roguelike subgenre but if you want to be more specific it should be categorized as a Roguelite. Games containing active gameplay such as Risk of Rain 2 has also been tagged as by adding Action into their tag resulting in Action Roguelike. Where
Roguelite stands in the hierarchy in relation to Roguelike is a bit tricky since it is like Roguelike with one major difference. It is safe however to consider VS and similar games as a Roguelike due to earlier points made and Roguelite as a unique subgenre within the Roguelike genre.

Examples: Rogue (Toy, M., & Wichman, G. 1980), FTL: Faster Than Light (Subset Games. 2012), Risk of Rain 2 (Hopoo Games. 2019), Darkest Dungeon (Red Hook Studios. 2015), Dead Cells (Motion Twins. 2017)

4.3 Issues to current proposed names

Presently, the gaming community has generated several potential names for this emerging genre. Notably, "Reverse Bullet Hell" has gained prominence within the Vampire Survivors (VS) community on YouTube and is mentioned on the Wikipedia page for Shoot ‘em up (Wikipedia Contributors, 2021, ‘Shoot em up’). However, these proposed labels raise certain concerns that warrant examination.

4.3.1 Reverse Bullet Hell

In an article released on theeliteinstitute.net it was described as “For those unfamiliar with the genre, ‘reverse bullet hell’ flips the idea of a shmup on its head. Instead of you avoiding a screen full of bullets, you’re the one filling the screen with bullets as you face a continual onslaught of enemies that gets more and more overwhelming as time goes on (The Elite Institute, 2023). But is this a unique pitch that would constitute a new genre and is the definition correct? For certain it is a way to separate itself from Bullet Hell but not from the shmup genre. This quote is rather misleading as it does not reflect our earlier discussion of what defines the shmup genre and that VS embraces elements that are enough to fit into the category of shmup. Another point is that shmup does not mean that there necessarily are a lot of projectiles to avoid but rather is about the player battling enemies by shooting per Mark Wolf’s definition. To add to the issue is what has been discussed prior in that this new genre leans into the RPG genre and more specifically the Roguelike genre. Something the naming of this genre excludes entirely.

4.3.2 Bullet Heaven

While Bullet Heaven falls under the same trap as Reverse Bullet Hell as in that it solely focuses on the shmup aspects of the game. To add to the confusion regarding naming this new genre Bullet Heaven is by the fact that there already is a game with that name that is a Bullet Hell game from 2011 with a sequel released in 2015.

What we have learned throughout this study is that definitions of genres should be open but consistent. An issue with game genres is that there is no official list on how each genre is defined, but rather definitions and requirements to fit into genres vary depending on source. To learn from this there is a need to take it step by step and match it with current parent genres before taking the next step to put it into a final subgenre.
Gameplay is unique enough and reflects gameplay relevant to already existing genres. In its foundation this genre falls under Action and then the subgenre of action which is shoot ‘em up, it does not reflect gameplay that fits under subgenres of the shoot ‘em up genre.

4.3.3 Vampire Survivors-like & Survivors-like

While being the most accurate one for obvious reasons this is not in my opinion the direction we should move towards in naming genres in this industry. We currently have popular genres such as Roguelike, Soulslike and Metroidvania that each are inspired by games that have made great contributions to the video game world, calling a genre something with -like is uninspiring in an industry filled with creativity. While referencing the most well known game of this type of games, calling a game such as Magic Survival which is the forefather of Vampire Survivors, a Vampire Survivors-like, would feel wrong. Going for Survivors-like may result in confusion as well due to the already well established Survival genre. Though at this point this is the genre name that could be considered the least misleading though it requires prior knowledge of what kind of game Vampire Survivors is in order to catch the reference.

4.4 Analyzing current classification

This is a newer genre that was founded based on these games and their gameplay. This unofficial genre goes by other names such as Reverse Bullet Hell, Bullet Heaven and Vampire Survivors-like. However this name is yet to be set and let us discuss this first by definition and offer suggestions to why current suggested names do not work.

