The controversy of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* and the influencers that fueled the fire

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Abstract

The video game industry is an industry that has lately come to use and abuse the user the collective intelligence of social media. Corporations have come to rely on their communities as a form of free labor; instead of letting paid testers at the company judge the product, they have chosen to let users on social media communities do this for free. In the case of Star Wars: Battlefront 2, gamers even had to pay to play the beta version of the game.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how the release of the beta unfolded, with the user responses that followed and finally how EA Games chose to respond. Consumers, YouTubers and journalists alike gave the beta version of the game heavy criticism for being exploitative, almost gambling-like in nature. This thesis analyzed the language used in some of the key posts, reviews and videos surrounding the video game. It also analyzed Walt Disney’s impact on the decisions by EA Games.

The study concludes that the controversy ultimately failed to damage EA Games in any long-lasting way, as a year later the stock value of the company has grown by 50%. The essay also concludes that EA Games chose to take immediate action not because of criticism from the media, but because of pressure from stakeholder Walt Disney. Reputable corporation Walt Disney did not want to be linked with a game accused of having a gambling system in it, and thus, they made EA Games remove the gambling system from the game.

Keywords: controversial companies, EA Games, gaming, Social media reception, Stakeholder pressure, Star Wars: Battlefront 2, video game development strategies, Walt Disney
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1.0 Introduction

Video games are media products with the complexity that can be expected of computer software; they require beta testing prior to their final release to make sure everything is up to the expected standards of the customers. During the early stages of video game development companies hire testers that test the video games and give a response on which parts of the games work well, and which parts that do not. A more recent development in the video gaming industry is that video game developers now rely on "free labor" in the form of larger fan communities that are willing to test their unfinished games for them, only to fix them with updates later (Bernstein, 2013). This is done by the community members without the video game developer paying them a dime. In the case of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* (DICE, 2017), customers even had to pay to play the beta. This could lead to the user experience being negative for the buyers, as customers are rarely satisfied with paying for a poor experience. If the experience of a large enough group is poor enough, it could lead to a controversy that causes significant damages to the company's reputation or stock value. It could also lead to pressure against the company from investors, seeking to resolve the situation in a way that keeps their stocks intact.

Using customers and fan communities as free labor is more common than one would think. Wikipedia is the perfect example, as it relies entirely on contributions by volunteers. This type of collective intelligence made up of large amounts of people can be more accurate than hired professionals (Greenstein and Zhu, 2013). In this thesis I will make the case that the negative community reception of the beta release of Star Wars put the gaming publisher in a tough situation, as Walt Disney pushed the EA Games into resolving the situation to prevent Walt Disney's movie *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Rian Johnson, 2017) from being affected. On the other hand, it is important to note that this situation was not entirely bad for EA Games as the media attention resulted in an increase of popularity for the company, even if the popularity may not have been all positive. Regardless, more attention to a product and company is often something positive.

Thus, the goal of this thesis is to study the situation caused by the release of the beta version of the game by analyzing consumer feedback and how EA Games chose to respond to it. This was done by analyzing comments by consumers written on Reddit, comments by reviewers on gaming review sites and by vloggers on YouTube. The latter are gamers who create videos with comments on products after playing them. I am going to follow up on this by analyzing
how the company responded to user feedback and by observing what they did to improve the
game.

Lastly, analyzing video game corporations and their strategies for releasing computer games
are vital as it helps researchers and users understand these strategies. Video game
corporations rely more and more on the feedback of users to “perfect” their games before
they release. Corporations have recently started to strive towards getting their gamers more
engaged in the product, as it increases the revenue of the games (Strickland, 2017). It is
important to research this engagement, as some of these strategies are borderline illegal; the
Belgian Gaming Commission started an investigation against EA Games over the use of
lootboxes in Star Wars: Battlefront 2, as the commission suspected they might be a form of
unregulated gambling. Similar investigations were started in Hawaii (Phillips, 2017).

1.1 Purpose
The purpose of this essay is to analyze how the controversy was started and how it was
spread in the social media. The focus will be on what caused the controversy, and in what
ways social media voiced their opinions on it. The end goal of this is to see in what way EA
Games reacted to the initial criticism, and to see what changes EA Games ultimately did to
mitigate the poor reception that the game faced in its pre-launch state.

1.2 Research questions
In this essay, I have answered the following research questions through analysis:

1. How did the release of the beta version and the user responses unfold?
2. In which ways did the users criticize EA Games?
3. How did EA Games react to the criticism?

1.3 Research limitations
This essay only focuses on one issue, made by one corporation. What this means is that the
actions taken by EA Games are not representative of how another corporation, such as
Activision-Blizzard, would react in the same situation.

The essay only focuses on a limited amount of material; three YouTubers, two articles by
journalists, two Reddit threads with their most popular comments and lastly, EA Games’
responses to the Reddit threads and two responses from DICE at the EA Games forum. Using
more material could have been a valid option, but it would, in turn, make this essay much
longer. Public figures that have a high possibility of convincing people to buy or to not buy
products are often called influencers and these have historically been journalists and radio hosts. It comes down to where consumers choose to get their information before purchase from (Brown and Hayes, 2008, p. 7). By choosing vloggers with videos on *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* with over a million views along with the two largest gaming review websites, my material has reached a substantial number of users. Angry Joe’s review alone has 4.3 million views (AngryJoeShow, 2017) which is almost half of the 9 million sales of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, a number that EA Games claims missed its sales target (Sarkar, 2018).

1.4 Disposition

Below follows background information on EA Games as a controversial video gaming publisher and background on what kind of game *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is. This is intended to show what type of publisher EA Games is, and what type of game *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is. Also described is the background to Reddit as a platform where users can voice their opinions without fear of corporate censorship, and the appearance of YouTubers as influential people in the world of video games. The previous research brings up the big video game crash of the ’80s and is intended to give an insight into how corporations in the video game industry have historically handled perceived issues in the industry.

The previous research also includes what makes games appealing, and the concept of expectations that gamers might have for the games they consume. Also detailed is the interactive factor of video games. Games are not only interactive through playing them, in the case of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, the gamers very much interacted with the developers as well. Under the theory, relevant theories are shown, including the importance of a corporation’s reputation can have, and the power of collective intelligence. Under material, I have detailed the material I have analyzed. This material was chosen from their popularity and due to EA Games’s input in the chosen Reddit threads. Under analysis methods, I list the analysis methods and books I used to analyze the material to find patterns in the material. Following that is a summary of the controversy, from how it started to how it ultimately affected EA Games. Penultimately is the analysis, showing my analysis of the material to find out in which ways the social media responded. This is also where I showcase how EA Games chose to respond to the crisis, and why. Under results, I summarize my findings, including categorizing the social media responses. Lastly comes discussions on what future developments I expect to see in the gaming industry.
2.0 Background

2.1 EA Games as a controversial publisher

In 1991, EA Games did what it is arguably most famous for today; it purchased an outside development studio with the long-term goal of becoming a publisher instead of a developer (Fleming, 2007). By becoming a publisher that primarily purchases studios that develop their games for them, they have been blamed for “killing” video game studios. This is something John Riccitiello, former president of EA Games, admitted really happened in certain cases (Kohler, 2008). An example is Westwood, best known for creating the *Command and Conquer* (Westwood, 1995) series. This series was eventually canceled by EA Games. Riccitiello means that in a way, EA Games killed Westwood by doing so. However, Riccitiello says that not all acquisitions were bad. He describes the acquisition of Maxis as an acquisition done right, as this led to the creation of *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) and its sequels (Kohler, 2008). Ironically, EA Games shut down Maxis seven years after this statement was made (Schreier, 2015).

