

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

Appropriation & Motivation in Game Modification

Analysing modders and historical mods

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Abstract

The videogame industry is enormous, growing and extremely lucrative. To illustrate the industry's revenue in 2018 was close to 140 billion dollars. It is essential to research the cultural value of such a booming industry, which affects millions of people over the globe. The participatory culture surrounding videogames includes users who aim to modify videogame content in order to alter the videogames. Altering videogames is known as 'modding', and these players produce, what is known as game mods. This thesis on games, modders and mods helps to understand the game industry, the participatory culture surrounding it and reflects on contemporary historical culture. Research into videogames has been relatively new in the academic field; even more so is the research into game modifications. Central in this thesis is the question how players appropriate the content of the historical digital entertainment game *Mount and Blade* through the practice of modding. Mods are a way for players and communities to react against the dominant historical representation put forward in commercial games.

The research focusses on *Mount and Blade*, two game modifications and modders to study how the past is represented in videogames and mods and what motivates modders to create alternative narratives of the past. The application of the formal analysis model defined by Óliver Latorre has shown that the mods *The Independence of Chile Mod* and the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* display counter-hegemonic properties. Furthermore, the modders state in the interviews that to them modding, similar to re-enactment, is a tool for history education. To the modders, modding is a way to keep history alive and to carry the lessons with us. Additionally, the modders deal with historical subjects not often seen in videogames and reiterate the importance and longing for their culture, traditions, country, and history to be represented in virtual interactive media.

Keywords: Game modifications, mods, modders, videogames, participatory culture, Mount and Blade, historical culture, representation, appropriation, motivation

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Set-up	4
1.1 Research question and sub-questions.....	6
1.2 Main theoretical concepts & literature review	6
1.3 Nature of sources and methods.....	15
Chapter 2: Mount & Blade	20
2.1 Player/Character; Representation of the medieval man	20
2.2 Gameworld; Representation of the medieval 'Calradia'	25
2.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of the medieval struggle	29
Chapter 3: Mods.....	32
3.1 American Civil War Mod: Revived!.....	32
3.1.1 Player/Character; Representation of 19th century American	33
3.1.2 Game world; Representation of the American Civil War	34
3.1.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of struggles of man in war	37
3.2 Independence of Chile mod	38
3.2.1 Character/player; Representation of the 19 th century South American.....	38
3.2.2 Game world; Representation of South America	39
3.2.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of the struggles of war	42
Chapter 4: Motivations.....	44
4.1 Mount and Blade Modders	44
4.2 Existing literature	47
Chapter 5: Conclusions.....	49
5.1 The American Civil War Mod.....	50
5.2 The Independence of Chile Mod	51
Bibliography.....	53
Appendix.....	57
A. Participation Consent Form.....	57
B. Interview Questions	59

Chapter 1: Set-up

Virtual, interactive media constitutes one of the major ground-breaking inventions of the digital revolution. During the 1970s virtual, interactive media, or gaming became more and more accessible for the general public through arcade machines, home gaming consoles and desktop computers. From this point on the videogame industry saw a meteoric rise alongside the steep development of hardware and software.¹ The global games market is expected to generate total revenue of 159.3 billion U.S. dollars in 2020.² To put this in perspective, in 2018, the videogames industry's revenue was 138.7 billion U.S. dollars, and the global music industry's revenue was around 54 billion U.S. dollars.³ Given the increased significance of the gaming industry, research into the cultural value of the booming industry is increasingly important. In the gaming industry, some of the most influential and highest-grossing videogames are set in historical periods or based on historical events. In recent years these historical games have emerged to become one of the most prominent expressions of history in popular media. Initially, academic discourse surrounding historical videogames revolved around the question if analysing the relationship between the past and the present is solely the task of the historian. The book *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulations of History* by Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott illustrates this perspective. The authors raise a few concerns with the way digital games approach the past. One of such issues is their perspective that popular history and videogames do not follow the academic perspective of studying history. They believe that history in videogames is inadequate in portraying the past.⁴ The former perspective rests on the assumption that written histories are the only appropriate method of understanding the past or present and that these written texts reflect history truthfully.⁵ Adam Chapman, in his book *Digital Games as History*, argues that thinking about written narratives as the main source of history underestimates the power of different sources such as oral histories or pictures to constitute, rather than express history and culture.⁶ Chapman objects to the formerly mentioned assumptions of Elliott and Kapell by stating that their perspective is based on different problematic assumptions. Firstly, the current practice of writing history and the study of the past is the only possibility of understanding the past is wrong. Secondly, the wrongful perspective that solely written history can reflect reality.⁷ Chapman in *Digital Games as History* objects this perspective and argues that the different types of engagement with the past allow for different understandings; therefore history does not have to be in the form of an academic text.⁸ Chapman views history as not solely constructed by historians but also by those involved in the production of multiple different cultural products and engaged in a variety of historical practices, as well as the local discourses with which they connect. Moreover, popular forms of history have the potential to be powerful precisely because more than often, they are accessible, engaging and widely experienced.⁹ Thus Chapman in

¹ Angenitus Arie Andries Mol et al., eds., *The Interactive Past: Archaeology, Heritage & Video Games* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2017). 8.

² "Global Games Market Revenue by Region 2020," Statista, accessed June 22, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/539572/games-market-revenue-by-region/>.

³ "Global Music Industry Revenue 2023," Statista, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259979/global-music-industry-revenue/>.

⁴ Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). 3.

⁵ Adam Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2016). 15.

⁶ Chapman. 14.

⁷ Chapman. 13.

⁸ Ibid. 14.

⁹ Ibid. 17.

his work argues that videogames are a (new) form of history and that these historical representations are an important expression of historical culture as well.¹⁰ In the article *Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited* the historians Maria Grever, and Robert-Jan Adriaansen denote that the study of historical culture requires a proper framework of analysis to categorise the study on three different, but interactive, levels; historical narratives, mnemonic infrastructures and conceptions of history. However, (historical) games appear to challenge this analysis. Due to the active role players have while playing the game; for instance, in other expressions of historical culture such as texts, the user has a rather inactive role. Next to the active role of the players in (historical) videogames, there is a strong virtual community of users. This participatory culture is an essential aspect of the gaming industry and the culture surrounding it. In their book *The Interactive Past* Angus Mol et al. describe the developments of the participatory culture as similar to the process of a historian.¹¹ A specific expression of the participatory culture are game modifications. These modifications, known as mods, are an interesting and enduring form of player production and are an essential part of gaming.¹² Mod makers, or “modders”, add or alter games to better suit the need of the players, themselves. By modding games, players actively appropriate the content of these games and transform it as their own.¹³

In order to study games and game modifications, the historical videogame *Mount and Blade* is analysed. The game is developed by TaleWorlds and published by Paradox Interactive and has a pervasive user-generated database of game modifications. To investigate this the game *Mount and Blade* is used as a case study. *Mount and Blade* provides an interesting and relevant case study due to several reasons. Firstly, the game is a unique blend of genres. This blend allows for an exciting narrative to analyse through the lens of historical culture. Secondly, the game was designed TaleWorlds with modding in mind. Therefore, it provides an excellent framework of analysis regarding the modding community. The original game is situated in the fictive medieval land of Calradia, where the player can create its own character and story from a noble to a bandit. However, the mods for *Mount and Blade* are incredibly varied. The mods range from a Modern Warfare setting to a Second World War setting to the Roman era as well as a scenario set in the Ottoman Empire. Completely altering the original games historical setting. A case study such *Mount and Blade* raises interesting questions to relations within historical culture as well as those within the world of videogames. Such as the question ‘how do modders appropriate these (historical) videogames?’ Although the mods of the Paradox Interactive game are varied, it is interesting to look at how radically they transform the contents of the original game. For example, mods can drastically change the nature of the original game, essentially creating a whole new product. Additionally, modders can also aim only to tweak, alter or change a few specific aspects of a game. Questions such as these require a thorough analysis of modding, videogames and historical culture.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Mol et al., *The Interactive Past*. 24.

¹² Olli Sotamaa, “When the Game Is Not Enough: Motivations and Practices among Computer Game Modding Culture,” *Games and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2010): 239–255.

¹³ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, The New Critical Idiom (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006). 1.

1.1 Research question and sub-questions

To guide and focus the research process the following research question is formulated:

*How do players appropriate the content of the historical digital entertainment game *Mount and Blade* through the practice of 'modding'?*

The goal of this research question and this study is to gain insight into gaming and mods as an expression of contemporary historical culture. A critical aspect to trace and consider is the way modders appropriate certain historical representations through game modifications. Do these mods differ from offered commercially? What motivates these modders? Additionally, this research aims to reflect on the implications of this research for the nature of the concept of (contemporary) historical culture.

Several sub-questions have been formulated to assist in answering the research question.

1. How is the past represented in the videogame *Mount & Blade*
2. What historical representations can be traced in the mods for popular digital games, such as *Mount and Blade*?
3. What motivations do the creators of *Mount and Blade* mods present?

The first sub-question aims to contextualize the original videogame. The different game mods are based on the original game, thus to fully understand what the modder alters, *Mount and Blade* and the representation of the past must be analysed. The second sub-question primarily deals with the historical representation of historical game modifications. Concerning the main research question this sub-question intends to aid in examining the first part; "How do players appropriate the content of historical digital entertainment games". The third sub-question intends to provide more insight into the concept of modding and deepen it by a thorough analysis of the motivations behind modders. The combination of these three sub-questions is aimed to suitably answer the proposed research question.

The research question and subsequent sub-questions are going to be analysed through a number of theoretical concepts. These underpinning theoretical concepts to this research are going to be described in the following paragraph in depth. After the theoretical concepts, the methodology and the nature of the analysed sources are going to be discussed.

1.2 Main theoretical concepts & literature review

The following part consists of a thorough discussion of the theoretical concepts relevant to the research. Due to the nature of the thesis being an expression of current historical culture and not a historical subject this chapter includes a combination of the main theoretical concepts and a literature report. Thus, this chapter will position the research topic in academic discourse, whilst simultaneously examining the theoretical concepts. As an expression of current historical culture, it is a logical starting point to begin this chapter with the concept of historical culture. The chapter will then continue with an examination of additional concepts related to the research question such as participatory culture, appropriation, (historical) digital games and lastly game modifications.

1.2.1 Historical culture

The concept of historical culture is a main concept throughout this research. The general understanding of historical culture is as a meta-historical concept that investigates how people deal

with the past.¹⁴ In a paper entitled '*Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited*', Maria Grever and Robert-Jan Adriaansen dissect the term in-depth. According to the authors, the 'historical' part in the term refers to past events, thoughts and ideas while the term "culture" relates to the various perspectives of different groups.¹⁵ The term emerged during the 1970s when history educators started to examine the sources which influenced historical thinking of pupils in schools. In order to study the concept Grever and Adriaansen discern three connected levels of analysis for the concept of historical culture. Historical narratives and performances of the past, mnemonic infrastructures and underlying conceptions of history.

The first level of analysis; historical narratives and performances of the past combines a description of the past and the recreation of the past. Important to note is Frank Ankersmit's understanding of a description of the past in his work *Truth and Reference*. In this work, the author delves deeper into the concept of historical representation and a description of the past. According to him, it is vital to discern between description and representation.¹⁶ Whereas a description can be either true or false, a representation's case is different. A (historical) representation is neither true nor false; instead, it can provide the reader with different aspects of the event represented.¹⁷ Ankersmit explains that similar to a shadow, a representation carries its own representative along with itself.¹⁸ Keeping this in mind, the re-creations, descriptions and representations of the past are according to Grever and Adriaansen embodied in texts in history schoolbooks, myths, re-enactments, travel guides and much more. These substantive interpretations require some form of configuration through the process of narrative emplotment. These narratives generate identities by arranging facts, experiences, and events into a plot. Grever and Adriaansen continue by stating that the majority of representation relies on a plot which makes the past meaningful to the audience and creator.¹⁹ The plot has a mediating function on a number of levels. Beginning with the mediating function of the individual experiences and the whole story, which means that every event or experience gains significance in the manner, of configuration in the plot. Secondly, emplotment ensures that a large group of heterogeneous actors, objects, situations, interactions, and results are tied together.

Lastly, the plot mediates between the actual passing of time and the time experienced by the narrative.²⁰ Another form of substantive interpretations is a (historical) videogame. Similar to history texts in schoolbooks, videogames provide the reader, or user, with a description and recreation of the past. Moreover, videogames also require some form of configuration through the arrangement of facts, events, and experiences in a plot. However, videogames are different from schoolbook texts in the sense that their story, or plot, requires the interaction of the user in order to progress the narrative. In all cases, the process of narration allows for the creation of identities which in turn produce different stories, which can confirm, alter or undermine other (grand) narratives. For videogames and game modifications, this development can clearly be observed as game modifications often alter a video game's setting to something else than the grand narrative produced by the industry, which will be discussed later in this chapter more thoroughly.

The second level of analysis are the mnemonic infrastructures. These infrastructures enable

¹⁴ Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, "Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited," in *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017). 73.

¹⁵ Grever and Adriaansen. 77.

¹⁶ Frank R. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, Licensed ed (Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 2012). 65.

¹⁷ Ankersmit. 70

¹⁸ Ibid. 72

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. 79.

people to tell specific stories about the past or to express historical experience. These structures are set in time and space and can include a variety of different expressions such as annual ceremonies, national calendars, museums and mnemonic sites.²¹ These mnemonic infrastructures allow people to tell specific stories about the past. In relation to videogames, it is important to explore *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memory). These social environments, such as a church or a peasant village, actively transmit memory through noticeable traditions and customs. In real life, modernity removed more and more of such places.²² However, videogames provide the option to recreate such environments in their digital worlds.