"Vampire Survivors" can be predominantly classified within the action genre, complemented by various elements associated with the RPG genre. The analysis employing Zagal's framework reveals certain aspects that warrant further consideration. While the framework introduces various game components, the analyst must exercise judgment to determine their impact on gameplay. It is essential to differentiate between elements crucial to the genre as a whole and unique game design features that may not necessarily define the genre.

An example of such unique game design is the Goal for completing a level in "Vampire Survivors." The game presents a distinctive approach by introducing exceedingly lethal enemies to expedite the player's defeat. While this aligns with the game's theme, labeling it a defining element of the genre might restrict possibilities for games that share similarities in other aspects.

Consequently, a query arises regarding game design elements that emerge to define this genre. The notion of these games being classified as "horde-shooters," involving a profusion of enemies, is widely popular. This characteristic aligns with the essence of shoot 'em up games, where players combat numerous adversaries simultaneously. Thus, a defining factor for this new genre lies in the substantial number of enemies that the games entail.

Regarding combat mechanics, "Vampire Survivors" adopts an automatic approach, wherein the majority of player-owned features and weapons activate at specified intervals, each governed by distinct attributes, durations, and cooldown periods. Character leveling or item acquisition allows for weapon
upgrades, enabling players to enhance the weapon's attributes to cope with the increasingly segmented difficulty levels. The art of weapon leveling emerges as a significant feature for games in this genre, facilitating players in specializing weapons to overcome various challenges. Additionally, "Vampire Survivors" allows weapon evolution into a more potent form when coupled with a compatible defensive ability. The necessity of this mechanic as a strict requirement for genre definition warrants contemplation.

While evasion of enemies without resorting to invulnerable mechanics constitutes a pivotal aspect for survival, "Vampire Survivors" does not introduce other evasion mechanisms beyond movement. Nonetheless, evasion remains crucial for prolonged survival.

Experience, health packs, and other items are collected by colliding with objects in "Vampire Survivors." Although the concept of picking up experience is intriguing, other games, like Magic Survival, incorporate alternative methods for experience acquisition, such as gaining experience from defeating enemies directly. Therefore, considering this as a defining feature of the genre could pose challenges for numerous games.

In conclusion, "Vampire Survivors" prominently falls into the action genre, enriched by elements of the RPG genre. The analysis using Zagal's framework reveals several game design elements that may shape the genre. However, it is imperative to strike a balance between elements specific to individual games and those that genuinely define the genre. The prominence of "horde-shooter" dynamics, automatic combat mechanics, the potential for weapon specialization, and the critical role of evasion in survival all present as significant elements in defining this emerging genre. As the genre continues to evolve, careful consideration should be given to foster innovation and diversity among games that align with its defining characteristics.

"Vampire Survivors" predominantly falls within the action genre, while also incorporating elements from the RPG genre. The game's intense and fast-paced combat, focus on survival, and constant wave-based challenges align it with the action genre. Furthermore, the introduction of character leveling, weapon upgrades, and the exploration of different objectives bring RPG elements into the gameplay experience. This genre combination results in a unique and compelling gameplay experience that caters to players seeking both action-packed combat and character progression.

Defining Elements of the Genre:
Throughout the analysis of "Vampire Survivors," several key game design elements stand out as potential defining factors of this emerging genre:

1. **Horde-Shooter Gameplay:** A hallmark of this genre is the inclusion of a large number of enemies that players must face simultaneously. The player is constantly engaged in intense combat, facing hordes of adversaries, which adds to the game's challenging and thrilling experience.

2. **Automatic Combat Mechanism:** "Vampire Survivors" employs automatic combat mechanics, where the player's weapons and abilities activate at intervals with their own distinct attributes, durations, and cooldown periods. The player can upgrade weapons through character leveling or
item discovery, enabling specialization to overcome the progressively challenging difficulty levels. This dynamic combat system contributes to the game's depth and strategic elements.

3. **Evasive Maneuvers**: Survivability in this genre heavily relies on the player's ability to skillfully evade enemies and their projectiles. The absence of invulnerable mechanics for evasion emphasizes the importance of player reflexes and strategic movement in maintaining survival.