In 2004, the company was sued, allegedly treating their employees poorly by refusing to pay them for promised overtime. At least one of the plaintiffs involved in the lawsuit worked on creating a game in the previously mentioned *The Sims* franchise (Thorsen, 2008). This shows that EA Games is not only willing to “harvest” the collective intelligence of the fan communities for free, they also want to get off as cheaply as possible when it comes to paying their own employees.

Most notable of all is likely that EA Games was voted by consumers as the worst company in all of America, both in 2012 and 2013 (Agnello, 2013).

2.2 *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* and what it is all about

*Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is described by Amazon (2017) as a sci-fi war simulator with battles taking place both in space and on planets, both in vehicles and on foot. The game puts a large focus on the character customization system; you create your own character, a character that gets stronger as the user plays the game. Established character Darth Vader is only mentioned once, as an opponent and not as a character the customer can play as. Space combat is mentioned as having been remade from scratch (Amazon, 2017). This essay focuses on the beta product of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, but what exactly is a “beta” and why does it matter? A beta version of a video game is simply put, an unfinished version of the product that is intended to be tested before the final release is officially released to the public. A beta test
can be both open to the public and closed to everyone except a select few. When a product is in the beta stage, changes can be expected. Both major and minor changes can be made at any time (Lee, 2013). The beta of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* was open to everyone that had pre-ordered the game (Pereia, 2017).

### 2.3 User-generated content's connection to the pop culture industry

User-generated content, UGC for short, is a recently popularized concept of creating content and exchanging it with other users (Elkin-Koren, 2009, p.17). This content is typically spread on hosting sites like YouTube, or on social networks like Reddit (Ibid., p. 21). Reviews are also considered to be UGC, as they are freely distributed in most cases (Ibid., p. 18).

The relevance of UGC in the case of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is that corporations often take advantage of the content created by users (Ibid., p. 26). An important factor is that UGC is often considered non-profit in nature, as users on the social media rarely expect to be paid for their comments (Ibid., p. 29).

A platform that can be beneficial for creators of UGC is YouTube. After being purchased by Google in 2006, Google monetized YouTube the following year. This means that for the first time ever, users could earn money from other users watching their videos (Stone, 2015).

A site that can be considered non-profit for creators of UGC is Reddit. Originally a smaller site, Reddit gained popularity after the website Digg was on the verge of collapsing (Parr, 2011). The website is free to use but relies on optional donations to keep the site running (Schroeder, 2010). Reddit is made up of “subreddits”, sub-sections of the site that are moderated by the private people that created the subreddits. The administration of Reddit themselves have little control over the subreddits, leaving it up to the subreddit moderators to remove posts as they see fit (Reddit, 2018).

### 3.0 Previous research

The biggest crisis the video game industry has ever been in was, without a doubt, the video game crash of 1983. Due to a flooded market, disappointing releases and strong competition from the computer market, the industry crashed in 1983. This has been researched by Scott Gallagher and Seung Park (2002). Though both the industry crash and the study might be old and therefore may not accurately describe today’s gaming industry, there are still similarities between the old giants and the “new” giants. Gallagher and Park (2002) describe Nintendo as a locked down company; a company that tries to keep the products of their games in an iron
grip. Much of their focus is from the perspective of the console developers; Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo. These developers do not purchase companies to help them create games, instead, they try to attract third party companies that will make games voluntarily for their console. Some ways to do this include having technology superior to the opposition and having few entry barriers (Gallagher and Park, 2002).

Video games are meant to be interacted with, and how gamers interact with video games has been studied by Stephan Günzel (2014). Even though games are made up of code, the games themselves are presented as moving pictures. Combined with the interactive part of video gaming, this makes it different from media such as film or books (Fromme and Unger, 2012, p. 7-8). Richard Bartle claims that gamers do not simply interact with the video game itself, the gamers also interact with the developers of said video game. He argues that video game developers and gamers must settle on a moral consensus. Video game developers have expectations to live up to; they must create an immersive game that the consumers “accept” if it is within the range of the consumer’s outlook (Ibid., p. 12). These expectations can be connected to a genre; for example, first-person shooter games are expected to have different types of weaponry, ammunition and multiplayer (Veugen, 2012, p. 51)

4.0 Theory

These are the theories that I will focus on in the analysis and results of this essay.

4.1 Crisis prevention

Preventing a crisis from happening in its entirety is better than repairing the crisis after it has already affected the company (Coombs and Holladay, 2010, p. 28). Corporations regularly must make decisions that put them at risk of facing public outcry or economic damages, thus it becomes a matter of potential risk versus potential reward. Some risks might be deemed worth taking, while some risks should be avoided at all costs. Not every crisis affects the company directly in sales or similar economical ways, it can also affect a corporation’s reputation (Ibid.). This theory will primarily be used to see how EA Games was on the verge of a crisis by getting Walt Disney involved in the crisis.

4.2 Corporate reputation

When a corporation’s reputation is affected negatively by controversy, it can also lead to a strengthened reputation for celebrities that seize the moment to strengthen their own reputation (Smith, 2018). In the case of Star Wars: Battlefront 2, celebrities can be replaced
by “YouTubers”, since they are a form of online celebrities, building their reputation on reviewing and otherwise criticizing commercial products. Some corporations are more strongly built on a reputation than others, an example of a corporation known for its strong reputation is Walt Disney (Ibid.). The corporation itself describes this as being due to their solid footing in a multitude of different areas, and as an organization with strong ethics. A spokesperson for Walt Disney also describes their focus on treating their employers and customers well, along with their innovation in their markets, as strong reasons for why they are viewed by the consumers as a reputable corporation (Ibid.).

4.3 Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence was originally coined by Pierre Levy in 1994 to describe how cultural production and consumption of knowledge are affected by Internet technologies. The theory of collective intelligence is built around the idea that the members of the intelligence will not only gather pre-existing information but also work with these ideas to invent new ways of thinking, strategizing and coordinating (McGonigal, 2013). The most obvious examples of collective intelligence in action is Wikipedia and Yahoo! Answers, two websites that rely entirely on volunteers to add their input to share knowledge with other users (Ibid.).

Notably, more and more corporations are taking advantage of the power of collective intelligence to cut down on costs. For example, threadless.com is a community where half a million people together design and select T-shirts for the website to put up for sale. Most important of all is that input from a collective intelligence can lead to the creation of higher quality output than input from an in-house development team. This is evident in the case of both kitesurfing and open source programming, where the latter has fewer bugs than closed-source counterparts (Greenstein and Zhu, 2012, p. 2). As social media plays a large portion in the controversy, the reaction of the collective intelligence of Reddit plays a major part in understanding the controversy and why it happened.