Thirdly, there are the underlying conceptions of history. Historical cultures always presume a particular conception of history. These conceptions are interpretations of the relationship between the past, present and future. A conception of history is a specific interpretation of the connection between the past, present and the future. These three temporal dimensions determine the epistemological possibilities of knowing the past and the degree of human agency.²³ Grever and Adriaansen pose three different articulated conceptions of history, *passeist*, *futurist* and a *presentist*. In a *passeist* regime of historicity, the past is determined by the present and future. In such a regime, the past serves as storage for moral lessons to guide us in the present.²⁴ This relates strongly to historical consciousness which is understood to be the ability to explain the present with knowledge about the past. Often historical consciousness is based on past experiences, interpretations and historical knowledge and orientation within (historical) cultures. The combination of the different levels of analysis aims to show that historical culture is a dynamic and inclusive concept which has meaningful implications for understanding the changing relationship that people have to the past

1.2.2 Participatory culture

Technological developments in computers, gaming consoles, personal devices and social media (e.g. smartphones, social networking sites and multimedia recorders) give way to a new era of information and communication technologies.²⁵ These new inventions, characterized by participatory activities, have a significant impact on heritage discourse, memory frameworks, the experience of history and the understanding of the past.²⁶ This paragraph is aimed to explore a different concept that deals with the relationship that people have to the past, through participatory culture. According to author Elisa Giaccardi, participatory culture, fostered by digital technologies, changes how we experience and think of history, heritage and historical representation.²⁷ The phrase participatory culture was introduced in 2006 by Henry Jenkins in the book *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*. It is defined as a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices.²⁸ This approach to history and memory poses a challenge for historical culture. Whereas, historical culture's mnemonic infrastructures, which allows people to tell stories about the past, relies on different institutions. Participatory culture aims to enhance the role of ordinary people to (co)produce narratives of public memory, instead of experiencing them as interactive extras or spectators. Participatory culture sets

²¹ Grever and Adriaansen. 79.

²² Grever and Adriaansen. 80.

²³ Grever and Adriaansen. 82.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Elisa Giaccardi, *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture* (Routledge, 2012). 1.

²⁶ Giaccardi. 1.

²⁷ Giaccardi.

²⁸ Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (MIT Press, 2009). 11.

itself apart from historical culture through the emphasis on inclusiveness, diversity, and access.²⁹ In participatory culture members feel that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another.

Jenkins further argues that participatory cultures provides benefits such as opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, alters the approach to intellectual property and diversification of cultural expression. The last two of these benefits are especially vibrant in the gaming and game modification culture.³⁰ Intellectual property within the video game industry has changed in the sense that mods represent an opportunity for the industry to learn from experimentation and innovation. A great example of this experimentation and innovation through mods is the game *Counter-strike*. Today this game is one of the best FPS-games (first-person shooter) available on PC, with its origins as a mod for the game *Half-life*. A first-person shooter is a videogame genre which revolves around weapon-based combat, often firearms, through the perspective of the eyes of the game's character. For the modding community, however, the participatory culture is slightly unclear. Postigo mentions that the modding community is in a sort limbo of existing within the participatory culture as well as outside of it. This is due to modding still existing as a hobby as well as being a professional production process.³¹ Recently, participatory culture, as defined by Jenkins, has received critique. Christian Fuchs, a professor at the University of Westminster, has concluded that the definition of the concept of participatory culture is problematic due to a number of reasons.³² According to Fuchs, Jenkins only has a culturalist understanding of participation and ignores the notion of participatory democracy, a term directly associated. Participatory democracy has political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Whereas, according to Fuchs, participatory culture ignores aspects such as platform/company ownership, collective decision making, profit and the distribution of material benefits.³³ These aspects need consideration seeing as the cultural expressions of internet users are strongly influenced by different companies such as Facebook, Google and others. This critique is important to consider while using the participatory culture as defined by Jenkins. As certain different community websites or modding tools are connected to game developer corporations.

In *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* the authors Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron further describe the ongoing theoretical and methodological development of game studies and the related concepts such as participatory culture. The chapter 'Community' by Carly Kocurek examines the widespread desire among these individuals to build connections, participate in community activities, the importance as well as the functioning of participatory culture of modders and the game industry. Kocurek describes the industries perspective of the manner in which player shaped communities form. Although the community activities by video gamers is not a highly debated part of game studies, many of the existing literature pays attention to the gaming community. According to Kocurek, official websites and forums are vital for most games and serve as a primary platform to communicate and interact with developers and users.³⁴ The concept that games stimulate the growth of communities is not new. In 1938 Johan Huizinga noted that playing games "promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy

²⁹ Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Univ of South Carolina Press, 2015). 4.

³⁰ Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*. 12.

³¹ Hector Postigo, "Modding to the Big Leagues: Exploring the Space between Modders and the Game Industry," *First Monday* 15, no. 5 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v15i5.2972>. 1.

³² Fuchs Christian, "Against Henry Jenkins. Remarks on Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture," accessed January 23, 2020, <http://fuchs.uti.at/570/>, <http://fuchs.uti.at/570/>.

³³ Christian.

³⁴ Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, Routledge Companions (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014). 368.

and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means".³⁵ In the *Routledge Companion to Videogame studies* Frans Mäyrä adds that today's digital players are not usually wearing special clothes to mark them as members of a particular community, but also that the gaming community can undoubtedly be characterized as a contemporary sub-culture.³⁶ These online player communities are also visible among modders, such as on the website 'Moddb' which is an abbreviation for the mod database.

In the article *User, Communities and Social Software in the Video Game Industry* by Thierry Burger-Helmchen and Patrick Cohendet the tight relationship between firms and user communities in the videogame industry is analysed. The authors describe the user communities and their relationship with game designers in-depth as well as determining different types of communities in the industry. Burger-Helmchen and Cohendet's types range from original developers to player types such as tool developers and content builders to tester types such as beta tester. An example of a game modification community with a tight relationship with game developers is the 'Steam Workshop'. The workshop is a part of the larger 'Steam' platform a digital content distribution website, webshop and social/gaming platform. The 'Steam Workshop' is part of the Valve Corporation a large game developer which launched 'Steam' a digital content distribution, web shop and social platform surrounding games. The PhD dissertation *Modders: Changing the Game Through User-Generated Content and Online Communities* by Kyle Andrew Moody. Explores community dynamics of modders on the Steam Workshop Channel for the game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011) in order to examine the identity politics of the community, as well as the tensions between innovation and control within the community. The dissertation delves even further and studies how digital media produces, such as Steam, attempt to control the fan-made productional spaces and how it affects the existing user-generated communities. The author also conducted interviews with modders in order to explore the motivations for participating in the mod group and their perceptions of norms, rituals and values in the group. An interesting addition to the current historiography as well as this thesis.

1.2.3 Appropriation

Closely tied to the participatory culture as well as the proposed research question is the term 'appropriation' which is an important concept throughout this thesis. Grever and Adriaansen already mentioned this term, but in this paragraph, we will consider the understanding of this term in-depth. Julie Sanders, in her work *Adaptation and Appropriation*, explores different definitions of appropriation, the cultural politics behind the term as well as the diverse ways of such reimaginings. Although the exploration of appropriation mainly focusses on literature, it can also be applied to the videogames as well as game modifications and different types of media. Sanders defines appropriation as taking something from one's own use and sometimes also allows for a possible shift in media type. Additionally, appropriation has a greater distance from the source than the strongly related term, adaptation. Moreover, appropriation allows for a possible shift in media type. The concept moves between the extremities of homage and plagiarism as it shifts the original source into a new cultural product and domain.³⁷ Sanders broadly defines appropriation as an intersecting and interrelating concept with adaptation. According to the author, adaptation can be defined as a trans-positional practice, which moves a specific genre into another generic mode. Often adaptation can be perceived in an amplifactory mode is, in the sense that it can add, expand, accredit, and interpolate the work.³⁸ In *Repositioning Shakespeare* Thomas Cartelli provides a

³⁵ J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Taylor & Francis, 2003). 12.

³⁶ Wolf and Perron, *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*. 297.

³⁷ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*. 26.

³⁸ Ibid.

supplementary definition for the difference between appropriation and adaptation. According to Cartelli, the act of appropriations is differentiated from adaptation due its more critical nature. In addition, appropriation often serves a social or political agenda.³⁹ According to the author Alexander Unger in the article *Modding as Part of Game Culture* appropriation of digital games through modding can be regarded as “the soil on which new cultures with their unique ways of usage and interpretation can grow.” Unger sees appropriation as an important and multi-layered part of the game culture. According to him the appropriation through game modification is heavily under-researched.⁴⁰ Concerning videogames, Hector Postigo in *Video Game Appropriation through Modifications* explores the relationship between modders, supporters of the game and owners of the works. Postigo focusses on the copyright laws interfering with the possibilities of modders and provides different justifications for appropriation. Such as the possible beneficial relationships between modders and owners. The relationship between modders and the game industry will further be analysed later in the theory and literature report.

1.2.4 Videogame studies

In order to analyse game modifications theoretically, videogame studies, digital games and historical games need to be considered. Research into videogames is a relatively new phenomenon. The academic research into videogames emerged around the beginning of the 21st century. Central to game studies is the digital game. Alexander Galloway defines a digital game or videogame as follows; a cultural object bound by history and materiality consisting of an electronic computational device and game simulated in software. The computational device is the machine with the input devices and other physical interfaces.⁴¹ Galloway further adds that games should not be equated with a theory of interactivity or the active audience theory of media. Whereas active audience theory states that audiences bring their own, personal interpretations and receptions of the work does not apply to games. Games, rooted in cybernetics and information technologies, are active and the videogames materiality moves and restructures itself. Therefore, instead of games being just interactive, they can also be thought of as an 'action-based' medium.

Formerly, game studies primarily revolved around the question of computer games are digital forms of play or interactive stories.⁴² As argued by Stephan Günzel in *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*, the major shift in the field of videogame studies came in 2001. Before 2001 game studies was torn between the ludological and narratological approaches on research. These two different approaches both attempted to categorize videogame within an existing frame: a text or a game. Narratological approach viewed games as a text medium developed into an interactive text, and the ludological approach saw a game becoming an interactive form of play.⁴³ In 2001 Mark Wolf published *The Medium of the Video Game* in which he argued that a videogame is categorically different from existing mediums and that videogames are a new specific kind of medium with its own mediality.⁴⁴

One of the leading secondary pieces of literature is the work of Adam Chapman, *Digital*

³⁹ Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (Psychology Press, 1999). 3.

⁴⁰ Alexander Unger, “Modding as Part of Game Culture,” in *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*, ed. Johannes Fromme and Alexander Unger (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 509–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2777-9_32.

⁴¹ Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, NED-New edition, vol. 18 (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttss5p.10.

⁴² Johannes Fromme and Alexander Unger, eds., *Computer Games and New Media Cultures* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2777-9.31>.

⁴³ Fromme and Unger. 32.

⁴⁴ Mark J. P. Wolf, *The Medium of the Video Game* (University of Texas Press, 2001). 13.

Games as History. The book provides the first in-depth exploration of videogames as history and sets out multiple theories and concepts relevant for this research. In this book, Chapman utilizes aspects of both narratological and the ludological framework in order to create methods for analysis and looks at how videogames produce representations of the past.⁴⁵ The book is generally regarded to be an important foundation for historical research into videogames as a historical form, due to the number of theoretical concepts linked to videogames as history and different methodological approaches analysed. In the book *Digital Games as History*, Chapman notes that historical videogames go beyond the conventional perspectives of history and historical narratives. History itself is always partly determined by the form in which it is constructed, disseminated, and received. Videogames offer next to the more common interpretation of representation also a manipulation of the narrative. The possibility of actively 'doing' history is, according to Chapman, what allows historical games to not only function as representations of the past but also as a way of accessing historical practices.⁴⁶ Additionally, Chapman defines digital historical games as digital games which make meaning out of the past. He notes that they are not bought as histories but that this does not matter since historical digital games expose players to an engagement with history and historical representations.⁴⁷ In combination with the immense popularity of digital games, Chapman argues that therefore this expression of popular culture holds a significant degree of power.⁴⁸

William Uricchio also explores videogames and historical representation. In the article *Simulation, History and Computer Games* Uricchio explores the matter of representation of history and the effect videogames, enactment and simulation can have on the concept.⁴⁹ Historical representation is an extensively debated concept. Covering the entire historiography of representation is out of the scope of this thesis. Therefore, only the representation directly related to videogames and game modifications will be analysed. Uricchio adds to the debate on the historical value of videogames by discussing whether the notion of mediation beyond language, enactments and simulation, allows us to move beyond the current conceptualization of historical representation in the domain of videogames.⁵⁰ Uricchio also aims to indulge deeper on the interactive role of the user. According to the author, there is a stark difference to other historical representation in popular media such as movies. Movies, similar to books, are bound to a particular singular rendering of the past, whereas videogames allow for a significant influence of the user in the process of historical simulation and representation.⁵¹

1.2.5 Game modifications and modders

The following part of the combined literature report and theoretical concepts will focus on the historiography and different approaches in the study of mods. Current academic research on mods and modders is largely consistent with the abovementioned game studies. As video games are a relatively new phenomenon, game modification is a relatively new phenomenon too. However, players have modified games for virtually as long as videogames themselves have existed.⁵² Within the world of video games, the word mod, short for 'modify' or 'modification' is common knowledge among the players and developers. Hector Postigo defines mods in his work *From Pong to Planet Quake: Post-Industrial Transitions from Leisure to Work* as fan-made changes to a video game with a

⁴⁵ Chapman, *Digital Games as History*. 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 19

⁴⁹ William Uricchio, "Simulation, History and Computer Games," in *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, 2005. 332.

⁵⁰ Uricchio. 332.

⁵¹ Uricchio, "Simulation, History and Computer Games."

⁵² Mol et al., *The Interactive Past*. 187.

range of complexity from simple adjustments in-game variables to 'total conversions' where an entire game is redesigned.⁵³ Alexander Galloway defines several varieties between different adjustments that a mod can make. Firstly, game modification can solely revolve around visual effects, such as altering character models or artwork to the game. Secondly, the game can be altered based on the rules of the game, changing game objectives, for example. Thirdly, mods can alter the original game's software technology such as game physics, character behaviour and more.⁵⁴ In nearly all cases these mods are a 'new' free version of an original game, supplying the player with new gaming experiences. Research into modding began with the economic aspects. Although not entirely related to the thesis topic, it is important to consider this aspect of game modifications briefly as stated by many different scholars, such as by Olli Sotamaa, who is a postdoctoral research fellow at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tampere. In Sotamaa's article *Have fun working with our product* he states that computer games are a multi-billion-dollar business, which profits from the free consumer labour of modders.⁵⁵ The free labour of the modders benefits the industry in multiple ways. One way is that these mods boost the value of games by contributing to the product branding of the game without additional investment from the original developer.⁵⁶ Another benefit for the publisher is that mods can extend the 'shelf life' of games and increase the customer loyalty of a game.⁵⁷ The loyalty increases because players tend to stick to games with large mod communities because the options for new and different material are abundant and increasing. For the modders themselves, a benefit is also present. Often game publishers recruit prolific and talented modders into their developer teams.⁵⁸ As can be seen in the earlier mentioned example of mod turned videogame, *Counter-strike*.