4. **Collectible Items and Experience**: Players collect items and experience points by colliding with objects within the game world. This aspect enhances player engagement, rewards exploration, and contributes to character progression. However, careful consideration is required when defining this as a genre characteristic, as some games in the genre may opt for different mechanisms for experience and item collection.

While some game design elements presented in "Vampire Survivors" are unique to its theme and setting, they should be approached with caution when defining the genre, as they may limit the potential for diverse games within the genre. However, the identified key elements, such as horde-shooter gameplay, automatic combat mechanics, evasive maneuvers, and collectible experience and items, serve as crucial defining factors for the emerging genre.

For this upcoming section I will discuss a few games and make a brief analysis, comparing the findings that have been gathered throughout the analysis.

**Magic Survival (Leme, 2021)**
This is a rather simple game to analyze in relation to VS as it plays out very similarly. This came out prior to VS in February 2021 but didn’t explode as much in popularity. Biggest reason for this is possibly that it came out on Android which doesn’t gain as much coverage as games released on PC. In terms of gameplay the differences are not many where the biggest would be the aesthetics. The way they manage time is different and is similar to the alternative playmode known as “Endless” in VS where the player will fight mobs until the avatar dies.
HoloCure - Save the Fans! (KayAnimate, 2023)
HoloCure is a fanmade game for a popular Youtubers group called HoloLive where the player much like in VS is battling through hordes of enemies, with an ever present time limit and unique array of weapons. It shares many commonalities with VS in how it is played and what can be done inside and outside of the game. It offers a unique flair however with characters having unique Ultimates, attributes, starting weapons and accessories offering the player lots of opportunity to experiment. To add to the gameplay it also relies on twin-stick shooter elements unlike VS which relies on one stick. The game doesn’t rely as much on secrets hidden across that map at its current stage but offers a wide array of challenges and weapon combinations. Instead of facing off against the reaper when the time is up but rather introduces a challenging boss for the player to take on.
Project Lazarus (Terapoly, 2023)
In Project Lazarus you play as a mech that plows through hordes of enemies. A game that embraces the survival and roguelite elements. What makes this game stand with the prior two examples is the perspective camera view and 3-Dimensional graphics which gives the game more depth in visuals. Like HoloCure it relies on twin-stick mechanics and also introduces an interesting way for the avatar to grow. The upgrades and new weapons attained are put into designated slots rather than having X-amount of available slots for weapons and defensives. Each “character” offers a different amount of open slots in each section of its arsenal and personal starting weapons. Like in the earlier examples the weapon has the potential to evolve into more powerful versions upon reaching level 10 with that particular weapon (TheGamer, 2022, ‘8 Things We Wish We Knew Before Starting Project Lazarus’).
Brotato (Blobfish, 2022)

Brotato is a unique entrance on this list with how they handle their horde and item upgrade mechanics. Potato-themed weapons and abilities put some humor into the game and put their depths in combat rather than storytelling (ScreenRant, 2023, ‘Brotato Review: A Starchy Arena Shooter’). Rather than facing a consistent horde of enemies that over time gets tougher and character levels up during the in game gameplay, the game rather focuses on waves. The game loop starts with the character fighting against hordes of enemies that consistently spawns until a shorter timer has reached 0. After that the wave is finished and all the currency the player has gathered through killing enemies will be gathered and the player will go into a shopping mode where the abilities can be upgraded. Once shopping is done the player moves on to the next wave and this will continue until the player reaches the boss level. Each higher level will increase the health, movespeed, etc of each enemy making it more difficult the higher the level.
20 Minutes Till Dawn (Flanne, 2023)
This game is a game that, similar to Brotato, actually counts down rather than up and upon reaching zero that player has won. The play time session lasts as the name suggests, 20 minutes and the goal is to survive until time has run out. There are several factors in gameplay that makes this game unique and that is that each character gets a unique weapon that gets upgraded throughout the gameplay. Meaning that the player only has one weapon and effects that correspond to that weapon. For example, a skill called “Electro Mage” is that every 2nd shot, calls down lightning dealing damage to a nearby enemy and this carries on to the second unique game element. That is that the weapon of the player has ammo and is fired manually towards the direction it’s aimed towards. Not only making it a twin-stick shooter which is not unique among the list but the automatic combat component is absent. This is something that may pose a problem for the results that have been gathered. However due to the nature of the weapons in how the passive abilities behave in relation to the weapon this may be reasons enough to put the game under a more hybrid of manual and automatic combat category. To be strict about the automatic combat however this game would likely fall closer into the category twin-stick shooter category with roguelike elements. It’s important to acknowledge that there are too many game design elements relevant to this new genre to ignore.