4.4 User-generated content

The concept of user-generated content (UGC) is strongly connected to social media and has shown great growth in the past ten years (Dennhardt, 2014, p. 19). Clear examples of social media sites are websites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. These are based on the idea that users will post their UGC to the websites, and therefore be a part of improving the websites. At the same time, this means users are, in a way, deciding the direction of the
websites. As it is their content that interacts with the users, the brand's role in the customer interactions is reduced (Ibid. 4).

With consumers spending more time on websites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, new communication environments have been created. Consuming media becomes almost synonymous with creating media, which results in new connections between information, innovation, and creativity (Ibid., 33). The Internet has damaged the balance between corporations and consumers, as consumers now have more power over the products than ever. In turn, corporations are now themselves expected to be present and interactive at these social media websites (Ibid., 67). How was EA Games present in the discussions on social media?

5.0 Material

The material used in this thesis includes criticism against the beta release of Star Wars: Battlefront 2 found in Reddit posts, in news coverage by gaming websites and in YouTube videos. The purpose of this is to study how the events unfolded in the various media, and how the users voiced their criticism over EA Games's decision to implement a gambling-like progression system into the game before it has even been released for sale.

5.1 Chosen Reddit threads and responses

This essay specifically focuses on Reddit posts from the “StarWarsBattlefront” subreddit. The primary reason for choosing the “StarWarsBattlefront” subreddit is not because it is the official subreddit for the video game, but because of it being the largest subreddit for the game. A large subreddit gives gamers larger amounts of user interactions, which means the popular replies are representative of a larger number of users. Even larger gaming oriented subreddits, such as “Gaming” or “PC Gaming” are available, but users in those subreddits are not guaranteed to have an interest in Star Wars: Battlefront 2, which in turn could result in the opinions not reflecting the game’s core audience. Reddit uses a voting system, where good posts are upvoted and bad posts are downvoted. I have chosen to only analyze upvoted threads, to make sure that the subreddit resonates with the posts in them.

The first Reddit thread this essay analyzed is created by Reddit user TheHotterPotato (2017) and is called "It Takes 40 hours to Unlock a Hero. Spreadsheet and Galactic Assault Statistics". This thread is significant to understand the public reactions against EA Games, as
its included statistics are the key focus in several news outlets. Examples include ExtremeTech (Whitmam, 2017) and VG247 (Martin, 2017).

The statistics gathered by TheHotterPotato strongly implies the user must play the beta for 40 hours to unlock Darth Vader, a Star Wars icon, as a playable character. Being able to play as Darth Vader and similar characters is important to the target audience of the game; *Star Wars* movie fans. Video game developer DICE themselves respond to the thread to defend the choice of releasing the game in its current state. This response by DICE, along with the most popular post in the thread, written by user KyloRiddle (2017), have been analyzed.

The second thread is named “Seriously? I paid 80$ to have Vader locked?” and is written by a user named MBMMaverick (2017). This thread has a first post that is much shorter than the post in the other thread. However, it is also far more popular, being the most popular thread to ever be posted in the StarWarsBattlefront subreddit. With over 2900 responses and 164000 likes, analyzing it is a necessity to understand the controversy. Video game developer DICE also responded to this thread. The original thread post is just a few lines long, but it, along with its replies, describes the issue the beta of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is facing quite well; the game is too time-consuming and the commenters feel it is because EA Games wants to pressure people into buying lootboxes rather than earning them through playing the game for hours. This ties into the previously mentioned accusations by the Belgian Gaming Commission that EA Games is trying to introduce a form of gambling to their video games. The most popular response to the thread is written by user Soaptimusprime (2017) has also been chosen for analysis.

The reason for analyzing the highest rated comments along with the main post is the assumption that they will be either similar or different in some way, in which case a pattern will be clear.

### 5.2 Chosen reviews on gaming sites

Due to the popularity and the spread of the previously mentioned Reddit threads on *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, there is an almost endless number of articles and reviews covering the threads and the gambling-like system they criticize. Instead of choosing articles completely randomly, I have chosen reviews based on the potential reach they had for the gaming audience.
The primary argument for why this was a better choice than including some less popular sites along with the titans, is due to the largest sites having the largest customer reaches. There might be smaller websites that have varying degrees of bias in their reporting that could be worth analyzing, however, the same varying degrees of bias can be found on gaming sites of any size. Arguments against only using major websites range from them being less engaged in the stories since the writer may not “burn” for the subjects at hand, to major websites rarely having communities where larger discussions happen. Both these arguments have changed the way I chose the rest of the material. Reddit was created to be an open forum where discussions can happen, and anyone can speak their mind (Robertson, 2015). This means Reddit fills the gap left by the lack of a large community on Kotaku or IGN in my chosen material. The comments and threads I have mentioned in the last section are all written by ordinary people without a real “stake” in the matter.

Thus, I chose to only analyze the article written on Kotaku by Heather Alexandra (2017, 2) and the article written by Tom Marks (2017) on IGN. My choosing of IGN would be considered controversial in the gaming industry, as it has been suggested by a former employee of theirs that they rate games higher for marketing and PR reasons. The games would sell less if the games consistently had poor reviews (Rumphol-Janc, 2012). Since the situation with *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* very much boils down to public reception, it is of interest to see if any such bias is visible in the reviews by the industry’s largest websites.

5.3 Chosen YouTubers

As with anything on YouTube, there is a wide variety of gaming-related YouTubers. I have chosen to go with popular YouTubers, with reviews that range over a million views. Just like with the previously mentioned material, the reason for this is to make sure the content I look at has been viewed by over a million people. A number I would say is significant, given that the original *Star Wars: Battlefront* sold 14 million copies (Minotti, 2016). The reason for including YouTubers at all is because analyzing them will show if there are any similarities between the criticism of journalists on the major gaming sites IGN and Kotaku, the criticism against the game by YouTubers, and the criticism stated by regular Reddit users.

Angry Joe is a YouTuber that, as his name implies, has an angry and emotional response to most of his YouTube videos. His video review of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* was released on November 22, 2017, and has been viewed 4.2 million times at the time of writing. The video review in question heavily focused on the so-called “pay to win” aspect of the game. Pay to
win is a term in the gaming community that describes the ability to pay real life money to get advantages over people that are unwilling to pay money in a competitive video game (Nem, 2018). Therefore, the customer can, in a way, pay to win matches they otherwise wouldn’t win. An advantage in using Angry Joe is because it will be easy to compare his upset statements to the upset statements on the social media.

Videogamedunkey, commonly known as Dunkey, released his review of Star Wars: Battlefront 2 on the 28th of November and has 6.5 million views at the time of writing this essay. His video is more structured than the video by Angry Joe, showing headlines for every issue he has with the game in his video. Dunkey’s video is 5 minutes and 25 seconds long, making it the shortest video of the three used in this essay.