Scholars such as Peter Christiansen in *Between a Mod and a Hard Place* elaborates on why people design mods, the value of modding and how modding is carried out. It is an important and exciting work which lies close to the research set out in this thesis. In his, work, Christiansen states that mods have significance not only due to their technological achievement, but also because they were never a commodity. This freedom in modding allows modders to create games that the industry is not making and dubs it a counter-hegemonic process.⁵⁹ The hegemony being the videogame industry which is a complex network of people, technology and ideas. Christiansen denotes a problem within the industry; the flow of power has privileged certain groups while others are marginalized. This leads to no authority telling us what games should be made and which groups matter.⁶⁰ According to the author, modding can be seen as a way to address and diversify the gaming industry and the expressions of history. This counter-hegemonic view holds a central role in this thesis as it is a significant to the manner in which mods relate to historical culture as defined by Grever and Adriaansen. In the article, Christiansen also sets out the perils of modding, while the bulk of the existing literature focusses on the benefits of game modification. One of which is the unequal distribution of the benefits of modding. Even though all parties gain something, the existing capitalist structure aids the large corporation and exploits the community.⁶¹

⁵³ Hector Postigo, "From Pong to Planet Quake: Post-Industrial Transitions from Leisure to Work," *Information Communication & Society* 6, no. 4 (2003): 593–607.

⁵⁴ Galloway, *Gaming*. 107-108

⁵⁵ Olli Sotamaa, "'Have Fun Working with Our Product!': Critical Perspectives On Computer Game Mod Competitions.," in *DiGRA Conference*, 2005.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Corliss, "Introduction: The Social Science Study of Video Games," *Games and Culture* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 11.

⁵⁷ Corliss. 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Erik Champion, *Game Mods: Design, Theory and Criticism* (ETC Press, 2013). 18

⁶⁰ Champion. 37.

⁶¹ Ibid.

From this perspective, in the aforementioned work *From Pong to Planet Quake* Hector Postigo investigates the motivations modders have in joining in on this exploitative relationship. He discerns three main motivations for modders; mods are a way to break into the industry, a way of artistic (self)expression and, simply, a way to enjoy their favourite game more.⁶² Here some form of a debate between scholars can be seen. Christiansen states that the possibility of a modder “breaking in” the game industry is as slim as a college football player to be recruited by the NFL. He thinks that, at best, modding should be considered an unpaid, informal internship with no promise for future employment.⁶³ The previously mentioned Olli Sotamaa in his article *When the Game is not Enough: Motivations and Practices among Computer Game Modding Culture* also analyses the attitudes and practices of modders. The game Sotamaa uses as a case study is *Operation Flashpoint*, a game set in the near future where the USA is at war with Russia. The author discerns five different motivations; the need to expand the game, interest in the inner workings of the game, increasing the number of playable scenarios and different battlefields and modders who enjoy the cooperation with other modders or the community. This article is highly relevant. The article delves into the motivations of modders of an FPS-shooter. Although this research can be seen as similar to the proposed research, the research is focused differently; namely, Sotamaa works with a different type of game, a shooter. Additionally, the scope of *When the Game is not Enough*, and this research is different, whereas this research intends to delve deeper into these motivations described by Sotamaa.

Historical mods, at the centre of this thesis, tend to be designed in order to give the player a more extensive historical experience, usually by adding historically accurate characters, events, symbols or other objects from the past to a videogame. There is no guarantee that the new content indeed more accurately historically represents the game; it is important to note that this is often the goal.⁶⁴ A term coined to represent this historical act is the ‘developer-historian’, referring to those who try to make meaning of the past through the form of digital games.⁶⁵ In addition to making sense of the past, developer-historians also challenge the authority posed by the official representations of history found in the original videogames. These developer-historians thus create a dialogue between their experience of history and that portrayed in popular media.⁶⁶ Within this thesis, the ‘modder’ will be attempted to be linked to the term developer-historian.

Lastly, a prominent scholar, which requires additional attention is Gareth Crabtree's and his work *Modding as Digital Reenactment: A Case Study of the 'Battlefield' Series*. This work is an essential point of reference for the analysis of the proposed research. Crabtree investigates modding through three strands of inquiry. The first mode of inquiry is through placing them in their context as both an element of video game culture and as a collaborative media practice. Secondly, the investigation revolves around the range of motivations for creating historical mods. The final mode of inquiry is the further analyzation of the working mechanics of this representation in order to chart historical narratives.⁶⁷ The author further explains that the majority of the academic literature has focused on how modding facilitates the dynamic between producer and consumer.⁶⁸ An example is the analysis of the previously mentioned *Between a Mod and a Hard Place*. This leads to mods being primarily presented as a connection between the consumption and production of digital media,

⁶² Postigo, “From Pong to Planet Quake.” 309

⁶³ Champion, *Game Mods*. 38.

⁶⁴ Mol et al., *The Interactive Past*. 186.

⁶⁵ Chapman, *Digital Games as History*. 20.

⁶⁶ Tom Apperley, “Modding the Historians’ Code: Historical Verisimilitude and the Counterfactual Imagination,” *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, 2013, 195.

⁶⁷ Gareth Crabtree, “Modding as Digital Reenactment: A Case Study of the Battlefield Series,” *Playing with the past. Digital Games and the Simulation of History*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 200.

⁶⁸ Crabtree. 201.

allowing the audience to have an active role in shaping their own experience of play.⁶⁹ The production of these mods is an extremely time-consuming business and yields little personal economic gain. This aspect of modding has sparked the interest of some scholars to explore what makes modding worthwhile for modders. Although Crabtree reveals little of his methodological approach to his research into motivations of modders, he concludes several motivational aspects. He states that modders enjoy seeing other play with their work, showing off technological skill, teamwork and the pursuit and educational purposes of historical accuracy.⁷⁰ A different critical aspect described by Crabtree is the conservatist definition of game modification. Modding reflects a largely male-centred historical world view as well as an over-representation of war.⁷¹ However, the historical orientation of these modders Crabtree concludes that they are a new form of digital reenactment. Similar to traditional reenactment groups, modding is enabled through a network driven by creativity, ambition and the desire for authenticity.⁷² This thesis aims to build upon the perspective of Crabtree and utilize his perspective of modders and the respective community as a guideline for further exploration of the phenomenon. Although Crabtree's notion of the conservatist nature of modding and modders is relevant, it will not be a leading concept in this thesis. In this research, there is the intent to study the motivations and historical representations of game modifications. If, however, a modder or game modifications exhibits strong notions of conservatism, then Crabtree's research will undoubtedly provide a helpful foundation for more in-depth investigation.

1.3 Nature of sources and methods

In this paragraph the methodological point of departure, as well as the nature of the sources is stated and explained. As can be derived from the research question "How do players appropriate the content of historical digital entertainment games through the practice of 'modding'?" this research intends to analyse the practice of game modding, a form of appropriation of games as historical representations, and as such, an expression of contemporary historical culture. This research rests on a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a form of research which deals with the non-numerical side of research. In the case of this thesis the data studied is derived from the (electronically) available texts and documents on videogames and mods as well as data from (online) interviews. Through an analysis of the content of historical mods, the research aims to find out how the past is represented. The study intends to adhere to an inductive view of the link between theory and research. This entails that this research stresses the understanding of the social world is through the interpretation of the world by its participants.⁷³ In the case of this research, the participants can be seen as all of those connected to videogames, such as the players and modders as well as the related communities. Alan Bryman's *Social Research Methods* denotes several criteria for upholding the quality of qualitative research which will be considered frequently throughout the thesis research. The criterion is founded in the research of L. Spencer in *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence* and was the result of a commissioned report of the United Kingdom's government Cabinet Office aimed to provide a framework for the assessment of the quality of qualitative research.⁷⁴ The full list of criterion consists of eighteen different criteria. According to Bryman, these criteria are at the basis for other schemes for appraising qualitative

⁶⁹ Ibid. 202.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 203.

⁷¹ Ibid. 207.

⁷² Ibid 208.

⁷³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). 380

⁷⁴ Ibid.

research.⁷⁵ Adhering to these different themes and criteria will aid in upholding the quality of this research.

The examination of mods will be through formal content analysis; this type of analysis aims to explain how the formal elements of a videogame modification affect the representation of the subject matter and the expressive content and is characterized by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics to draw conclusions.⁷⁶ *Mount and Blade* and the game mods are assessed through the systemic formal content analysis model as constructed by Óliver Pérez Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV*.⁷⁷ The author argues in favour of studying videogames due to their increasing importance in our collective imagination. Additionally, Latorre believes that understanding the discursive potential of popular videogames on the social world is beneficial. In order to fully grasp the social discourse of videogames, Latorre proposes to analyse the relationships between game design, the transmission of ideological values and the construction of social reality.⁷⁸ The author developed an analytical model based on three aspects of video game discourse. The first aspect is the representation of the character/player. Secondly, the game world and thirdly the main actions carried out in the game world. These three aspects are determined to be fundamental in videogame representation culture. According to Latorre, these three entities are at the centre of a videogame.⁷⁹ The following table illustrates the three different videogame aspects and shows the subsequent rules which need to be analysed in order to study a videogame.

Formal analysis model by Óliver Latorre	
Representation of the character/player <i>Game design resources</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Performance rules 2. Operation rules 3. State rules 4. Rules for inducing behaviours 5. Game mechanics
Representation of the game world <i>Game design resources</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spatiotemporal design 2. Rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world 3. Patterns of behaviour of non-player characters 4. Rules of objects of the game world 5. Rules for inducing behaviours
Representation of the game play activities <i>Game design resources</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Patterns of action regarding final objectives 2. Winning and losing conditions 3. Degree of redundancy versus variability 4. Game mechanics 5. Chains of actions 6. Strategic/tactical dilemmas

⁷⁵ Ibid. 396

⁷⁶ Bryman. 289.

⁷⁷ O. Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV," *Games and Culture* 10, no. 5 (September 1, 2015): 415–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014565639>.

⁷⁸ O. Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV," *Games and Culture* 10, no. 5 (September 1, 2015): 415.

⁷⁹ Perez Latorre. 420.

As can be seen in the table, the representation of the character/player is shaped through five types of game rules: the performance rules, operation rules, state rules, rules for inducing behaviour and game mechanics. The second design factor is the representation of the game world, which is composed by the environment and those existing in the environment or non-playable characters (NPCs). Essentially and NPC is a character not controlled by the player which 'inhabits' the game world. Again there are five factors crucial to design the game world: the spatiotemporal design, the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world, the game rules related to the design of NPCs, the rules of objects of the game world and the rules for inducing behaviour. Thirdly, the table shows the representation of the game play activities. Alongside the character/player and the game world the possible in-game activities construct the videogame. There are six game design resources associated with the representation of the game play activities: the patterns of action regarding final objectives, winning and losing conditions, the degree of redundancy versus variability, game mechanics, the chains of actions and strategic/tactical dilemmas.

A final remark surrounding the analysis of mods is that, aside from the analysis model, the strategy for the mod analysis is not fully set-out. Instead, I aim to approach the mods inductive. In the sense that the study will move from observations to more empirical generalizations and then move on to different theories.⁸⁰ William Trochim in *Research Methods Knowledge Base* explains inductive reasoning as moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theory. Informally known as the "bottom-up" approach which aims to observe and find patterns or regularities between the different game modifications.

The selection for the game 'Mount and Blade' has been for multiple purposes. The game itself is a genre all of its own, its characterized by its different elements of action, roleplaying and simulation. In *Mount and Blade*, the player can experience and simulate medieval combat and kingdom building in a sandbox world map. A 'sandbox' or open-world game is a type of game where the player is free to roam the entire world map, without a set-out way to progress, it is all up to the player. Also, in terms of roleplaying the player can create their own character. The character creation rests on a large variety of different aspects such as creating your own background, gender, nobility, skills, attributes, equipment and renown. *Mount and Blade* is developed by Taleworlds and published by Paradox Interactive. Originally, the game is set in the fictive land of Calradia, based on the 17th century Eastern Europe but the mods can immerse the player in many different centuries. The game has relatively been unstudied by other academics in game studies or game modification studies. Additionally, the game has a vast number of historical mods available for research. The mod database *Moddb* includes a total of 683 *Mount and Blade* mods, 359 mods of the total deal with a variety of historical subjects such as the Second World War or feudal Japan. In terms of non-historical mods on *Moddb* there are various mods such as *Lord of the Ring* mods, soccer mods and *Dragonball Z* mods.⁸¹ However, the website *Moddb* is more than a mere mod database. Next to the option to find and download game mods, the website is a social platform. *Moddb* is the oldest community website on video game modification and aims to unite developers, players and their ideas.⁸² The social platform supports online participation for co-creation through which (historical) game modders can reflect on (cultural) heritage and historical representation.

From this platform two game modifications were selected and serve as a case study in this thesis. The mods were picked due to the following selection criteria. The first category considered was 'history'. For the purpose and aim of this thesis, it would be unhelpful to analyse a mod dealing

⁸⁰ William MK Trochim and James P. Donnelly, *Research Methods Knowledge Base*, vol. 2 (Atomic Dog Publishing Cincinnati, OH, 2001).

⁸¹ "Mods - Mount & Blade," Mod DB, accessed June 24, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/games/mount-blade-warband/mods>.

⁸² "About Us," Mod DB, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/groups/moddb>.

with unrelated subjects. Secondly, the rating of the mod was considered, only dealing with historical *Mount and Blade* mods with a community rating above seven on *ModdB*. The third criterion deals with the historical subject of the mod in relation to the game. The thesis aims only to consider mods that alter the original game's medieval setting. Next to drastic changes in the historical setting, the study aims to research historical mods that deal with 'unique' historical periods, periods not often found in videogames. In the videogame industry, the supply of historical games generally focusses on a few historical periods such as the Second World War, the Roman era and the Napoleonic wars. The first *Mount and Blade* mod selected is the mod "*The American Civil War Mod*" by the modder King85. The mod alters the combat completely, where the original game is set in medieval times, the mod allows the player to fight in different formation with soldiers bearing muskets.⁸³ Moreover, the mod has a community rating of 7.5 and surprisingly, the historical period of the American Civil War is rather unrepresented in historical videogames. Furthermore, the American Civil War is an incredibly contested historical period giving an additional dimension to the analysis. The second mod selected is *The Independence of Chile mod* which is an excellent example of a mod which drastically alters the original game's medieval era. The modder explicitly mentions the absence of the representation of this historical period in commercial video games. Additionally, the mod is rated with an 8.3 and the conventional supply of video games seriously overlooks the historical period. Also, what should be mentioned is that the responses of the mod creator also influence the decision of selecting a mod—preferring the research of historical mods with responses of the creator. The following paragraph will explain this further.