“Players can also spend points to unlock new Characters, Weapons, and runes between runs. The latter are upgrades which 20 Minutes Till Dawn splits into Sword and Shield Runes. As the name implies, Sword Runes are attacks and offensive buffs. Examples include things such as increased bullet damage or creating a shockwave whenever you reload. Shield Runes offer things like adding invincibility frames or health regeneration. The game further divides each category into
four unlockable ranks, and players can equip one Shield and Sword Rune for each.” (DeAngelo, 2022) - Daniel DeAngelo

Figure 11: Image of gameplay from 20 Minutes Till Dawn (Steam, 2023)
5 Conclusions

In this thesis, I advocate for the clear segregation of aesthetic elements and gameplay mechanics when engaging in discourse surrounding video game genres. This perspective stems from the recognition that conflating these distinct aspects not only imposes unwarranted restrictions but also obstructs the pursuit of an academically rigorous approach to genre analysis.

The consideration of art, narrative, and other artistic dimensions as separate entities from gameplay mechanics is paramount to fostering a comprehensive understanding of video game genres. By disentangling these facets and identifying them according to their respective attributes, we can eliminate confounding variables and attain a more precise and discerning genre classification.

A salient observation that has emerged during this inquiry pertains to the formulation of a definitive and encompassing list of features characterizing video game genres. Such a catalog would serve as a guiding resource for game designers, empowering them to discern and articulate the unique gameplay attributes that govern their creations. This endeavor aligns with my aspiration to engender a more coherent and structured classification system that resonates with the gaming community.

Moreover, this research underscores the dynamic nature of the video game landscape, where genres evolve continuously. As an engaged community, we must proactively distinguish between various aspects to mitigate confusion and eschew the proliferation of new genres triggered primarily by superficial aesthetic distinctions.

Throughout this investigation, I have encountered intriguing debates and intersections within the gaming community, notably surrounding the classification of certain roguelike games as Gothic. This highlights the exigency for a well-defined framework that addresses ambiguities and resolves discrepancies in genre classification.

The fundamental aim of this thesis has been to identify the need for and establish a new genre by employing a meticulously designed framework capable of performing a comprehensive taxonomy of gameplay components within a game. The ensuing results, augmented by insights from external sources such as YouTube clips and review articles, have facilitated the comparison of analogous games, leading to the identification of defining features characterizing games suitable for this nascent genre. Acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in the gaming domain, this framework provides a valuable structure for creating a comparative map to relate to other games exhibiting similar characteristics.

Furthermore, this study responds to the community's quest to define games akin to "Vampire Survivors" and develop effective methods for their identification. By analyzing the interplay of gameplay components and their impact, I have endeavored to present a coherent structure that enhances genre classification within this unique domain.

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding video game genres by refining genre classification methodologies. Through these efforts, we aspire to cultivate a more robust understanding and appreciation of the diverse gaming experiences available. Moreover, this work
endeavors to inspire future investigations and foster collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing the accuracy and coherence of genre classification within the ever-evolving landscape of video games.

Future research endeavors, prompted by the insights gained from this study, are poised to explore the persistence of inconsistency in genre classification within the dynamic domain of digital games. The establishment of guidelines and a more systematic approach to genre classification can elevate our comprehension of genres and their broader significance in shaping gaming experiences. As video games continue to evolve, propelled by creative innovation and technological advancements, the gaming community is well-positioned to embrace the challenges and opportunities that arise in refining and enriching the classification of video game genres.

5.1 Summary
In the pursuit of classifying a new genre that aptly captures games like "Vampire Survivors," this study has delved into the intricate interplay between gameplay mechanics, aesthetics, and thematic elements. The fundamental premise that gameplay mechanics and aesthetics should be discerned distinctly within genre discussions has been a cornerstone of this investigation. The exploration embarked upon has revealed that while the amalgamation of these elements enriches the gaming experience, a clear distinction between them remains crucial for accurate genre delineation.