Gameranx is a YouTube channel with a more review-centric focus, compared to the more entertainment-oriented Dunkey and Angry Joe YouTube personalities. Gameranx reviewed the game on the 16th of November in a 9-minute-long video. As the name of the video implies, the purpose of this video is to inform people about the game’s pros and cons. This video was chosen primarily for two reasons: First, the video has over 1.1 million views in total. This means the review has been viewed by a significant number of users. The second reason is due to Gameranx being easy to compare to the written reviews on IGN and Kotaku, due to the similarities in how they structure their content. They both try to raise both the good and the negative, with arguments for why they feel the way they do.

5.4 Chosen statements by EA Games

I have analyzed the official response by DICE CFO Oskar Gabrielson (2017) on the EA Games website and the follow-up response by DICE (2017) that details what changes EA Games planned on doing to the game after its official release. The previously mentioned Reddit threads by TheHotterPotato and MBM Maverick have 1 response each from EA Games and I have analyzed both.

Only analyzing two responses might seem limiting, since the Reddit responses feature almost identical sentences and arguments to one another. However, this merely shows that the content of the messages is an official stance held by EA Games. Both comments by EA on Reddit are written by the moniker EACommunityTeam. As they are written on the same day and on the same month, I have chosen to differentiate between them by writing them as EACommunityTeam (2017, 1) and EACommunityTeam (2017, 2).
6.0 Analytical methods

6.1 Analyzing the reviews by IGN and Kotaku

News as a media can be a complex subject to analyze. It can be difficult to know what’s objective journalistic reporting and what is the author’s personal “touch” on the subject (Tuchman, 2002, p. 80). Journalists can be considered a form of “professional politicians”, as journalists have the power to sway elections and affect society in other ways. Talking about news is to talk about politics (Ibid.). I would argue that even video game reviews can be considered political in nature, due to the enormous amounts of money at stake in the reviews surrounding video games. It is apparent that games that are positively covered in the media generally sell better than games that are poorly received by gaming sites. In the previously mentioned article by Rumphol-Janc (2012) he makes it clear that the video game industry relies on positive reviews for marketing. In which ways is this visible in the articles by IGN and Kotaku? To study that, I have used Gaye Tuchman’s (2012) qualitative method for detecting bias, as detailed in *A Handbook of Qualitative Methods* by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas Jankowski.

6.2 Analyzing Reddit comments

To analyze the Reddit responses written by TheHotterPotato (2017), Soaptimusprime (2017), KyloRiddler (2017) and MBMMaverick (2017), I used James Paul Gee’s (2015) book, *Unified Discourse Analysis*. The book in question has a focus on discourse analyzing conversations about video games, the video games themselves and the people discussing them. Gee has made an easy to use framework that covers just about anything having to do with verbal conversations and criticism of video games. His book is of interest for this essay particularly because of its focus on video game avatars; the characters the players play the game as. The obvious reason showing its importance is because one of the biggest areas of criticism came from Darth Vader’s status as a difficult to unlock playable character. To see his analysis model, see attachments 1 and 2.

Since virtually every post related to the controversy is skeptical of EA Games’s actions, I chose not to try to categorize posts as positive or negative. Instead, I have analyzed why they are skeptical of EA Games's use of collective intelligence in the beta version of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*. As previously stated, in-game avatars and the way EA Games decided to keep them locked played a major part in the controversy. The way the video game handles avatars is thus central to player enjoyment. In-game avatars and the importance of them is something
that has been analyzed by James Paul Gee; he calls it Projective Identity (James Paul Gee, 2015, p. 94). Video games are, after all, built around the notion that your avatar must accomplish various things to progress through the game and in turn, get enjoyment from doing so.

6.3 Analyzing the videos of YouTubers

To analyze the commentaries of YouTubers, I have also used the book *Unified Discourse Analysis* by James Paul Gee (2015). The purpose of this was to see in which ways the YouTubers criticized the game. Did they criticize the game using facts to back up their opinions, or was the critique mostly emotional and fueled by prejudice? Much of the controversy can be correlated to expectations, as every video gamer has expectations that games may or may not live up to (James Paul Gee, 2015, p. 77). Understanding these broken expectations is key to understanding what caused the controversy in the first place. Especially since YouTubers, as mentioned before, are influencers, their broken expectations are likely to reflect on their respective audiences that trust their judgments.

According to James Paul Gee (2015, p. 36), syntaxes are the social rules and conventions we apply to the words we use, to make them appropriate for the audience our words are intended for. Different YouTubers likely have different social rules they follow and analyzing how these YouTubers communicate to their audiences can ultimately be compared to how the rest of the material chose to voice their critique.

6.4 Analyzing the EA Games's responses to the controversy

To analyze EA Games’s responses to the users surrounding the crisis, I have used *Strategic Issues Management: Organizations and Public Policy Challenges* by Robert Heath and Michael Palenchar (2009). The book brings up the challenges of being a corporation in the era of the Internet. Some of the advantages of the internet is that modern corporations can more easily take part of user’s issues and share information with these users. The disadvantage is of course, that issues affecting a product can more easily be widely spread online. This puts pressure on a corporation to quickly and directly respond to this critique (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 230). Analyzing the timing of EA Games’s responses is therefore vital to understanding how well EA Games handled the situation.

A corporation known to meet expectations is less likely to face further criticism when they respond to consumers (Ibid., p. 212). Analyzing this in the case of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is crucial to understand why EA Games responded the way they did. Expectations are of course
related to consistency; if a corporation is consistent in their statements the user knows what to expect of it. A corporation is more likely to accept statements if they are trustworthy, clear and consistent (Ibid., 338). Is EA Games consistent in their message, or are they constantly changing their focus?

Responsibility is something that is fundamental to handling an issue. Corporations are expected to show who or what is responsible for the decisions that led to the issue. Whether this is the corporation’s own fault, or if it is the fault of an outside factor (Ibid., p. 224). Did EA Games take responsibility for their actions, or did they blame it on someone else?

Perhaps most important all in understanding their responses is the context. Everything occurs in a context, a context that is part of a larger story (Ibid., p. 206). What is the context of the responses by EA Games, and why does it say about the corporation’s way of handling the criticism?

6.5 Comparing the different results

To compare the different results with one another, I have used the qualitative content analysis created by James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi in their book Qualitative Content Analysis. This analysis method is intended to categorize and analyze visible and latent content. Categorization is also used as a tool to reduce the amount of data or to expand the original data (Drisko and Maschi, 2015, p. 90). The primary purpose of their qualitative content analysis method is to identify categories and themes, with the end goal of summarizing the analyzed content (Ibid., p. 88). The deciding factor for choosing their method over other methods, is because their model is intended to build on the strengths of other models (Ibid., p. 86). 10 components make up the analysis method in question; research purpose, epistemological issues, research designs, target audiences, ethical issues, sampling issues and methods, collecting data, coding methods, data analysis methods and the role of researcher reflection (Ibid., p. 81).