This thesis aims to explore the different motivations of members within the videogame and modding community in order to find out what drives these (amateur) developers. An excellent way to explore different motivations is through an interview, although this might be difficult to accomplish due to various constraints such as COVID-19, location, language, and the willingness of the interviewee. Therefore, the first thing to consider is how to establish contact with the modding community and its members in order to assess the possibilities. Since both mods are found on the community website *ModdB*, it is a logical step to approach the modders through this website. The site allows for comments on downloadable mods as well as private messages, allowing for direct contact with the creator of the mod. It is important to note that within the gaming community, the online medium is the primary form of communication, so therefore, online messaging is likely the most appropriate for this research. The Appendix includes the 'Participation Consent Form' sent to the participants of the interview and states the adherence of this research to the Ethics Board of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC).

The result of the interviews is analysed in accordance with the thematic analysis defined in *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology* by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke.⁸⁴ The thematic qualitative research method is used to identify, analyse, locate and categorize patterns within the data. In this research the following method regarding the interviews is going to be applied. The first step in the thematic analysis model is be familiar with the interview data. Secondly, generating initial codes, in the case of this research this translates to marking interesting features of the data. The third step is the analyzation of the different identified coinciding or clashing codes. Then these themes are reviewed. The final two steps of the thematic analysis include the defining of the themes and the production of the report. After completing the categorization and observations the analysis

⁸³ "The American Civil War Mod: Revived! First Public Release News," Mod DB, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived/news/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived-first-public-release>.

⁸⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

will be compared and related to the research question and literature.⁸⁵

In *Cases in Online Interview Research* by Janet Salmons the challenge of (online) data collection is mentioned. According to Salmons this is challenging due to the technological dimension. The addition of technology creates a different stage between the researcher and the participant due to the different experience caused by the form of communication.⁸⁶ Using these different works on methodology aids in shaping the credibility and potential contribution to the knowledge of the field of game studies. What should be noted is that modders are not representative of the entire gaming community. These content creators make up a small portion of the video gaming community. This is due to the number of resources; hardware, programming skills, motivation and available time necessary to construct game modifications.⁸⁷ If the responses on *Moddb* disappoint or do not fulfil the proposed goal, then the following ways of reaching out to modders will be applied. Firstly, a message will be posted on *Reddit*. *Reddit* is a website which can be characterized differently, but in sum, it can be considered to be an online community, message board, and a site to share (social-)news.⁸⁸ On this website, several 'subreddits' exist, which are essentially different forums for a specific subject. In the case of this thesis, it is intended to post a message on the subreddit 'r/mountandblade'. Another way to reach out to modders and the participatory culture of the game is through the website 'Fandom'. The website is a global entertainment media brand powered by fans. It is a collection of over 400.000 different communities surrounding different pop culture expression. The community relevant to this thesis is the 'Mountandblade wiki' a collection of gameplay guides, additional game information, blogs, and a forum. The last feature allows for the posting of different messages. *Reddit* and *Fandom* are picked due to their immense popularity, allowing for a large audience to be reached.

The selected sources and analysis methods have several advantages and disadvantages. The decision to research *Mount and Blade* as a case study limits the study to a single historical game. This allows for an in-depth exploration of the videogame. However, it also constrains the research outcomes to represent historical games in general. Given this constraint, this research considers the games specificity in presenting the research outcome. The same can be said for the assessment of the two historical game mods. The mods are two examples of a large amount of different (historical) mods for the game *Mount and Blade*. Research into these two examples certainly remains valuable although it is possible that the results cannot be applied to the broad spectrum of (historical) mods. Similarly, the interviews consist of a small sample size. The possibility exists that there is a large amount of variability in the interview results of this thesis and all modders. Although it should be noted that the research aimed to interview more modders. Unfortunately, several modders initially agreed to join the study, but failed to send answers to the asked interview questions. The decision to use a formal analysis model proves useful in structuring the different instances of *Mount and Blade* allowing for a clear comparison. On the other hand, strictly following a certain analysis model

⁸⁵ Braun and Clarke. 87.

⁸⁶ Janet Salmons, *Cases in Online Interview Research* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335155>. 2.

⁸⁷ Corliss, "Social Science Study." 14.

⁸⁸ Adrienne Lynne Massanari, "Participatory Culture, Community, and Play," *Learning From*, 2015. 19.

Chapter 2: Mount & Blade

The previous chapter provided an overview of academic discussions that relate to this research as well as the research questions, relevant theories and the methodology of the research. The following chapters will be more of an analytical nature; the relevant theories are going to be connected to the videogames *Mount & Blade* as well as to the different game modifications. This chapter will focus on the videogame *Mount & Blade* before the following chapters delve into the game modifications of this videogame. The focus of this chapter corresponds with the following part of the first sub-question 'What historical representations can be traced in the mods for popular digital games, such as *Mount and Blade*?'. Central in this chapter will be *Mount & Blade*. The game is an immersive medieval action/tactics game which takes place in the fictive country Calradia. The game offers the player a vast amount of freedom to roam the detailed environment of different castles, towns, and villages. It was developed by TaleWorlds Entertainment and published by Paradox Interactive in 2008. TaleWorlds is an independent video game development company, founded in 2005. The company started with its two founders and now employs over ninety developers with the game *Mount & Blade* as its most popular product.⁸⁹ Recently, the team released the sequel for the game named *Mount & Blade II: Bannerlord*. The publisher Paradox Interactive is one of the leading global publishers of PC strategy games. The company has published different established and popular franchises such as *Europa Universalis*, *Crusader Kings*, *Hearts of Iron* and more.⁹⁰ In 2010 TaleWorlds and Paradox released an expansion of *Mount & Blade* called *Mount & Blade Warband* which added multiplayer, extended political options and finetuned combat.⁹¹ The games *Mount & Blade* and *M&W: Warband* do not fall within a particular genre; instead, they incorporate different genres such as 'open-world' and 'RPG's' into a unique blend. The research will apply the formal analysis model as defined by Óliver Pérez Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Videogames Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV*.⁹² The model is constructed following the idea that the growing importance of videogames can be seen in the configuration of the collective imagination, which calls for an understanding of their discursive potential. In the following paragraphs, Latorre's model of analysis is going to be applied to the videogame at the core of this thesis, *Mount & Blade*

2.1 Player/Character; Representation of the medieval man

Before delving into these game designs, the character part must be clarified. In *Mount and Blade*, there is no character in the traditional sense of a game character. This is due to the genre of the videogame, as mentioned, the videogame *Mount and Blade* is a combination of videogame genres, for a large part the game is an 'RPG' or a roleplaying game. Such a genre allows the users to play a more substantial and different role in relation to the character than other videogames. The main feature of RPG's and *Mount and Blade* is that the character of the game is customizable, allowing for the player to set their own cosmetic attributes in any way they like: name, gender, hair colour, age, but even more specific, such as "eyebrow-width" and "nose-length". Additionally, *Mount and Blade* lets the player pick their character's background. Although most of the cosmetic attributes of the player-created main character do not matter, the character's gender and background strongly affect the game. For example, the option to pick a female character significantly impacts the games difficulty. As a female character, the player is required to do more work in order to obtain approval

⁸⁹ "Company - TaleWorlds Entertainment," accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.taleworlds.com/en/Company>.

⁹⁰ "About Us | Paradox Interactive," accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.paradoxplaza.com/about-us-static-info-ca.html>.

⁹¹ "Mount&Blade Warband - TaleWorlds Entertainment," accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.taleworlds.com/en/Games/Warband>.

⁹² Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study."

of (male) NPCs. The character creation can be understood as a way for the developers to touch on the gender roles in medieval society. As explained by Jennifer Ward in *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500* the late middle age woman was viewed inferior to men, and were treated as daughters, wives and widows rather than as individuals.⁹³ As illustrated by the following *Mount and Blade* quote which provides context to the player.

“Welcome, adventurer, to Mount and Blade. Before beginning the game you must create your character. Remember that in traditional medieval society depicted in the game, war and politics are usually dominated by male members of nobility. That does however not mean that you should not choose to play a female character, or one who is not of noble birth. Male nobles have a somewhat easier start, but women and commoners can attain all of the same goals – and in fact have a much more challenging early game.”

The quote illustrates that the videogame perpetuates the perspective of women in the middle ages. The developers even add that the game becomes more challenging en enjoyable because of the additional challenges a female character faces.

Thus, in *Mount and Blade*, there is no predefined main character, rather the main character can be customized in terms of cosmetics, gender, and background. Apart from the looks of the character, the choices made by the player alter the character's statistics and competencies. This is important to understand regarding the first game rule type defined by Latorre; the performance rules. According to the author, performance rules define the possible actions of the character and the links between actions and their effects in the game.⁹⁴ In *Mount and Blade*, the main character is able to perform are a large variety of actions. The more experience points a character has in a particular action, the better the character can perform the action. For example, the player chooses to create a character whose parents were a nobleman, the characters early life was spent as a page and later the character became a squire. Then as an effect, the characters leadership skills, strength, horse riding skill, charisma, weapon handling, and persuasion skill would be boosted. Amplifying these competencies would then nudge the player into further developing these skills as well as those closely associated. However, the player retains his/her freedom to do whatever the player desires and work on every skill. *Figure 1* on the following page, shows the possible skills, attributes and proficiencies of *Mount and Blade* characters that can be attained. To illustrate, the player who chooses the character's background as mentioned earlier would have fewer experience points in for example the "Trade" skill, low experience in this skill means that the character is unskilled in bargaining a profitable selling/buying price when buying food or horses. However, if the player keeps on performing many transactions, known as training the skill, trade proficiency improves. *Mount and Blade's* character creation thus implies, but not limits, the player to a single playthrough.

⁹³ Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500: 1200-1500* (Routledge, 2016). 4.

⁹⁴ Perez Latorre, “The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study.” 420



Figure 1 Mount & Blade character creation screen

The second game rule type are the operation rules; these rules shape how the actions of the player outside of the game world connect to the actions triggered in the game world. In other words, these operation rules regulate the ways of manipulating the keyboard, mouse or gamepads and visual interfaces in the videogame.⁹⁵ *Mount & Blade* is a videogame released for Windows, Linux and MacOS.⁹⁶ PC games are developed with the requirement of the player regulating the actions of the character through a keyboard and mouse in mind. In *Mount and Blade*, the operation rules are relatively straightforward. Outside of combat the game is "point and click" meaning that the player moves on the map by selecting a point on the map. If the player selects and moves to another character, the player is given different conversational options. *Figure 2* provides a clear illustration of several options the player has when speaking to a nobleman. If the player chooses to "deliver his demands" the characters "persuasion" skill is taken into account. The higher the character's skill, the easier it is to make NPCs comply with the demands. However, if unsuccessful, the NPC can react hostile, possibly initiating combat. When in combat, the operation rules are different. When in combat the player no longer points and clicks. During combat, the player moves the character through manipulating the keyboard and mouse. Several keys on the keyboard are connecting to moving forwards, sideways or backwards additionally the player is able to make the character jump, kick, (dis)mount horses, drop/pick up weapons and position the characters army through the keyboard. The mouse controls the movement of the camera and the use of the weapon(s) or shield.

⁹⁵ Perez Latorre. 421

⁹⁶ "Mount&Blade Warband - TaleWorlds Entertainment."



Figure 2 Communication

Regarding the state rules, the third type of game rules. The game rules govern the types of states in which the character can find themselves. Moreover, the rules also regulate how these are structured as well as the game conditions that produce them. An example is the design of the characters health bar, experience point, or reputation/status.⁹⁷ A low reputation with a certain faction can lead to the character becoming *persona non grata*, although not physically barred from entering the faction's territory, the character is attacked by the faction's members and blocked from entering cities, towns and villages, except through siege or combat. In combat, the head-up display highlights the characters health as well as displaying the health of the horse. Additionally, the heads-up display shows which unit dies by whom as well as showing the damage dealt, received and the experience game. At the bottom of the screen the player can find the character's health bar, ammo(arrows) and gained experience points.

The final type of game rules are game mechanics; these constitute the core of the game experience. These game mechanics are the set of actions of the character and the related skills of the player in connection to achieving objectives in the videogame. A great example of a game mechanic is found in the 'shooter' genre. In shooter games shooting at enemies, dodging their bullets, and taking cover behind scenery elements by the character is achieved by the player's application of visual-motor skills, reflexes, and spatial orientation.⁹⁸ In *Mount and Blade* the game mechanics surrounding the player/character centre on similar combat aspects; however, the game also includes strategic elements. Important for the combat game mechanics is that the creators fill the historical setting with historically influenced soldiers and their equipment. The different weapons and armour in *Mount and Blade* vary from swords, maces, hammers, scimitars to lances and crossbows designed to slash, pierce, or bludgeon the enemies. Each of these different weapons has a different set statistic. Robert Houghton in *World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes* describes the manner of how the *Mount and Blade* creators have tied these item statistics to the game world and the game mechanics.⁹⁹ Each weapon has its

⁹⁷ Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study." 421.

⁹⁸ Perez Latorre.

⁹⁹ Robert Houghton, "World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes," *Práticas Da História*, accessed March 30, 2020,

specific characteristics pertaining to the weapon such as weight, type of handling (one-handed, two-handed). These characteristics are combined with the player's character, which possesses quantified physical attributes such as weapon handling, strength, and agility. In combat, these mechanics translate to different effectiveness, where stronger characters with heavy axes deal more damage than the same weapon in a character hands with lower strength statistics.¹⁰⁰ The different character and weapon characteristics have implications for the representation of medieval warfare in the game. The characteristics enrich the representation of warfare through the ability of the player to experiment with and adhere to the tactics and strategy of medieval warfare.

Mount and Blade adds another dimension to these mechanics, namely, speed. In the game, a mounted combatant receives a damage bonus based on the speed at which the attacker is moving. In historical theory, it is discussed whether medieval troops were more effective when charging. The dimension of speed added to the combat mechanics by *Mount and Blade* confirms this academic historical interpretation of medieval combat in their game.¹⁰¹ Aside from running up to the enemy with a melee weapon, the player can choose to equip a ranged weapon. To effectively use these weapons a character needs experience points in skills, attributes, and proficiencies in stats such as "Power Draw", "Horse Archery" and "Archery", "Crossbows" and "Throw" as can be seen in *Figure 1*. Weapons include a variety of bows, crossbows, javelins, throwing axes, knives and even rocks. Using ranged weapons includes a practical problem, namely the need for ammunition. The use of spatial conditions is another important tactical game mechanic in *Mount and Blade*. It is crucial for players to be aware of the tactical advantage terrain can have to their units. As illustrated by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* written around five hundred BC, it is important for the character and their units to "occupy the raised and sunny spots and wait there for the enemy to come up".¹⁰² The game developers have translated this by decreasing the moving speeds of units moving uphill, making it easier for characters to engage these units with ranged weapons as well as engaging with these units due to the range advantage of melee weapons uphill.