The journey to define this emerging genre has been navigated through a meticulous examination of game design elements using a framework designed to taxonomize gameplay components. Throughout this exploration, the study has identified crucial attributes that serve as defining markers for this new genre. The synthesis of automatic shooting mechanisms, rogue-like features, intense horde-shooter dynamics, and a balance between action and RPG elements emerges as the core foundation upon which this genre is constructed.

Analyzing "Vampire Survivors" in comparison to similar games like "Magic Survival," "HoloCure - Save the Fans!," "Project Lazarus," "Brotato," and "20 Minutes Till Dawn" has affirmed the universality of certain key design components. These components, including automatic combat mechanics, evasion strategies, collectible items and experience, and the unrelenting challenge posed by hordes of adversaries, consistently emerge as pivotal elements within this budding genre.

However, it is crucial to underscore that as the genre continues to evolve, careful consideration must be given to the balance between distinctive game features and those that genuinely typify the genre. The potential for innovation and diversity should remain paramount, even as the quest for a comprehensive classification endures. It is within this realm of balance that the intriguing genre nomenclature "Horde Auto Roguelike Shoot 'Em Up" (HARS) is suggested, encapsulating the essence of the genre's core elements.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the intricate task of classifying an emerging genre within the dynamic landscape of video games. The synthesis of gameplay mechanics, aesthetics, and thematic elements defines the unique gaming experience that games like "Vampire Survivors" offer. By distilling the defining characteristics and critically assessing their role, this study offers a foundational framework
for classifying and appreciating this distinctive genre. As the gaming landscape advances, this research sets the stage for a more refined understanding of genre classifications and their broader implications in shaping the future of interactive entertainment.

5.2 Discussion
Games naturally fall under genres and it is rare for games to only fall under one genre without falling into subgenres. Vampire Survivors is not an exception of this and definitely falls under already existing genres. This following section gives a short description of genres relevant to the topic and arguments of their relevance for these types of games.

5.3 Conclusion:
Based on the current genres that has been gathered throughout this study and others definitions regarding game design elements involved in this new genre, calling it by current popular genre titles may be misleading. The more popular suggestions of names being Reverse Bullet Hell, Bullet Heaven and Vampire Survivors-like.

From what has been gathered so far there is enough substance to define a new genre. However it is the combination of game design elements that makes the genre unique. There is an issue with the current conversations regarding this new genre is the focus on it being a purely a subgenre of shmup. This genre definitely belongs to shmup but since it relies upon game design elements that belongs to the Roguelike which belongs to the RPG-genre makes this new genre a mixture of Action and RPG. While previous popular genre suggestions like Bullet Heaven and Reverse Bullet Hell focuses on the shmup aspects of the genre, this throws shade on the RPG elements.

Since this is a hybrid of action and RPG or to get more specific; shmup and Roguelike the name of this genre should reflect that kind of gameplay. This is a field that is heavily influenced by the community and the name of a genre falls under a “See what sticks”-mentality, this is an attempt by offering suggestions and definitions using an academic approach.

The results that can be presented by the analysis that this new type of games are a hybrid of roguelike and shmup which naturally puts the games under the genres of the mentioned genres parents.
Defining game design elements of this new genre

Through comprehensive data analysis and comparisons with similar games, we have identified key game design elements that form the foundation of this new genre. These defining characteristics provide a basis for categorizing games within this unique genre. The results of this investigation, combined with insights from external sources such as YouTube clips and review articles, offer a framework for understanding and identifying games that belong to this genre.

Strong characteristics:

- Automatic Shooting
  - The weapons in general shoot in intervals meaning that it is out of the players control to decide when a weapon is fired.

- Weapon Leveling
  - Over the play session the character levels up and upgrade features and weapons

- Roguelike elements
  - Permadeath
  - Complexity
  - Character stats

- Overall progression outside
  - During the gameplay the player collects resources that can be used to further upgrade the attributes of the player character in between play sessions.
● Combat a large amount of enemies
  ○ The play session features a large number of enemies that the player needs to subdue in order to win.