7.0 Summary of the controversy

7.1 Social media starts responding

Six days before the game officially releases, the Reddit user TheHotterPotato (2017) creates a Reddit thread with data gathered from the testing version of Star Wars: Battlefront 2. In this thread, TheHotterPotato argues that given the standard amount of in-game “credits” earned per hour, it takes 40 hours to unlock a new hero in the game. His evidence of this is that the
average amount of credits per minute of gameplay is approximately 25, with 60,000 credits being the minimum required to purchase a hero. The following day, the thread was “stickied” by a Reddit moderator. This means the thread was put on the top of the Star Wars subreddit where it was posted, meaning it was, at the time, the first thread users saw when they entered the subreddit.

In TheHotterPotato’s (2017) thread, there are 2100 comments with various opinions on the subject. The comment with the most upvotes is one by the user KyloRiddle. This user estimates that earning a single lootbox of the rank “trooper” takes about 2 and a half hours. He ends his post by suggesting that EA Games is doing this to push people to spend money on the lootboxes instead of earning them in the game.

The most popular thread on the entire subreddit is written by MBMMaverick (2017) and is titled “I can’t even playing fucking Darth Vader?!?!? Disgusting.” and can be summarized as a short yet angry thread, directed at EA Games. The thread gets upvoted by other users 164000 times, putting pressure on EA Games to respond.

7.2 EA Games responds to social pressure on Reddit

In the above-mentioned thread by MBMMaverick, an unnamed representative of EA Games responds to the criticism. In a lengthy response, the representative, only nicknamed EACommunityTeam, tries to defend EA Games from the criticism in the thread. The post starts off by stating that the corporate goal was to create a “provide players with a sense of pride and accomplishment for unlocking different heroes” (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 1), with adjustments to the system coming later. This post has, at the time of writing, a score of -667828. What this means is that over 660000 people have pressed the dislike button on the post.

EA Games also responds in the thread written by TheHotterPotato. The content of this post is described by EACommunityTeam as having been copied from another unnamed thread. This unnamed thread is, in fact, the thread written by MBMMaverick. Therefore, the EA response to both threads is almost identical.

7.3 Walt Disney gets involved

Though EA Games is the creator of the Star Wars games, Walt Disney is the license holder for the Star Wars franchise. Star Wars: Battlefront 2’s controversy happened a mere month before Walt Disney was going to release their next Star Wars movie, Star Wars The Last Jedi
(Rian Johnson, 2017) and so Walt Disney had reason to believe that the controversy could hurt their upcoming movie (Henry, 2017). After several days of media outrage over the *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* beta’s lootbox system, Walt Disney decided it was time to act, resulting in Walt Disney’s Jimmy Pitaro calling EA Games’s CEO Andrew Wilson. Precisely what they said to one another is unknown, but a few hours later the lootbox system has been disabled and DICE makes a public statement on the EA Games website (Grubb, 2017).

7.4 DICE makes public statements

“Sorry we didn’t get this right.” (Oskar Gabrielson, 2017)

After the phone call from Jimmy Pitaro, Oskar Gabrielson, general manager of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* developer DICE made a pre-launch blog post detailing what DICE is planning on doing to make the situation right (Grubb, 2017). Oskar Gabrielson’s (2017) blog post mentions that the lootbox system has been disabled and that major changes are coming before the game officially releases. Gabrielson (2017) mentions that EA Games has the goal of making games enjoyable by everyone; their games should be enjoyable both by *Star Wars* fans and gamers. Further, he claims it is clear to him that “many” players are dissatisfied with the design of the game and that players willing to pay more money are given unfair advantages. This, Gabrielson (2017) claims, overshadows an otherwise great game.

Gabrielson (2017) states that DICE are planning on making major changes to the lootbox system before they bring it back. Ending the post is a claim that DICE will keep players updated on their progress. This update comes in a follow-up post, this time by an unnamed DICE (2017) employee. The post lists several major changes that went live “today”. It also focuses on challenges coming to the game to make the game more fun. Players will now receive larger daily bonuses simply for starting the game. The credits payout that players purchase in-game content with has been “upped” an unspecified amount (DICE). In short, characters are now easier to earn by playing the game.

7.5 The aftermath of the controversy

As previously mentioned, EA Games and DICE decided to completely disable the controversial progression system the game was criticized for. Five months later, they announce they are bringing back a new, more linear progression system. Instead of having lootboxes being the center of the game progression, upgrades for characters and weapons are now unlocked by playing as the characters and by using the weapons. Lootboxes now only contain cosmetic items; items that only affect non-vital things such as color and shape of the
items. This means that unlike before, players willing to spend a lot of money on the game are no longer at an advantage over players that only paid the release price (Beck).

Shortly afterward, DICE announces several new features to the game. Arguably the most notable change is that every character is now unlocked from the start; you no longer must play 40 hours to unlock Darth Vader. As mentioned earlier, the time-consuming process of unlocking characters was the main issue gamers, in general, had with the game. At the same time, EA Games decided to allow players that prefer playing without other players to unlock items in the game. They also added a new map to the game that was in the original *Star Wars: Battlefront* from 2015. Lastly, they made some minor changes to the playable characters. Some characters were made stronger, while some characters were made weaker (Good, 2018).

7.6 How the controversy affected EA Games

According to Erik Kain (2017), EA share prices fell 8.5% after the beta of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* received backlash from consumers. This resulted in the shareholder values decreasing with $3.1 billion. This was likely not entirely due to *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* as the stock value already was falling before the game officially released. The final product of the game did, however, sell roughly half as many copies as the original *Star Wars: Battlefront* did in the same time frame (Kain, 2017). It is important to note that shareholder value and profits are not the same; a company does not “lose” money by losing shareholder value. In short, shareholder value only matters at the point of sale and purchase (Stout, 2015).

However, during the final fiscal quarter of 2017, EA Games also reported a $186 million loss (Birch, 2018). What this shows is that EA Games not only took damage in the shareholders’ point of view, but they also suffered losses in the form of damaged sales. While EA Games is far too large to go under from such losses, earning roughly 3 to 4 billion per year, it does show that the company suffered heavy damages from the *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* incident. These damages were, however, temporary. This is evident when looking at the company’s gross profit; the company earned more money in 2018 than in 2017 (Macrotrends, 2018).

8.0 Analysis of the controversy

8.1 The review websites’ reception of the game

In the case of the controversy surrounding *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, Heather Alexandra (2018, 2) from video gaming website Kotaku never outright claims to have played the game
herself but uses language that strongly implies she has done so. This is shown primarily by her mentioning the dialogue in the game. Contrary to the situation with sources involving military involvement mentioned by Tuchman (2002, p. 88), the review on Kotaku primarily comes from the journalist’s own opinions and expectations. Tuchman (2002, p. 89) makes the argument that cultural experiences play a large role in journalism by creating a form of framing to further the writer’s own agenda. While there is no obvious framing in the review itself, it is hard to ignore the article by Rumphol-Janc (2012) claiming IGN is going easy on video game developers for PR and marketing reasons. It is likely the same is true for Kotaku, as Kotaku makes its money writing gaming related articles. The company has, in the past, been known to interview the CEO of EA Games (Totilo, 2014) which could very well mean Alexandra is going easy on the corporation to minimize the risk of losing such exclusive privileges. The only words used in the review that implies the journalist has an issue with the game is the heart of the controversy; she states, “There is no dancing about the issue” and points to the exploitative progression system in the game as the problem that brings down an otherwise good game. Alexandra (2018, 2) also criticized the single-player campaign, describing it as barebones with a non-existent story.