Besides combat, the game boasts a variety of more strategic game mechanics relevant to the player/character. Being a roleplaying sandbox game, the objective of *Mount and Blade* is up to the player. These objectives can be military, political, or simply immersion. It is up to the player to reach these objectives through managing four different in-game concepts: Money, Renown, Honour and Reputation. In *Mount and Blade* money or 'Denars', is used to pay for equipment, items, troop upkeep, bribes and troop recruitment. Denars can be made through quests, taxing fiefdoms, trading, pillaging, winning battles, tournaments and from ransoms. Secondly, there is 'Renown' this is the character's personal fame. Renown is needed for a character to become a lord or lady, to marry, to become marshal and the ability to start their own kingdom. Moreover, NPCs react differently to players with high renown. To gain renown the player has to win (large) battles and succeed certain quests given by NPCs. In *Mount and Blade* the game tends to reward high risks with great rewards, thus 'punching above your weight class' in battles and political endeavours can be particularly rewarding; however, failure is also punished by diminishing the player's renown. Alongside the management of renown and money the player has to balance their honour. Honour can work in favour or against the character. Having honour affects the reputation gain with other nobles. Honour can be gained by releasing prisoners, saving villagers from raids, and completing quests without pay. Having little to no honour degrades the reputation with lords and ladies across Calradia. The

https://www.academia.edu/40250398/World_Structure_and_Play_A_Framework_for_Games_as_Historical_Research_Outputs_Tools_and_Processes. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Houghton. 32.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Sun-Tzu and Nigel Cawthorne, *The Art of War* (Arcturus Publishing, 2015). 88.

different game mechanics represent the feudal political system of the middle ages. Where a high status of renown, honour and reputation were esteemed.¹⁰³

In sum, the combination of videogame genres in *Mount and Blade* leads to different features in the representation of the player/character. The game allows for the complete personalization of the character. Illustrated by the difference in the game's experience in the case of a female character or male character. In the game the female character is subject to a more difficult game experience. This difference is due to the historical view that in the middle ages women were viewed as inferior to man. Furthermore, the player is able to shape the character's background which strongly influences the ability of the character to interact with items, NPC and the game world. The focus on different aspects leads to the character being more successful in the preferred traits. For example, the background of a character as a squire leads to a character being more proficient in using weapons.

In *Mount and Blade* the use of weaponry is a central game mechanic. Through the different effectiveness of weaponry in the hands of (un)skilled characters a strategic element is added to in-game combat. The different effectiveness of weapons is based on medieval warfare and represents the period neatly. The effectiveness of mounted combatants is a great example of the academic interpretation of medieval warfare and the representation of medieval warfare in *Mount and Blade*. Besides the representation of combat, the game represents the feudal medieval society through the implementation of Money, Renown, Honour and Reputation. Especially Renown is a particularly interesting mechanic. The renown stat is increased through winning battles and completing tasks given by other noblemen. Having a high renown stat aids in dealing with other nobles, (political) marriages and becoming a lord.

2.2 Gameworld; Representation of the medieval 'Calradia'

Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV* explains that next to the player/character, the game world is composed by the environment and the inhabitants of the environment. Inhabitants are otherwise referred to as "non-playable characters" (NPCs). Important to note is that objects, as well as natural and cultural elements, are understood to shape the game's environment. Latorre denotes five different factors that are crucial to the environment. The spatiotemporal design, the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world, the game rules related to the design of the nonplayer character, the design of the interactive objects and the relationship between rules that induce behaviour.¹⁰⁴ In the following paragraph, these different design factors will be explained as well as applied to the videogame *Mount and Blade*.

The first design factor is the spatiotemporal design. Latorre defines this factor as visual and scenic designs. Additionally, attention should be paid to active and reactive environments. Active environments are environments where the off-screen game spaces act independently from the player. In reactive environments, the game spaces are inactive or waiting for the player's interaction. The game world created by the TaleWorlds developers is aimed to represent Europe in the late twelfth and thirteenth century. The game starts in 1257; however, as the game takes place in the fictive country of Calradia, there are several inaccuracies between the historical year of 1257 and the created and fictive year. Calradia is a vast territory with many different villages, towns and castles all belonging to a different faction. In Calradia, there are six different factions, each with different visual components and characteristics. All these different factions are aimed to represent a medieval kingdom with a specific culture. In the desert located in the South there is the 'Sarranid Sultanate' this faction is based on the historic northern regions of Africa. The units represent Arabic soldiers, and the nobles carry the Arab title for ruler 'Emir'. Over the mountains, there are the steppes ruled

¹⁰³ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Routledge, 2014). 133.

¹⁰⁴ Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study." 422

by the 'Khergit Khanate', which are portrayed as a semi-nomadic group of horsemen. The Khergits closely resemble the historic Mongols as the units mainly consist of horse archers; moreover, the lords of the faction are called 'Noyan' a Central Asian title for rulers. The third faction which can clearly represent a particular historical region is the 'Kingdom of the Nords', located on the coast. The faction shows strong Scandinavian influences. The rulers are 'Jarls' a Scandinavian term for high nobles. Moreover, the faction's units wear Viking helmets and use battle axes. The fourth faction, 'The Kingdom of Rhodoks', is harder to pinpoint to a specific historical counterpart. The kingdom is located in a densely forested as well as mountainous area. The faction's speciality are their crossbowmen which might reference the Genoese crossbowmen of Northern Italy. The fifth faction is the 'Kingdom of the Vaegirs' this kingdom strongly parallels the historical Russian knights and other Eastern European warriors. The title used for lords; 'boyar' is the word used in many Slavic languages to denote rulers. The final faction is the 'Kingdom of Swadia'. This faction boasts heavy armoured knights and cavalry, similar to German forces around the twelfth and thirteenth century. However, many of these different represented factions and cultures have certain anachronistic properties. For example, the 'Kingdom of the Nords' represents Vikings. The historic Viking age is generally understood to be around the eighth century until the early eleventh century.¹⁰⁵ Another example is the use of 'kite shields' in 'the kingdom of Swadia'. These cavalry shields helped protect a knight's leg while he attacked from horseback; however, these shields were only used around the tenth and eleventh century.¹⁰⁶ The author Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar in *The Other Possible Past: Simulation of the Middle Ages in Videogames* provides a possible explanation to the perceived anachronisms in the historical world shaped by *Mount and Blade*. According to Alcázar, the possibility of being attacked in *Mount and Blade* by a band of Vikings while travelling through Calradia in 1257 fulfils a vital role in terms of modelling the past. The author explains that the historical imprecision of being attacked by the anachronistic Vikings is not perceived as such by non-specialists.¹⁰⁷ For the non-specialists the medieval era is most strongly associated with violence, fighting to the death with bows, swords, catapults and maces. These items bear a much stronger mnemonic infrastructure than the anachronism of bands of Vikings using them. Moreover, it is simpler to use Vikings who strongly bear these violent associations than the actual 13th-century mercenaries who require explanation and contextualization.¹⁰⁸ Alcázar concludes by stating that in creating a successful commercial videogame, it is important to assess the player's prior idea about history in general.¹⁰⁹

The abovementioned kingdoms and towns are part of the active environment of the game world. The active environment of *Mount and Blade* can be seen in the streets of towns and villages. These in-game locations are freely accessible for the character to stroll the tavern, marketplaces, farms and blacksmiths, city walls and guard towers. These towns modelled after real-life examples of medieval towns are filled with NPCs going about their business. Next to farmers and townsman, the game's active environment can also be perceived in the military and political actions of the factions and nobles. The different kingdoms wage wars, towns and villages are conquered, and nobles change their allegiance. Events such as these happen independently from the player, which adds to the roleplaying aspect of the videogame. An active environment generated by the AI-driven NPCs creates a unique Calradia where the player can choose to partake and attempt to control.

The second design factor relating to the game world are the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world. More than often a videogame has a system in place which

¹⁰⁵ Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings* (Penguin UK, 1998). 25.

¹⁰⁶ Joshua Allfree, John Cairns, and Brian Todd Carey, *Warfare in the Medieval World* (Pen and Sword, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar, "The Other Possible Past: Simulation of the Middle Ages in Videogames," *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum*, 2011, 337.

¹⁰⁸ Alcázar.

¹⁰⁹ Alcázar.

determines the order of different states for the player. For example, in *Civilization IV*, the "tree of technologies" implies the order of different evolutionary states in history that are part of the game. Different strategies can be adopted, but there is an underlying path that must be followed and cannot be skipped. Such as the states beginning with mysticism before moving to polytheism and monotheism.¹¹⁰ In *Mount and Blade*, this design factor is different from the example given by Latorre. In *Mount and Blade*, the player can reach every location on the map. However, the player is only able to effectively interact with lords and nobles if a certain level of renown is reached. Before the required level of renown, the character is seen as unimportant.

The third design factor are the patterns of behaviour of nonplayer characters. According to Latorre, these game rules regulate the behaviour profiles of NPCs, the game conditions that activate these profiles and effects within the game. As briefly mentioned earlier, the behaviour of NPCs is based mainly on the renown of the NPC. These NPC's will then act independently from the player and try to extend their power by forging relationships with other lords, fight battles, conquer villages and patrol their territories. The NPC can also serve a different function. As a lord or mercenary, the player can engage with NPC and ask NPCs for quests and information of the game world. The different lords and nobles of Calradia represent a different medieval noble related to the kingdom they swore fealty to, for example, a Jarl of the Kingdom of the Nords will be named and equipped according to this culture. *Figure 3* (on the next page) shows an example of an interaction with Jarl Gundur. As can be seen in *Figure 3*, the Jarl wears a helmet. This type of helmet closely represents the Gjermundbu Helmet, the best-preserved Viking Helmet in the world.¹¹¹

The representation of NPC's through items ties closely to the fourth design factor, namely the rules of objects of the game world. Latorre explains this rule as similar to the previous, but this rule relates to objects and material instruments. Concerning different objects, different rules define the actions, the way they function and the effects of these elements in the game.¹¹² As mentioned earlier, there are several different weapon types in *Mount and Blade*, and these weapons work differently in relation to their handling, type, weight, agility, movement speed and the skills of the character. However, *Mount and Blade* includes a wider variety of items and objects. All of these items and objects provide the player with an image of the medieval era. The game includes four different item/object categories: weapons, armour, goods, and horses. The earlier mentioned armour and weapons have been explained adequately, the two other object categories, goods and horses require some further explanation.

¹¹⁰ Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study." 423

¹¹¹ "Helmets," National Museum of Denmark, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-viking-age/weapons/helmets/>.

¹¹² Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study." 423

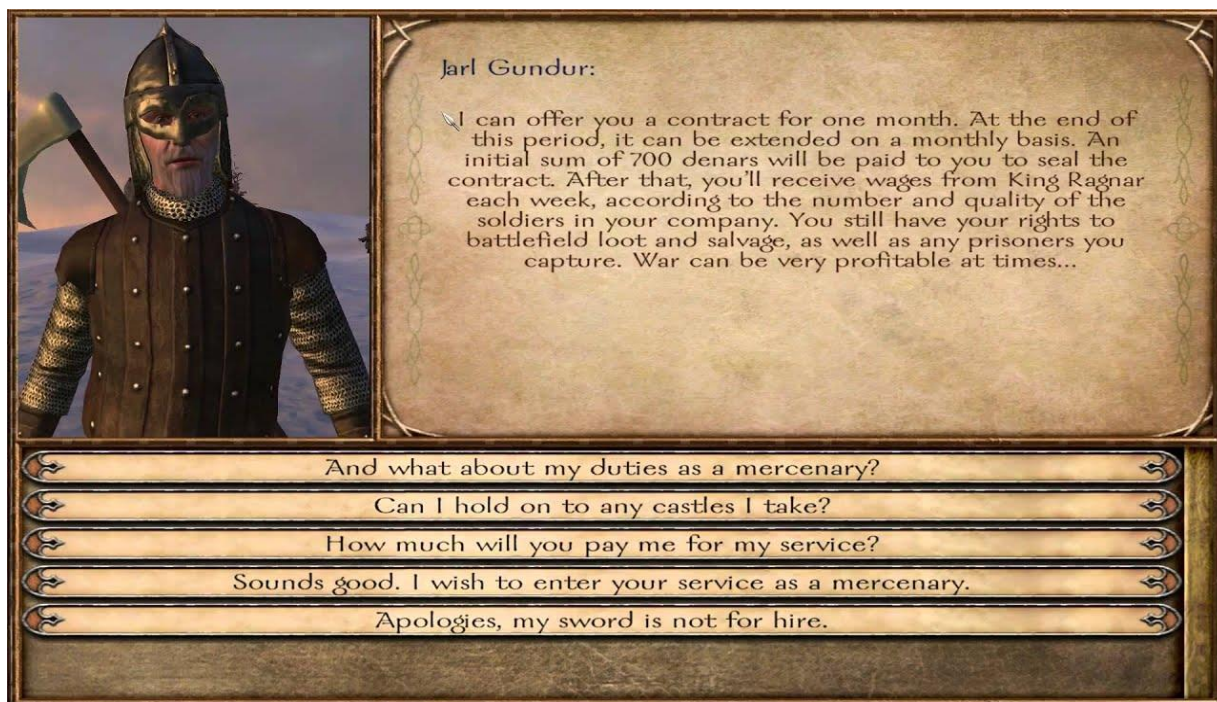


Figure 3 Interaction with Jarl Gundur

The object category 'goods' can be split into foodstuffs/consumables or tradeable items. The different consumable items are required to feed troops and maintain a player's party's morale. Some food types of 'fresh' foods such as beef, chicken and pork will rot over time, rendering them useless. The options for food are aimed to represent the idea of a medieval diet. In *Mount and Blade*, the following foodstuffs can be found bread, cheese, fruit, cabbage, butter, olives, sausages, pork, beef, chicken, dried meat, grain, and smoked fish. Each type of food has different stats. An example can be seen in Figure 4. The image shows the quantity, sell price, weight, and morale bonus for the character's party. The second type of objects in *Mount and Blade* is the tradeable items. These items can be obtained through trade or by pillaging or looting. These types of objects cannot be used for anything other than trading. The only stats relating to these items are the selling price and the weight. The weight stats affect the characters travelling speed, slowing down the character when the inventory is full of items. Examples of such in-game goods are dyes, flax bundles, oil, furs and iron.