● Enemies with simple behavior patterns
  ○ In general the enemies follow a simple behavior pattern with the sole purpose of colliding which in turn will drain the player’s hit points.

● Shorter play sessions last for example 20 minutes or until player death
  ○ A play session lasts for a limited amount of time, however how the time limit affects the game may vary. Examples of this is a final boss appearing that needs to be defeated, failed in clearing objectives or like in Vampire Survivors where the reapers begin to spawn in order to kill off the player.

● Steady increase of difficulty over time
  ○ Over time, the play session becomes increasingly more challenging. Examples of this are bosses, increased number of enemies and their toughness.

Weak characteristics:

● Multiple Weapons - Not strict
  ○ During the play session the player can unlock a variety of weapons.

● Perspective - Top Down - Isometric (not strict)
  ○ The player plays in a third-person environment that is coming from a top-down or isometric direction.

● Different characters (not strict)
  ○ The game offers the player a selection of characters with different attributes, features and starting loadout.

● Weapon Evolution - Not strict
  ○ After a specific requirement has been met the weapon has the ability to evolve into a new type of weapon.

5.3.1 Horde Auto Roguelike Shoot ‘em Up (HARS)
There are a couple of keypoints that will benefit from being pointed to help in identifying this new genre. This while embracing the uniqueness this type of game provides. Naming a genre for this type of game for example “Roguelike Shooter” would be a broad term that would cause confusion due to the unique
characteristics within the shooter genre it contains. So it may be wise to point out the more significant game design elements that make the games unique in their category.

- Action based gameplay where the player needs to evade their adversaries
- Automatic shooting system
- Horde of enemies
- Roguelike elements

While there is no real recipe to how to properly name a genre in a sensical way. One approach would be by mixing in adjectives and corresponding genres in order to come up with a fitting name of the genre. There are examples of names that do not use a combination of terms but rather make use of pop-culture. A name of a genre like this is the “Battle Royale”. Then there are genres such as MOBA that use more identifiable terms such as Multiplayer, Online, Battle and Arena which each in respect describes the way the game is played. Multiplayer to describe several players, online, where they battle against each other in an arena. The name makes sense for games such as Dota 2 and LoL. Then there are genre titles that use a similar approach to “Battle Royale” that uses reference to something in order to describe. Example such as this is the Roguelike genre we’ve discussed prior to this that references the old game Rogue(1980). In order to get something trending an impression I hold is that it should be easy to say.

With these thoughts in mind the suggestion I will boldly claim is: Horde Auto Roguelike Shoot ‘Em Up (HARS). The acronym of HARS fits in the sense that it can sound like “harsh” which is a fitting way to describe games of this sort.

**Horde:** The player faces off against a massive amount of enemies.

**Auto:** The actions are made automatically

**Roguelike:** Commonly identified as and as the investigation has unfold shows that it fits this subgenre of RPG.

**Shoot ‘em up:** It is the deepest and most consistent way of describing the games within the Action genre.
Figure 13: Finalized version of the Hierarchy the suggested genre HARS is a part of.

In order to put a final note into this research the games should be categorized as Roguelike and Shmup. Which naturally puts them into their parent genres going up to RPG and Action. Lastly as the game at their deepest are Roguelike and Shmup the new genre which my suggestion was going to be Horde Auto Roguelike Shoot ‘em up (HARS) is a combination of these two genres.

5.4 Future Work

The vantage point attained through this study serves to herald the advent of future research endeavors. A pressing imperative that emerges pertains to the persisting inconsistency in genre classification within the dynamic domain of digital games. With this study I for a collective endeavor aimed at refining the ontological comprehension of genres and their broader significance in shaping gaming experiences.

The exigencies encountered in the course of this study underscore the necessity for a more systematic approach to genre classification. The ever-fluctuating landscape of video games, impelled by creative ingenuity and technological strides, may necessitate the inception of novel genres or the restructuring of existing ones. However, a conspicuous dearth of established guidelines pertaining to the implementation of such modifications prevails.
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