The IGN review of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* is written by Tom Marks (2017). The article starts off with an editor’s note, stating that a former IGN editor was co-writer for the story in *Star Wars: Battlefront 2* and that this fact is one of the reasons why Tom Marks was chosen to write the review; because the two have never met. This shows IGN is trying to defend themselves against accusations of having a bias (Tuchman 2002, p. 88). Marks (2017) brings up many issues also stated by Alexandra such as the lackluster single player campaign and the poor progression system. He makes no mentions of the criticism of the game that has been voiced in the social media, but he acknowledges that the video game is in an unfinished state by mentioning that he is hoping larger changes to the game are on their way. Notable in his review is his final rating: 6.5 out of 10. The gaming industry is tainted by skewed reviews that are higher than they “should” be, as stated in the article by Rumphol-Janc (2012). Marks is likely aiming for a rating that will show the game is by no means perfect, yet still very much playable and fun. This joy, Marks (2017) remarks, is not a joy that lasts for very long due to the, at the time, still broken parts of the game.

8.2 YouTubers and their video reviews

Videogamedunkey, more commonly known as Dunkey voices his first critique aimed at the game by saying, “My number one issue with the game right now, is that it is completely
fucking broken” (Videogamedunkey, 2017, 0:13) and his choice of words in this sentence is very specific, as he uses the words *right now*. Describing the game as a changing product connects strongly with collective intelligence and UGC. Games are a medium that can quickly change in any way, due to games being made up of changeable programming code. Dunkey is assuming the game is going to change as EA Games listens to feedback from the community on what prevents the consumers from enjoying the game.

Dunkey then goes on to mention the key issue in his video: His expectations of DICE as a corporation has been broken. He states that since DICE has released many games in the past, they should know how to make a game work properly. James Paul Gee (2015, p. 77) states that different types of players have different types of expectations. Dunkey, as a gamer that has previously played games by the same creator, has different expectations than someone who’s unfamiliar with the company.

Dunkey elaborates on this by claiming that the progression systems in DICE’s past games were superior to the progression system found in *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, as the past games lacked the lootboxes that could be bought for real life money. Dunkey claims progression has been slowed down to incentivize players to buy the lootboxes, rather than earning them by playing the game. In a sense, this correlates to what makes games enjoyable. Some games are difficult to progress in, and some are difficult, with both types of games being enjoyable in their own way (Gee, 2015, p. 13). Dunkey goes on to claim that if the player gets the right pay-to-win items from a lootbox, the player will be far more likely to win over their opponents than if they did not get any items at all. This correlates to the point of video gaming; the games are supposed to test the skills we gain from playing them, within the confines of the game’s rules (Ibid., p. 98-99). By downplaying the skills necessary to win in the game and replacing them with a way to purchase victory, the game, therefore, loses a portion of what makes gaming enjoyable in the first place.

Angry Joe’s over 42-minute-long review starts with a short sketch, where Angry Joe and a friend of his makes fun of the advantages given to players that chose to purchase the more expensive editions of the games, and thus, got access to better weapons. The sketch ends with Angry Joe yelling “I don’t need your pay-to-win garbage” (AngryJoeShow, 2017, 01:29) to his friend, thus setting the style for the rest of the video. As with Dunkey, Angry Joe’s style is one of comedy. In turn, this shows that his syntax is aimed at an audience looking to be entertained. If his video was intended to be more informative, his syntax would likely be
different to reflect this (Gee, 2015, p. 65). "The biggest selling point is practically a lie" (AngryJoeShow, 2017, 12:56) are the words he uses to describe the single-player campaign in the game. Angry Joe had expectations for the game that he felt were unfulfilled by the final product. Like Dunkey, Angry Joe’s expectations let him down, as evidenced by his claims that he really looked forward to the single-player campaign, but ultimately felt it did not live up to expectations.

At the start of his video, Gameranx mentions the controversy surrounding the game, showing that he has already heard about the issues the game has, prior to having played it himself. He quickly gets behind the consumers in his video and distances himself from EA Games' actions by saying “I think the majority of consumers and gamers have been in the right, I can confirm most of your suspicions in my own way” (Gameranx, 2017, 00:18). Gee claims that humans create a form of internal world inside our heads, based on our past experiences. These worlds are interactive, in that the words of others can change them (Gee, 2015, p. 9-10). In a way, Gameranx is trying to connect to other people’s “worlds” by stating that he agrees with them. Gameranx says something that the other two YouTubers don’t by describing how he tries to balance his videos when he creates them: “I usually in these videos try to balance with good and bad and then good again” (Gameranx, 2017, 00:32).

He very much touches upon the area of avatars; the in-game character you play as by describing how they are unlocked. “You actually have to earn your way to playing a hero character”, is stated by Gameranx (2017, 04:11) as a good improvement over the original Star Wars: Battlefront since it gives the player something to look forward to. This mirrors past statements by EA Games and their attempts at defending their decision of requiring currency to unlock characters.

The avatars in Star Wars: Battlefront 2 are very much visible, as the game uses a third person camera; the camera is centered behind the playable character and is not supposed to represent the “eyes” of the main character. This creates a different form of emotional response from the player when playing the game (Gee, 2015, p. 26). Players would likely not be incentivized to unlock new characters to the same degree if they did not constantly see their own character in front of them. This ties into what Gameranx states during the video: “The game is very much pay to win” (Gameranx, 2017, 04:57) and “EA has been listening and making some alterations like lowering the amount of currency it takes to unlock special hero characters, which was pretty egregious and ridiculous” (Gameranx, 2017, 05:30). The first quote is built
upon by Gameranx, as he says it ruins an otherwise great game and it connects with statements made by Heather Alexandra.

8.3 Reddit posts criticizing the company

The thread by TheHotterPotato has a clear purpose of informing the consumers of a perceived issue. This brings some complexities into the discussions, as the customers seem to be the primary conversational partner, with the center of the discussion being TheHotterPotato himself (Gee, 2015, p. 63). TheHotterPotato shows his status as a conversational partner by writing “If you have any questions […] let me know”, thus he invites users to discuss the topic at hand with him. The most obvious complexity being that EA Games or another party involved in the development of the game is expected to defend their actions in the thread, which they eventually did. An edit made in the thread by TheHotterPotato shows that the user is hoping developer DICE will make a statement. With them responding, they also become a conversational partner. While most posts in the thread are obviously aimed at TheHotterPotato, as is natural since he is the author of the topic, EA Games as a company is also targeted. By responding, a specific Reddit account run by EA Games also becomes a partner in the discussions. This, in turn, partly changes the direction of the topic as EA Games receives large amounts of additional replies demanding answers.