Figure 4 'Food' statistics in *Mount and Blade*

The final design factor regarding the game world are the rules for inducing behaviour. The game rules are most often incentives and disincentive systems. Systems such as these influence the representation of the character/player as well as the game world.¹¹³ In *Mount and Blade*, we saw earlier that there are multiple strategic game mechanisms, namely denars, reputation and honour. The last two are strong incentive systems. These game mechanics strongly incentivize the player to behave "honourably" and to increase their reputation if they want to "survive" in medieval courts. In this case reputation, but especially honour is seen as a representative aspect of the medieval era. The design strengthens the romanticized idea of the medieval past as a time of honourable knights, lords and nobles.

To conclude, in the representation of the game world the spatiotemporal design of *Mount and Blade* is significant in supporting the narrative of the medieval world. *Mount and Blade's* active environment aids in creating a 'living' world for the player. In Calradia the NPCs are following their own AI-driven lives. The NPCs are able to fight and wage wars, conduct business and are politically active in the different factions. The addition of the of six factions that represent different medieval cultures and areas is an important feature of medieval representation. In common historical thinking the medieval era is shaped through violence. The developers achieve a violent world through the addition features such as the 'Kingdom of the Nords'. The faction is characterized by Vikings, which is anachronistic to the period represented in the game, but strongly bears violent connotations.

Another significant aspect of *Mount and Blade* to represent medieval history are the rules and objects of the game world. In the game there are four different item types which are all based on items and goods found to objects found at the time. To enhance the realism of the videogame certain items, have a limited durability. For example, beef might over time rot and become useless. In *Mount and Blade* the management of foodstuffs and goods are important in order to sustain the character and his party. Additionally, the items can be bought and sold in the videogame's virtual trade economy.

2.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of the medieval struggle

Alongside the game world and the character/player, there is the representation of activities in the gameplay. Every gameplay unit of the videogame involves performing certain activities in order to attain a specific goal or objective. Latorre defines five different design elements that shape and give meaning to the activities represented in gameplay.¹¹⁴ The first design element to consider are the patterns of action regarding final objects. According to Latorre, the meaning of a gameplay activity largely depends on the relation between the actions that compose the activity and the goal reached by these activities. For example, during the game, the player discovers that certain behaviours are ideal for reaching certain objectives or goals, as opposed to other behavioural activities that lead to unwanted results. Due to the open-world nature of *Mount and Blade*, there is no clear single, set storyline or pattern of action regarding final objectives. If the player chooses as their objective in *Mount and Blade* to conquer all the different towns and castles, then the pattern of action is characterized by a link between military activity, strategy, and tactics. However, if the player aims to become a successful merchant than the patterns of actions revolve more around trading and producing goods. However, from a different perspective, all these different objectives the player sets for him- or herself can be characterized as survival. Whatever goal the player sets for their character, it all revolves around the survival of their character in a medieval world. Although it is not possible for the character to die, the player does suffer severe penalties when losing combat, whether by and opposing army or when ambushed by bandits. The character loses its reputation, the party loses

¹¹³ Perez Latorre. 424.

¹¹⁴ Perez Latorre. 424.

morale, denars, and some items are lost. Thus, whatever role a player's character fulfils in order to survive and prosper the actions of the player are linked to sustaining or improving the characters living conditions, whether these are economic, social or political. The large degree of personal freedom in *Mount and Blade* can also be linked to neoliberal ideals, such as the construction of the individual through (unlimited) freedom, connected to the flexibility of one's identity and the possession and consumption of goods.¹¹⁵

The second game design factor relating to gameplay activities is the degree of redundancy versus variability in gameplay. Latorre explains this as an activity having a single way of reaching an objective. Alternatively, the design can include a variety of different ways to reach a goal. Additionally, the same activity represented in a gameplay unit can conform to a model of redundancy or a model of variability. These different models lead to different semiotic connotations, such as 'fate' versus 'freedom'.¹¹⁶ The great freedom found in freely roaming through Calradia provides a high degree of flexibility and variability to *Mount and Blade*. The variability found in the gameplay design also aids the developers in representing their vision of the medieval era as free, unpredictable, violent, and unforgiving. The final three design factor the author Latorre defines are game mechanics, strategic/tactical dilemmas, and chains of actions. The first two, game mechanics and strategic/tactical dilemmas have been covered earlier during the discussion of the representation of the character/player. In the earlier paragraph, we saw that the characteristics of the game mechanics require the player to select the appropriate equipment for his character to fulfil his goals. As we saw, *Mount and Blade* boast many different types of armour, weapons and even horses. The decisions regarding the moulding of the character link the game mechanics to tactical and strategic dilemmas since every weapons or piece of equipment has particular advantages and disadvantages.

However, the final game design factor, the chains of action, is yet to be discussed. Latorre explains this element of representation of gameplay activities as the design of a process through a sequence of interconnected actions. This often occurs in games with a predefined "script". This type of design creates meaning through constructing cause-effect relationships which lead to a particular ending.¹¹⁷ Usually, videogames provide the scripted narrative to the player through cut-scenes. These cut-scenes are non-playable, movie-like, scenes that move the story forward often through dialogue between the different game characters.¹¹⁸ However, in open-world videogames such as *Mount and Blade*, there is little to no scripted plot. The lack of such a scripted narrative does not entail that these videogames provide the player without a narrative.¹¹⁹ In *Mount and Blade*, the developers have decided to approach the story in a more interactive form of storytelling. The author Chris Crawford in *The Video Game Theory Reader* argues that achieving 'true' interactive storytelling is nearly impossible, although TaleWorlds has made an effort. Crawford mentions that in order to obtain interactive storytelling, the player must be able to make dramatically interesting choices. However, he also notes that the universe of dramatic choices is endlessly rich and varied that no coding system exists that permits to such an extent of possibilities.¹²⁰ So although reaching true interactivity is impossible the *Mount and Blade* developers do try to reach some form of interactivity by providing several, but limited, options such as hostile, friendly and neutral communicative

¹¹⁵ Perez Latorre. 431

¹¹⁶ Perez Latorre. 425.

¹¹⁷ Perez Latorre. 426.

¹¹⁸ Mark J. P. Wolf, Bernard Perron, and Routledge, *The Video Game Theory Reader* (Psychology Press, 2003). 260.

¹¹⁹ Gordon Calleja, "Narrative Involvement in Digital Games," accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/3374382/Narrative_Involvement_in_Digital_Games.

¹²⁰ Wolf, Perron, and Routledge, *The Video Game Theory Reader*. 263.

options. These different options can be applied to nearly all factions/entities that follow an artificial life model in the environment they populate. This approach is far from the scripted narratives of different videogames, and thus players experience a narrative that feels more like their own.

In conclusion, this paragraph studied the representation of the gameplay activities. Important in the representation of the gameplay activities are the patterns of action regarding final objectives. In *Mount and Blade* there is no end-goal or objective, it is up to the player to set and achieve goals. Due to the open nature of the game the focus on certain background choices is helpful for the player to increase attributes and skills suitable for his preferred objectives. In other words, *Mount and Blade* lacks a script or predefined narrative. Instead the developers rely on an interactive narrative through the great variety of options available to the payer alongside the freedom of setting economic, social or political goals. *Mount and Blade* represent the medieval era as free and unpredictable in addition to being violent, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

Chapter 3: Mods

The previous chapter showed us how the past is represented in the videogame *Mount and Blade*. Additionally, the chapter included the different manners of the player/character functions as well as illustrating how the game world and the activities therein function and aid in representing the medieval past. The representation of the past through the medium of a videogame does not limit itself to the representation of the past by the author, or in this case, the developer. As seen in the paragraph on the theoretical concepts, the boundary of whom represent the past in videogames is becoming increasingly indistinct. In videogames, there is a 'problem' with authorship and narrativity. This issue emerges from the interactivity that distinct games and other texts. The interaction gamers have through the interface allows the players to influence the narrative. This interactive feature permits gamers to extend agency into the text. In more traditional representations of historical culture, the user has a rather inactive role. The increasing indistinct boundary is highly observable in the case of game modifications and modders. Modders aim to alter the game in accordance with their personal views. The changes made in-game modifications can range from highly complex adjustments completely overhauling the original videogame or to simpler small adjustments to finetune variables. During the act of modding, the users creating these adjustments are actively appropriating the content of the original videogame to make it their own. Fans have been making their own versions of industry produced videogame since the release of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*.¹²¹ Henry Jenkins in *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture* defined such a culture with low artistic barriers, support for creations, sharing of creations and some type of informal mentorship as a participatory culture.¹²² The mods generated by this participatory culture provide new content by launching the mods into gaming communities where it is then downloaded and played by other gamers.¹²³

The following chapter will focus on these game modifications, modders and the participatory culture surrounding the videogame *Mount and Blade*. The section aims to explore the second sub-question, namely. What historical representations can be traced in the mods for popular digital games, such as *Mount and Blade*? Notable are the differences between the historical representation in the original game as opposed to the historical representation in the game modifications. The analysis of the sub-question will also be supplemented through comments and remarks of the modder themselves.

3.1 American Civil War Mod: Revived!

The first mod to be analysed is the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* The mod is created by King85 and alters the videogame *Mount and Blade*. It was released on December 20, 2019, on the community website *Moddb*. The previous chapter illustrated that the original *Mount and Blade* is set in the fictive country of Calradia around the medieval 13th century. As the title *The American Civil War Mod: Revived!* suggests this mod is set during the historic events taking place around the 1860s. The mod almost wholly overhauls the original *Mount and Blade*. Following the analysis model defined by O. Perez Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV* and used in the previous chapter, several major differences in between the mod and the videogame will be highlighted.

The mod maker King85 is from the United States and has been active on *Moddb* since 2015. The mod includes 'Revived!' in its title due to it being a revamped version of a different *Mount and Blade* mod which dealt with the American Civil War. This original mod, *A House Divided* was lost after the modders computer crashed causing a data loss. *The American Civil War Mod: Revived!* Is based

¹²¹ Hector Postigo, "Video Game Appropriation through Modifications: Attitudes Concerning Intellectual Property among Modders and Fans," *Convergence* 14, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 59–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507084419>.

¹²² Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*.

¹²³ Postigo, "Video Game Appropriation through Modifications."

on a copy of *A House Divided* found online and has been actively modded ever since. The game modification is rated with an average of 7.3 by the *Moddb* community and is ranked 456th of the total 42.261 game modifications on *Moddb*. In total the mod's webpage has been viewed over 80.000 times and has 176 active followers.¹²⁴

3.1.1 Player/Character; Representation of 19th century American

Regarding the representation of the player/character, there are no significant changes by the modder. The game still allows for the player to create their own character although the options for the character's background differ. Where the previously the character's background could revolve around being a nobleman and a squire the mod changes these medieval options to a "wealthy landowner". Different options such as, "steppe bandit" and "hunter" are changed to "Native American" and "Frontiersman". The game modification does not include any different rules or limitations for such choices. Moreover, the game modification only slightly touches on the subject of slavery, a crucial aspect of the American Civil War. The mod only mentions slaves but does not provide any deep or extensive representation. Instead the mod solely focuses on the Confederacy and Union. This focus implies a white, militarist and western perspective of the American Civil War.

Similar to *Mount and Blade* the choices made by the player would translate to different statistics for the character. Interestingly, as seen in *Figure 1*, the names of the different statistics are not changed, leading to a character with a high archery skill to be proficient in shooting muskets. The operation rules for the mod and the original videogame are similar. Travelling the map and communication with NPCs still function as "point and click". In combat, the player uses the same mouse and keyboard options in the mod to move the player. The mod does expand the possibilities to move and position the character's units. The modder expanded the tactical options in battle according to the nature of military battles at the time. During the American Civil War, the commanders often applied linear tactics. Linear tactics, or otherwise referred to as shoulder-to-shoulder lines, emphasized the regiment as a tactical unit and enhanced the command and control of the troops and the battlefield. At the time, the linear tactical system was still relevant and allowed officers to train their citizen-soldiers successfully.¹²⁵ The modder also added the option of the units to perform "firing by file". King85 elaborates on this tactical option as being a drill whereby the line maintains a continuous fire by firing in turn and reloading in between turns.¹²⁶ But the most striking addition to the operation rules is the modder's addition of voice commands. The modder's addition of voice commands introduces the feature for the player to fight with the character while consequently shouting orders to their units. Moreover, the modder added the correct bugle calls, short military signal tunes, to respond to these orders. According to King85, "It gives a greater feeling of immersion to hear cavalry bugle calls when commanding cavalry and infantry bugle calls when ordering infantry."¹²⁷ The extensive military and strategic options of the mod seem to further indicate the modder's militarist view of the American Civil War

The third and fourth game rules are the state rules and the game mechanics and are similar in the game modification and the original game, although some additions and alterations were made to the game mechanics. The most notable additions to the game mechanics are the extended tactical

¹²⁴ "The American Civil War Mod: Revived! For Mount & Blade: Warband," Mod DB, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived>.

¹²⁵ Kathryn Shively Meier, "Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness by Earl J. Hess (Review)," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no. 1 (March 12, 2016): 117–19, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwe.2016.0005>.

¹²⁶ "The First Patch Is Released! News - The American Civil War Mod: Revived! For Mount & Blade: Warband," Mod DB, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived/news/the-first-patch-is-released>.

¹²⁷ "The American Civil War Mod: Revived! Full Release Version 1.5 News," Mod DB, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived/news/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived-full-release-version-15>.

options as discussed above and the addition of firearms. The firearms added to the game range from rifles, muskets, revolvers and carabines and are originally not included in the game. Similar to the different weapons in the original game such as spears and swords, each firearm has different stats to represent the utilization and use of the weapon. The game modifications addition of firearms requires the player to use more of their spatial orientation, visual-motor skills, tactical insight, and reflexes in order to take cover and engage the enemy effectively. Other game mechanics such as the in-game currency and renown mechanics are similar. Although the game modification renamed and changed the setting of the game. For example, the currency is no longer 'Denars' but has been aptly altered to Dollars.

In sum, in the mod *The American Civil War: Revived!* the representation of the player/character differs from the original *Mount and Blade* in several ways. Most of the changes applied however are relatively superficial. Seeing as the mod changes the historical period several things such as names, and background stories are simply renamed to fit the period. Interestingly, the role of the female in the historical period is largely unaltered. No additional attention is divided to the discourse of slavery during the American Civil War. Instead the modder focusses on aspects concerning warfare and strategy. This is exemplified by the modder addition of several operation rules, namely voice commands and 19th century military tactics. The new voice commands in the mod further immerse the player into Civil War battlefields and creates a more authentic historical representation. In terms of game mechanics, the modder included a new weapon type, firearms. Evidently, this is a necessity in the combat of the historical period.