The user TheHotterPotato seems to know the beta is going to receive heavy changes before the game is ultimately released. Evidence of this is when TheHotterPotato tries to downplay his findings by writing “I hope these numbers are just for EA Access”. This shows that the user sees the game as a work in progress, even though the beta, as mentioned before, costs money to play.

The most popular response to the main post is written by KyloRiddle (2017). In his 29-word long answer, he mentions it takes 2 and a half hours to unlock a lootbox in the game. He ends it with an open question “They really are trying to push people to spend money on microtransactions, aren't they?” which, once again, connects to the concept of conversational partners. He is trying to engage other readers in the thread that agree with him that EA Games is intentionally trying to push this system on people. James Paul Gee (2015, p. 65) states the previously mentioned “worlds” all humans have, all have different people with different roles. He uses the example of teachers initiating topics with students replying, with the teacher then evaluating the replies. The dynamics on Reddit are quite different from those found in the classroom, however. TheHotterPotato is clearly the initiator, as he created the
thread with the topic he wanted to discuss, but are all replies truly “students”? The post by KyloRiddle is all three; he initiates a discussion with his response to TheHotterPotato, and he replies and debates with the replies he gets. In a way, he also evaluates them by responding positively or negatively to the answers.

The last social media thread analyzed is the Reddit thread by a user named MBMMaverick (2017). Upvoted 164000 times and named “Seriously? I paid 80$ to have Vader locked?”, it is immediately clear what the thread is about. The thread creator is noticeably upset over Darth Vader being a locked character in the game, as evidenced by them asserting “I can’t even playing fucking Darth Vader?!?!? Disgusting.”. Based on the upvotes in the thread, Reddit users in the thread resonated strongly with the thread, even if it does not feature anything “new” like the above thread by TheHotterPotato. In the end, this boils down to context. The Subreddit at the time, after threads such as the one by TheHotterPotato, was already upset at EA Games for their perceived greed. Therefore, the noticeable tone of the thread fits the context of an upset community angered by a controversial company. Gee (2015, p. 37) describes context as something that is vital when it comes to reception; in a calmer community, a calmer thread written in a mostly similar way might have had the same reception, while the current angry thread would not have been as popular. Unlike the thread by TheHotterPotato, the thread by MBMMaverick comes off more as a statement rather than something they want to discuss. This is evident by the user ending the post with “Leave it to EA though to stretch the boundaries”, and it connects to Gee’s (2015, p. 69) view on stories. The statement also correlates to EA Games stretching the boundaries of what is acceptable or not in the gaming industry. EA Games is a corporation that wants to earn money, and one way to earn money is to cut down on the costs of using paid testing. Historically, beta testing, both open and closed has been used by gaming corporations. The primary goal of beta testing, however, has been to find bugs (Lee, 2013). Not to find out if a corporation can earn more money from a feature or not.

The most upvoted response in the thread by MBMMaverick is written by Soaptimusprime (2017) and is written in the form of a meme: “Can’t divide a community if there is no community”, is the post in its entirety. At first glance, this might seem as merely a joke meant to make fun of EA Games, but it describes the situation from the Subreddit’s view very clearly. Since the social language is clear, it is easy to see its purpose in the context of the blunt and emotional main post in the thread. The style being humorous is therefore in simple terms meant to be a silly response in response to a silly critique. Communication always has a
form of story behind it (Gee 2015, 69). Soaptimusprime simply followed the “story” of MBMMaverick by making a short but concise, upset post in response to a concise, upset thread. If the story laid out by MBMMaverick had been more serious, akin to the story created by TheHotterPotato in their thread, the responses would reflect this.

8.4 EA Games's management of the controversy

The response EA Games wrote on Reddit in the thread made by TheHotterPotato starts off by detailing what the company’s goal with the progression system was; they wanted to make sure users felt a sense of accomplishment for progressing in the game (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 1). This explanation correlates with the act of taking responsibility detailed by Heath and Palenchar (2009, p. 224). The post is therefore clear with stating that the system was intentional and not caused by outside factors. Further, the EA Games response also claims they are planning on making changes before the game is officially released. The stated reason for this being that making progress in the game should feel not only rewarding but also feel attainable (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 1). This implies the corporation agrees with the assessment by TheHotterPotato, however, their focus is on the future. Corporations often try to suppress relevant facts (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 206). They are going to make changes “before launch” to fix this, yet the problem is happening right now. A common defense in the corporate world is one of “progress”, the corporation’s problem stems from a desire to make progress or improvements to a product (Ibid.). EA Games is trying to minimize the issues users are experiencing by stating the issue is only temporary.

The second post by EA Games on Reddit in the thread by MBMMaverick states the price of the items in the game were chosen from data from the beta, with changes coming before the final launch (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 2). This shows that the message that change is coming is consistent, as it appears in both posts. Consistency in messages increases the chance of positive feedback (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p.338). On Reddit, EA Games is clearly aiming for consistency. In the first message, EA Games even states parts of the message are taken directly from other posts (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 1). This further shows that EA Games is consistent and is not misleading in their statements.

Both comments were made in a timely fashion. The first comment was made the day after the thread was created (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 1). The second comment was made six hours after the thread was created (EACommunityTeam, 2017, 2). This shows that, as Heath and Palenchar (2009, p. 230) point out, EA Games is properly responding to comments on the
Internet. Ultimately, this proves that EA Games is presenting itself as a legitimate organization that monitors issues on a modern platform (Ibid.). Both comments were also made in the context of responses from social media comments. This reflects the lack of urgency in the post, as EA Games has no sense of urgency pushing it to make the changes immediately. The company is responding to it as if it was a situation that might or might not blow up in the future, not as something that requires immediate mitigations (Ibid., 344).

The official response by Oskar Gabrielson (2018) is very different as far as context goes. As mentioned prior, the statement by Gabrielson was made mere hours after Walt Disney called EA Games. The context of the post is, therefore, one of a company that is feeling pressure to mitigate an emergency (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 344). Walt Disney is the owner of the Star Wars license and is, therefore, a stakeholder of EA Games’s. Getting on the bad side of Walt Disney could result in the company withdrawing the right to create Star Wars games from EA Games. The original Star Wars: Battlefront sold 14 million copies (Minotti, 2016). Thus, keeping the right to develop games in the Star Wars franchise is vital to the company as it could greatly affect profits. A company must make statements that give each party what they want (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 204). In a sense, Oskar Gabrielson is not responding to the consumers as much as they are responding to the pressure from Walt Disney. Oskar Gabrielson (2018) bluntly states that they did not “get this right”, and this is his way of taking responsibility for the actions. The way a corporation presents their missteps can affect public perceptions (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 222). Their reason for taking responsibility is, therefore, to prevent Walt Disney’s public perception from being damaged.