3.1.2 Game world; Representation of the American Civil War

Alongside the representation of the player/character, the analysis model defined by Latorre states that to understand a (historical) videogame the representation of the game world must be examined. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the understanding of the game world revolves around five different factors in the game. The five different factors are the spatiotemporal design, the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world, the game rules related to the design of the nonplayer character, the design of the interactive objects and the relationship between rules that induce behaviour.¹²⁸ Regarding the spatiotemporal design the mod *The American Civil War: Revived!* completely alters this aspect. The world designed by the modder "King85" represents the late nineteenth-century United States. Where previously the game map showed a non-existing territory the modded map shows a map from the American East coast up to the Eastern border of Texas. Roughly the map contains the modern territories of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri and Illinois. The game map is filled with cities, towns and villages bearing the well-known names such as Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Boston, Nashville, Gettysburg, St Augustine and many more. Similar to the original game these historic sites are all modelled after their real-life counterpart and free to traverse. Although the map is not a perfect model of the United States, the map does clearly resemble the US. The map of the mod is noticeably larger than Calradia. The mod includes six different factions, the army of Northern Virginia, the army of Pensacola, the army of Tennessee, the army of the Mississippi, the army of the Potomac and the Plains Nation. At first glance, this might seem like an unusual decision. Popular history often denotes the American Civil War as a war between the Union and the Confederacy. However, the modder King85 has represented the American Civil War as a battle between six different belligerents. To explain this, the modder provides the following explanation on the game modifications webpage on *Moddb*:

¹²⁸ Perez Latorre, "The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study."

“... From the historical perspective, there was no giant blob of Union and Confederate armies in real life. America is a very large country and no single army was going to be able to fight effectively across such an enormous landscape, especially with the kind of technology they had available at the time. Logistics and communications alone would be impossible over such a large area for one single entity to command. That’s why there were all these separate armies with their own generals, such as the Army of the Potomac, the Army of Northern Virginia, and so on. The different “factions” portray this aspect of history fairly well ...”.¹²⁹

The modder King85 clearly states his preference for historical accuracy. According to him, there never was a centralized Union or Confederacy army; rather, there were separate armies. The reason for the division between generals was the communication and logistical challenge of the nineteenth century. The historian Richard McMurry specializes in the history of the Civil War and provides similar arguments in his work the *Two Great Rebel Armies*. In this work, the McMurry compares the two largest Confederate armies to assess which of the twenty-five Confederate armies was most successful.¹³⁰ Thus, five of the six different factions can be separated between the Union; the Army of the Potomac, the Army of the Mississippi and the Confederacy; the Army of Northern Virginia, the Army of Tennessee and the Army of Pensacola. The sixth faction in the mod is the 'Plains Nation'; this faction is best categorized as a Native American faction. Even though the Native Americans were never unified as a single bloc, their presence in the mod is justified. As the historian, Megan Nelson argues in her work *The Three-Cornered War*. In this book, the author elaborates on the role different Native Americans tribes played in the Civil War. To illustrate, Nelson states that the Navajos and the Chiricahua Apaches were a serious threat and challenge to the Union Army's campaign of New Mexico.¹³¹ Additionally, the historian Ashley Dunbar, in *Native Americans: A Study of Their Civil War Experience* states that the Native Americans played a vital role during the unrest and upheaval of the Civil War. Their pledged allegiances played important roles in the outcome of several battles and the eventual war's outcome.¹³² Unfortunately, the role of the Native Americans in the American Civil War is often overlooked. According to Dunbar, this is due to the fact that most of the sources on the history of the American Civil War are written from a Western perspective; thus the voice and representation of the Native American more than often lacks from these histories.¹³³

These six different factions are a stark difference to the different factions found in *Mount and Blade*. Where the original game uses fictional factions inspired by history and uses anachronisms to represent the medieval past. The game modification includes factions based on historical counterparts, aiming to represent the historical setting more closely. The six different factions act similarly as the original game. The original game's active environment is similar to the mods. However, the only change is an increase in the relationship between the armies of the Northern states and between the armies of the Southern states, to ensure that the AI-led generals and commanders do not fight amongst themselves.

The second design factor to be discussed are the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game is unchanged in the mod; therefore, no attention will be paid to this design factor. The following design factor, however, the rules of objects in the game world do require additional attention. As explained earlier, these rules mainly govern the way items look, work and the effects of

¹²⁹ “The American Civil War Mod: Revived! Full Release Version 1.6 File,” Mod DB, 6, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived/downloads/the-american-civil-war-mod-revived-full-release-version-16>.

¹³⁰ Richard M. McMurry, *Two Great Rebel Armies: An Essay in Confederate Military History* (UNC Press Books, 1996). 1.

¹³¹ Megan Kate Nelson, *The Three-Cornered War: The Union, the Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West* (Simon and Schuster, 2020). 17.

¹³² Ashley Dunbar, “Native Americans: A Study of Their Civil War Experience,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research* 3, no. 4 (2011): 19.

¹³³ Dunbar. 20.

these elements in action. The mod and the game both include the four same item categories: weapons, armour, goods, and horses. However, the mod completely changes these items. To begin with the weapons. *Mount and Blade* included swords, polearms, axes, maces, hammers, and many more medieval style weaponry. The modder removed items that are inappropriate to the Civil War era. The weapons that remain are a few weapons such as axes, hatchets, knives, and some bows. Instead, the modder added a very large variety of ranged weapons appropriate to the historical period. Such as the Merrill Carabine, Richmond Rifles, and the Fayetteville Rifle. or the sake of immersion, King85 also included different sounds for the different weapon types. The modder pays close attention to the design of these weapons as well as ensuring that the correct weapons are included in the mod.

The modder also added a new type of 'weapon' to the game, flags. During the Civil War flags had great importance to soldiers. The historian Robert McNamara explores the significance of flags during the historic period. According to McNamara, soldiers on both sides of the conflict would give their lives defending the regimental flag.¹³⁴ The respect for the flag was partly a matter of morale and pride, but additionally, it symbolized the regiment's identity. In battle, the flags were practical, marking the position of the regiment in the fog of war.¹³⁵ The combination of the symbolic meaning and practicality of the flag required the designation of 'colour guards' carrying the flag. Typically, a regiment would consist of two colour guards, one carrying the national flag and another carrying the regimental flag, a mark of great distinction.¹³⁶ *Figure 5* shows the mod's rendition of the "Iron Brigade", also known as the "Black Hats" or "Black Hat Brigade", according to the author Alan Nolan, one of the most famous units of the Union's Army of the Potomac. The modder is keen on adding many different regiments and their unique flags and uniform. More examples of such regiments included in the mod are the "The Red Legged Devils", "Garibaldi Guard", "Stonewall Brigade" and "Thomasville Zouaves". Important to notice in *Figure 5* are the two-colour guards. Additionally, the unit's uniforms and equipment accurately depict the soldiers at the time. The seen uniform is only a small example of the many uniforms the modder added to the mod. With every update, the modder aims to add new and additional uniforms to "truly reflect their historical counterparts" and "to no longer look like other generic cavalry units."¹³⁷



Figure 5 The Iron Brigade

The characteristics also apply to the other two item types, the horses and the goods. King85 added different horse models reflecting the horses used at the time. Additionally, the mod adds several

¹³⁴ Robert McNamara, "Why Civil War Flags Were So Important," ThoughtCo, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.thoughtco.com/flags-importance-in-the-civil-war-1773716>.

¹³⁵ McNamara.

¹³⁶ McNamara.

¹³⁷ "The American Civil War Mod."

different types of good that typify the late 19th century, such as whiskey, cotton, and corn. The mod *The American Civil War: Revived!* does not alter the final design factor, the rules for inducing behaviour. The only difference is related to a change in the historical setting from the medieval courts to aristocratic/military society.

To conclude, the modification of *Mount and Blade's* game world is altered through many different changes. The original map is reshaped and fitted to resemble a large portion of United States territory. The modder altered the original factions to several historically accurate Civil War belligerents. In the modification of the different factions the modder chose to intricately create factions that accurately portray the belligerents of the Civil War. The same attention to detail is given to the alteration of the objects and items in the game world. The complete item list of *Mount and Blade* is changed to the many different sorts of muskets and rifles of the Civil War era. Furthermore, in order to further immerse and deepen the experience of the Civil War the modder added flags and uniforms to the mod, important aspects of the time period. Which further underlines the focus of the modder to portray the military aspects of the American Civil War.

3.1.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of struggles of man in war

In the previous chapter, the representation of the activities in the gameplay was introduced. Again, five different design elements were explained and applied to *Mount and Blade*. This paragraph aims to apply the same design elements to the mod *The American Civil War: Revived!*. The first element to consider for the mod are the patterns of action regarding final objects. Similar to *Mount and Blade* the mod there is no single storyline, it all depends on the player. The difference between the original game and the mod is the (historical) setting. However, this difference does inspire more to a specific end goal. As the mod is set in a Civil War, the player is more strongly influenced to resolve the war between the North and South. Although in the game mod the player remains free to do as he/she likes, the setting does push more towards participating on either side of the conflict. The second element, the degree of redundancy versus variability in gameplay is also unchanged by the game modification. The third design element, the game mechanics, has already been discussed sufficiently earlier in the chapter. The fourth element, however, the strategic/tactical dilemmas do significantly differ between the mod and the original game. As mentioned, the mod adds many different tactical formations to the game as well as different options for the units to fire on the enemy such as firing by file. Moreover, the addition of guns replacing medieval warfare is a huge tactical difference. Alongside these added tactical options the mod includes different strategic options too. In the mod the Confederate and the Union factions are unable to declare war against themselves, generating a different realm than the original game. In *Mount and Blade*, the six different were all able from attacking everyone which would often lead to increased renown among the court of a faction fighting a common enemy. In the mod *The American Civil War: Revived!* there are two sides and a third party. This division of factions inclines the two parties to side with the "Plains Nation" to gain the upper hand. The final game design factor, the chains of action does not differ strongly from the original game. Therefore, this design factor will not be discussed.

In conclusion of the representation of gameplay activities there are several important alterations of the mod to the original. In the commercial *Mount and Blade* there was a large degree of freedom and different playthrough options. In the mod, these options remain, however they are less extensively detailed and changed in comparison the changes in military playthrough. The mod's patterns of action regarding final objectives are focused on experiencing the American Civil War, instead of experiencing life in the Middle Ages.

3.2 Independence of Chile mod

The second mod that is going to be studied is the *Independence of Chile* mod for *Mount and Blade*. The modification's creator is Mauromagno_Patriota and was first released in 2011 and posted on the community website *Moddb*. As mentioned earlier the original game revolves around the historical medieval period, this mod, however, changes the historical setting to Chile in the early nineteenth century during the independence war against Spain. The mod can be considered as a total conversion of the original game. Mauromagno_Patriota is a modder from Chile who has been active on *Moddb* since 2013. His mod *The Independence of Chile Mod* is rated with an 8.3 on *Moddb* and is ranked 800 of the total 42.262 mods on *Moddb*. The game modification webpage has been visited a total of 270,569 and has 180 active members.¹³⁸

The historical mod *The Independence of Chile* is a great example of a modder's work that goes against the hegemony of the game's industry. The counter-hegemonic mod goes against the industry in the sense that the videogame covers a heavily underrepresented part of history, which exemplifies Christiansen's argument discussed in *Between a Mod and a Hard Place*. Even more so than the American Civil War mod, which deals with a slightly more common theme. In this article, the author argues that game modifications are a way of diversifying the historical representation in videogames.¹³⁹ Christiansen argumentation is illustrated by the comment seen below. The quote is from a review of the user Cloudieallover on the historical mod *The Independence of Chile* on the website *Moddb*.

“Really well done, I love this topic it’s not really a war that is talked about much and it’s just great to see it come to life like this and be able to be a part of it so kudos.”¹⁴⁰

The user praises the game modification due to the mod’s representation of the underrepresented Chilean independence wars in popular culture. The following paragraph aims to show the major differences between the historical representation of the videogame *Mount and Blade*. Furthermore, the paragraph aims to show how the historical representation of the Chilean independence wars is constructed in the game modification following the analysis model defined by O. Perez Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study: GTA IV*. The use of the same analysis model for the original game, *the American Civil War: Revived!* and *The Independence of Chile* allows for a structured comparison between the representations of history.

3.2.1 Character/player; Representation of the 19th century South American

The systemic analysis model explained by Oliver Latorre starts by analyzing the player and character in the videogame. The author denotes four types of game rules that influence the representation of the player and character. The four types of game rules: performance rules, operation rules, state rules and game mechanics do not need further definition as they have been aptly dealt with in the previous paragraph and chapter¹⁴¹. Instead the most striking features between this game modification and *Mount and Blade* are going to be highlighted. Remarkably, the modder did not make many significant changes regarding the game rule types of the character/player. Which means that in relation to the more specific rules of *Mount and Blade*, which refer to the medieval era, are still largely present in the game modification. In relation to the performance rules, the mod *The Independence of Chile* retains the original choices for the character’s background as well as keeping *Mount and Blade*’s variety of skills, attributes and proficiencies. However, the modder did include the

¹³⁸ “Independence of Chile Mod for Mount & Blade: Warband,” Mod DB, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/independence-of-chile>.

¹³⁹ Champion, *Game Mods*. 37

¹⁴⁰ “Independence of Chile Mod for Mount & Blade.”

¹⁴¹ Perez Latorre, “The Social Discourse of Video Games Analysis Model and Case Study.”

possibility of crouching. In the original game the only options the character has are jumping and running. The modder added the movement option of crouching in order to add new formation options for soldiers during battles. The new formation options are the most notable additions to the operation rules. *Mount and Blade* has limited orders for troops such as 'move here, 'follow me' and 'stand your ground'. The historical mod adds more and different formation options similar to the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* the *Independence of Chile* mod includes more tactical options relating to nineteenth century rifle-based warfare. To illustrate some of the added options are commands such as "Left flank fire now" or "All fire now". The effect of this new operation rules is an even stronger emphasis on the military, tactical and strategic aspect of the game *Mount and Blade*.