In both the post by Oskar Gabrielson (2017) and the follow-up post by an unnamed DICE (2017) employee, the corporation details what they did to mitigate the criticism from the public. In the post by Gabrielson (2017), it is mentioned that the source of the controversy, the pay-to-win aspects of the pre-launch beta of the game, have been removed. In the follow-up post by DICE (2017), the corporation states in greater details which changes they are going to take. They also state that they are going to listen to further feedback. This is their way of holding a dialogue with not only the upset consumers but also with Walt Disney. The purpose of such a dialogue is to meet the needs and satisfy both parties, and in turn show that they are willing to change to adapt to the public (Heath and Palenchar, 2009, p. 203).
9.0 Results

The consensus on Reddit and YouTube is that EA Games released the beta to see if they could push users into paying more money than just the pre-order price for the game. Likely as a form of test to see if people would accept it. This shows that consumers believed EA Games was using them as a collective intelligence to get feedback on the game, with the end goal of changing the game if the lootbox system was rejected.

By releasing a beta of a *Star Wars* game that did not live up to the expectations, EA Games faced both sarcastic and constructive criticism in the form of UGC. Example of constructive criticism included the criticism by TheHotterPotato, whose thread pointed out an issue in the hopes that DICE would adjust the game. The lootbox system, especially one that is so closely connected to gambling that it warranted government investigation, was deemed to have no place in a *Star Wars* branded game. While the UGC itself was critical of *Star Wars: Battlefront 2*, the massive reach that the UGC reached likely benefited EA Games in the long run as it put the corporation into the spotlight.

There are noticeable themes in the analyzed content. These themes reveal how consumers as a collective intelligence chose to respond. Themes are made clear by showcasing passages of texts showing the themes in question (Drisko and Maschi, 2017, p. 93). To showcase this, I have put the various forms of material into different categories. Firstly, there is what I have chosen to refer to as the calm category. The primary theme in this category is that the users try to keep emotions out of their judgment, and they avoid sarcastic comments. In this category, Gameranx, TheHotterPotato, KyloRiddle and the reviews by IGN and Kotaku can be placed. The second category is the emotional category. The obvious theme in this category is that these users choose to voice their opinions harshly, sarcastically and bluntly, with little actual evidence to back up their claims. The material placed in this category is the Reddit thread by MBMMaverick, the response in that thread by Soaptimusprime, and Angry Joe’s YouTube video. As is evident in the previously mentioned MBMMaverick post, there is no actual evidence in the post at all. Instead, the reader is expected to agree with the thread creator without any stated facts. Angry Joe’s video is filled with sketches, aimed at making fun of EA Games. Ultimately, the lengthy sketches of Angry Joe’s video, along with the almost 45-minute-long runtime of the video, means Angry Joe’s emotional video likely earned him a significant amount of money. Ironically, this is the category with the largest spread, as is evident by the immense popularity of MBMMaverick’s thread and the view
count on Angry Joe’s video. The primary reason for this being the largest category is most likely due to it being the easiest way to spread your opinion. Writing angry comments does not require much effort. The third category is what I have chosen to call the mixed category. Dunkey is the sole member of this category, as he voices his opinions emotionally with profanity just like Angry Joe, yet still attempts to paint his video as a review by splitting up his criticism into categories and systematically argues for why he feels he’s right.

In their Reddit posts, EA Games puts heavy emphasis on the fact that the game, at the time, was a work in progress set to gain major updates in the weeks after the game officially releases. Their claims that the data collected during the beta led to the implementation of the controversial progression system appears to be legitimate. They have consistently claimed they based the system on data gathered from the community. This shows that EA Games used collective intelligence by letting the community judge the game, so that they can improve it before release. Oskar Gabrielson claims the system was never intended to be pay-to-win, and he apologizes for the company not getting it right.

Walt Disney's involvement in the controversy is notable, as EA Games had not suffered much in the way of lost revenue or reputation; the corporation did not lose money from the controversy because as mentioned prior, less than a year later the corporation’s stock value had increased by 50%, and the corporation has a reputation so poor it was rated the worst company in America several years in a row. The first official response outside of the social media over the usage of lootboxes and pay-to-win elements came from CFO Oskar Gabrielson mere hours after EA Games received a phone call from Walt Disney, owner of the Star Wars franchise. EA Games’s decision to remove the controversial elements were not because of pressure from the social media, YouTubers or reviewers. These could not hurt EA Games in any meaningful way. Walt Disney, on the other hand, could revoke the license for EA Games to make Star Wars games in the first place. The Star Wars franchise, being a titan in the movie industry, is an asset for a corporation such as EA. An asset EA Games could not risk losing.

Ultimately, video game developer DICE decided to remove the controversial system, to prevent jeopardizing EA Games’s role as Walt Disney’s license holder of Star Wars video games.
9.1 Discussion

Video gaming is a media that is in constant development. Originally played with a controller connected to a console connected to a television, it has now evolved past that. Games are now expected to be playable online, with other players, with minimal issues. Something that was merely a dream when video gaming launched is now the new standard, and expectations from the consumers reflect this. With the rise of social media, users can now spread their own content in the form of Reddit posts and YouTube videos with ease. This has resulted in user criticism now being easier to publish in a visible forum than ever before.

It is likely that due to the increased prevalence of UGC, video game developers will try to use this to get free advertising for their games. Why spend millions on a campaign when you can stir up a minor controversy and get it for free? The power of collective intelligence is a powerful one, that has great potential when it comes to creating quality products. It is therefore of interest to see how video game developers try to use this asset, and if they ultimately succeed in doing so.

10.0 References

10.1 Books


10.2 Case studies and essays


10.3 E-Books


10.4 Movies


10.5 Video games


10.6 Websites


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10.7 YouTube videos


11.0 Attachments

Attachment 1

1. Who or what are the conversational partners? What histories and complexities do they bring to the encounter?
2. How does syntax work? What are the basic units and how do they combine?
3. How does semantics work?
   a) What universe of discourse is involved?
   b) How was the universe of discourse determined?
   c) How are meanings assigned from the universe of discourse?
4. What is the avatar?
   a) How does the avatar function as an identity?
   b) How does the avatar function as a surrogate body?
   c) How does the avatar function as a tool-kit?
5. How are affordances and effective abilities aligned?
6. How does X-ray vision function?
   a) What are the relevant details for aligning affordances and effective abilities?
   b) What tools are being used to supplement “seeing” and interaction?
7. How is meaning being situated? How are situated meanings being created?
   a) What is the context? How is it being construed and constructed?
   b) What are the relevant aspects of the context and how is relevance being determined?

Attachment 2
c) How is “packaging”—how units are combined (syntax)—helping to create situated meaning? What were alternative ways things could have been packaged?

What does it mean that these alternatives were not used?

d) How does the sequence and flow of sentences, utterances, or activities work to help create situated meanings?

e) What style or social language is being used? How does its units and their combinations (its distinctive syntax and semantics) function to carry out distinctive tasks or work for which it was invented?

8 What is the role of story (top-down, authored stories or stories produced in the course of interaction); cultural, social, scientific, or other sorts of theories, models, schemas, or frames; and beliefs, values, and ideologies?

9 How is a “player’s story” being constructed by the choices, decisions, actions, interactions, successes and failures the “player” experiences as he or she talks, acts, and plays? (Here I use “player” for anyone speaking, writing, acting on the world, or playing a game.)