Regarding the third game rule type, the state rules the mod and *Mount and Blade* do not differ aside from updating the icon next to the health bar to represent a more nineteenth century style. However, in relation to the game mechanics the modder adds functioning rifles which is something that the medieval *Mount and Blade* does not include. The addition of firearms to the game expands the skills required of the player and is comparable to the discussion of the firearms in the analysis of *the American Civil War Mod: Revived!*

To conclude, like the *American Civil War Mod: Revived* does the *Independence of Chile Mod* not alter the representation of the player/character in a major way. The modder does make several superficial changes such as renaming and refitting the medieval themed background stories. The game modification does have additional operation rules, namely the ability for the character to crouch. The modder added this movement option due to the tactical options it provides in rifle-based warfare. In terms of the other game design rules there are no significant changes applied either, apart from the addition of firearms to the videogame.

3.2.2 Game world; Representation of South America

According to Latorre's analysis model the game world consists of the virtual environment and the inhabitants of the virtual environment. Latorre sees inhabitants as more than just NPCs, the game's objects, natural and cultural elements are also considered as inhabitants and part of the game world.¹⁴² There are five design factors important in relation to the representation of the game world. The spatiotemporal design, the rules for blocking/unblocking areas and states of the game world, the game rules related to the design of NPCs and objects and the rules that induce behavior in the character/player.¹⁴³ These different design factors are going to be considered in relation to the mod the *Independence of Chile* and the original *Mount and Blade*. The first design factor discussed is the spatiotemporal design. Clearly the *Independence of Chile* mod alters the spatiotemporal factor of medieval 'Calradia' considerably. The modder Mauromagno_Patriota recreated the independence wars of nineteenth century in Chile. The independence wars of Chile began around 1810, surrounding the upheaval of the Napoleonic wars engulfing Spain and Europe.¹⁴⁴ The mod starts on the 23 August 1814, a key year during the struggle for independence. The year is understood to mark a turning point in terms of militarization and military action.¹⁴⁵ To recreate the historical setting the modder changed *Mount and Blade's* map of Calradia to the continent South America. The map includes the territories of modern-day Chile, Argentina and Peru. The creator Mauromagno_Patriota incorporated twenty-two cities, eighty-four forts and one hundred ten villages. All the locations on

¹⁴² Perez Latorre. 420.

¹⁴³ Perez Latorre. 422.

¹⁴⁴ Simon Collier, Professor of History Simon Collier, and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile, 1808-1994* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). 33.

¹⁴⁵ "1808 – 1814 The Revolutionary Civil War in Chile," War and Nation: identity and the process of state-building in South America (1800-1840), accessed June 1, 2020, <https://research.kent.ac.uk/warandnation/1808-1814-the-revolutionary-civil-war-in-chile/>.

the game map are named after their real-life counterpart, including cities such as Cordoba, Talca and Mendoza.¹⁴⁶ Chapter 2 included an analysis of the representations of the towns in *Mount and Blade* following the conceptualization of what medieval cities and towns look like. In the mod *the Independence of Chile* the modder aims to accurately recreate forts and cities. The different towns includes many representations of Spanish colonial architecture, following Spanish city planning and building styles. The modders adherence to architecture is seen in the cities as well as the military fortifications. *Figure 7* below illustrates the modders work of recreating the architecture at the time of Chilean independence. The figure shows the mods rendition of the *Palacio de la Real Audiencia de Santiago* or the Royal Court Palace of Chile. The palace is located the *Plaza de Armas* in Santiago, Chile. In 1818 the Chilean Declaration of Independence was signed in the palace and afterwards it hosted the Chilean government. Today it houses the Chilean museum of national history and represents the nation's past, present and future.¹⁴⁷ The original *Mount and Blade's* architecture was fictional, although based on the medieval period. In *The Independence of Chile Mod* it can clearly be seen that the modder aims to accurately recreate important buildings in order to increase the mod's authenticity in representing the history of Chile.



Figure 7 The Royal Court Palace of Chile

As Grever and Adriaansen argue, historical sites, such as this palace, are important in shaping a vision of the past. Especially in the case of a nation state, sites of memory generate collective, national identities. Seeing the palace 'in action' in the mod is a way to emphasize the role of the palace in the Chilean national identity and history.

The game modification includes six different factions: the Chile Army, the Viceroyalty of Peru, the Mapuches, the Andes Army, the Upper Peru Army and the Río de La Plata's United Provinces. These six factions are the main actors during the wars of independence in South America. The wars of independence mark a major historical turning point. In Spain, the turning point translated to a massive decline of power, rendering the European state to a ghost of its former self. In Spanish America, the wars sprouted new, modern and constitutional states.¹⁴⁸ On one side of the conflict the

¹⁴⁶ "Independence of Chile Version 4.0 News," Mod DB, accessed May 31, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/independence-of-chile/news/independence-of-chile-version-40>.

¹⁴⁷ "History - National Historical Museum," accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.mhn.gob.cl/sitio/Secciones/Quienes-somos/Historia/>.

¹⁴⁸ Anthony McFarlane, *War and Independence In Spanish America* (Routledge, 2013). 1.

Viceroyalty of Peru, Upper Peru Army and a large portion of the Mapuches fought on the side of the Spanish Crown against the rebelling Chilean Army, Andes Army, and the Rio de La Plata's United Provinces(Argentina).¹⁴⁹ The quote below shows Mauromagno_Patriota comment on a user asking him why he does not add the Liga Federal or the Banda Oriental, two Uruguayan independence organizations.

“Amigos, como dice Malotun, el mod trate de la independencia de Chile, pos eso esta Argentina, el Ejercito de los Andes, las 2 facciones españolas y los mapuches, historicamente, se relacionava todo... ore eso puse mas paises, ademas porque hice el mod solo...”

Translated the top half of the comment states the following:

“Guys, as Malotun states, the mod is about the Independence of Chile. Which is why Argentina, the two Spanish factions and the Mapuches were added. Historically, all these states relate. That is why I did not add more factions. Also, I made the mod alone....”

The comment illustrates the modders understanding of history, what he aims for his game modification and his goal for historical accuracy. The different factions in the mod act in the same manner of active environment as in *Mount and Blade*, aside from the historically factions refraining from attacking each other.

Regarding the rules for blocking and unblocking areas and states of the game the *Independence of Chile* mod does not add, modify or remove anything. Therefore, this design factor will receive no further attention. The third design factor, the rules of objects in the game and the NPCs do require additional attention. *Mount and Blade* and the *Independence of Chile* both include the same item types and the functioning of these items are relatively similar. Visually, however, the mod completely modifies the original game's items. The modder removed all the obsolete and unused weaponry, leaving swords for the Mapuches natives and the cavalry used in the armies. To replace these weapons the mod creator adds a wide variety of different firearms. Additionally, the correct uniforms are used in accordance with the time period. On the mod's webpage Mauromagno_Patriota elaborates on his research in picking the right equipment fitting the historical era. The mod creator relies on the study *Breve estudio sobre los uniformes usados por las tropas colonials e independientes de Chile* by the author Nicanor Molinare. The research written in 1914 deals with the different uniforms and equipment of the colonial overlord and the Chilean independence fighters. To provide the user of the mod with additional information on the Spanish American Independence Wars the modder posts short stories on highlighted events or troops. *Figure 6* is a screenshot of the modder used in one of the 'short stories' on Chile's infantry grenadiers.¹⁵⁰ The figure shows the historically accurate uniforms and weapons utilized by the Grenadier Regiment of Infantry of Chile. Moreover, the figure shows the modders additional operation rules, crouching.

¹⁴⁹ McFarlane. 347

¹⁵⁰ “Chile's Infantry Grenadiers News,” Mod DB, accessed May 31, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/independence-of-chile/news/grenadiers-of-infantry-of-chile>.



Figure 6 Chile's Infantry Grenadiers

The final game design resource to be discussed are the rules of inducing behavior. Similar to *Mount and Blade* the game still allows the player/character to pick every faction and to design their own playthrough. However, the player is stimulated to pick the anti-colonial Chile and to adhere to a combat focused military play through of the videogame. This is due to that unlike *Mount and Blade* the mod is less polished to follow other playstyles. For example, in the original game the economy and the different items and goods were all functioning properly and suited for the different playstyle. In the case of *the Independence of Chile* the items, goods and economy received less attention and detail in refitting it to the relevant historical period. Likely, this is due because the mod's setting is during a civil war, whilst the setting of *Mount and Blade* is 'medieval' not a specific medieval war, allowing more peaceful playthroughs.

In sum, the representation of the 19th century game world in the *Independence of Chile* is shaped through various important game design rules. In the spatiotemporal design the modder made the most significant changes. The original game map is reconstructed to the southern half of the South American continent filled with accurate cities, towns and villages. To the modder the details of locations such as cities and forts is important. As illustrated by focus on architecture in these cities, such as the mod's rendition of an important building in Chile's history, the *Palacio de la Real Audiencia de Santiago*.

Furthermore, the modder aims to accurately represent the Chilean struggle for Independence through the six different factions active during the war. The modification shows a tendency to accurately depict the military/combat aspect of *Mount and Blade*. The other objects, items and good are altered to fit the historical period, but no major modifications in the functioning are made.

3.2.3 Gameplay activities; Representation of the struggles of war

This paragraph will focus on the third and final fundamental reference in videogame representation structure, the game play activities. In order to analyze the activities in videogames the following game play units are going to be considered the patterns of action regarding final objects, the degree of redundancy versus variability of the game play, the game mechanics and the chains of action. The modification the *Independence of Chile* does not change the original videogame's open world structure. The mod adheres to a similar structure regarding final objects as *Mount and Blade*. For the player this means that there is no single set objective, the player can choose their own objectives freely. For example, in the *Independence of Chile* mod the player can pledge allegiance to the different factions such as the Chilean army and follow the course of history. However, the player may also decide to join a faction sided to the Spanish crown following the concept of counterfactual history.

The degree of redundancy versus variability of the game play hardly differs from *Mount and Blade* in the mod. Between the mod and the original there no great differences. Both the games include a great amount of freedom and variability in their game play. Similar to the developers the modder retains the unpredictability and freedom in the game modification. The third game play unit, the game mechanics has been sufficiently covered during the analyzation of the player/character earlier. Furthermore, the chains of action are not altered significantly so require no further analyzation.

To conclude, in the representation of the gameplay activities only a few modifications can be observed. Most of the original game's gameplay activities were only changed in terms of appearance, instead of adding or removing functions. The most striking modification is that in the historical mod the modder emphasizes a playthrough as Chile. The main objective being fighting against Spanish colonial rule. Although the user remains free to join other factions or roam free across the map.

Chapter 4: Motivations

The first chapter introduced several different authors and works that researched the rationale behind modders to create game modifications. As shown by several authors, such as Sotamaa in *Have Fun Working with Our Product* and Christiansen in *Between a Mod and a Hard Place* is the unequal distribution of benefits and disadvantages between the game industry and modders. Both these authors explain that the gaming industry benefits from the free labour provided through game modifications. The benefits of the gaming industry can be seen in several different aspects. Sotamaa argues that one aspect of the benefit of the industry is through a boost in the value of the industry game through the contribution of the mods to the branding of the product, allowing the game to stand out against competitors and fosters stronger brand loyalty.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the gaming industry benefits through the increased duration of the videogame's life cycle leading to higher profits. In addition, Christiansen argues that the game industry occupies a hegemonic position in relation to the marginalized position of modders.¹⁵² However, both the authors also establish that there are some benefits in creating game modifications, although it seems that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages for modders and the surrounding participatory culture. However, as illustrated by the game modifications of the videogame *Mount and Blade* and the great number of mods on *Moddb*, the modding community remains very active. The following chapter aims to explore the seemingly irrational act of modding. Through a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke. This method is used to identify, analyse, locate and categorize patterns within the data. The data consists of the respective *Moddb* page of the mod and an interview with the modder. The appendix includes the different interview questions asked. The thematic analysis aims to gain more insight into the following sub-question: "What motivations do the creators of *Mount and Blade* mods present?". The sub-question intends to enhance the understanding of modding through an in-depth analysis of the motivations different modders present as a result of an (online) interview in combination with some of their online statements on *Moddb*.

4.1 Mount and Blade Modders

Among the different answers and statements of the modders several interesting features were traced. The following recurring themes came to the fore after the initial coding of the data. Firstly, a high general interest in history was noticeable among the modders. On a 1-10 scale of general interest the modders averaged around a 7.5. Additionally, one of the modder stated that "warlike periods" and "how they lived in certain times" interests him the most. Unsurprisingly, seeing as the mods deal with a historical game and are historical mods.

Regarding *Mount and Blade* the modders were generally positive. As the only problems that came up were "some of the engine limitations" and limited use of language and animations. Although these limitations can be explained due to the fact that *Mount and Blade* "is an older game" launched over a decade ago. However, the modders seem to actively change the aspects of *Mount and Blade* which they resent. For example, the creator of the *Independence of Chile Mod* finds it frustrating that "the player can only walk and stand and has few animations ... ". As the analysis on the historical mod has shown, the modder has included a new operation rule to the game, allowing the player to crouch.

The main reason for the modders to play *Mount and Blade* is because they enjoy the "replayability and freedom" of the game as well as that the "game recreates the story in an almost real way ... most of the games are controlled. The AI is directing you to certain scenes or leading you to missions and at the end they are finished." The most interesting aspects according to the modders is

¹⁵¹ Sotamaa, "Have Fun Working with Our Product!"

¹⁵² Champion, *Game Mods*. 37.

Mount and Blade's realism and that “the game has commercialization, different cultures, a system of honour, loyalty and betrayal.”. Interestingly, in the case of the mod *The Independence of Chile* and in *The American Civil War Mod: Revived* the commercialization and the system of honour and loyalty is hardly altered. On the other hand, the medieval culture is totally changed to realistically represent the early 19th century Chile and the bordering countries as well as the United States.

Researching the modders view on their own work as most significant or interesting shows the modders focus on the particularities of their work. To illustrate, Mauromagno_Patriota sees the most important characteristic of his mod as:

“My mod is historical, which recreates the Independence of Chile, where you can find the characters of all the countries involved that made the disassociation of the Spanish Empire possible, historical towns and cities, historical architecture, ancient culture like the Mapuche people who brings and motivates children and young people to study history.”

The characteristics mentioned by the modder are very clearly visible in the *Independence of Chile Mod*. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the mod includes several different factions active during the era of the independence war as well as the modders focus on historical architecture. On the mod's webpage the modder provides insight in his process of creating the models of the mod. In *Figure 7* two of the modders added images can be seen. The images show a picture of the *Fuerte de Nacimiento* near Concepción, Chile and the work-in-progress rendition of the military fortress.



Figure 3 Fuerte de Nacimiento

The modder states that to him attention to detail is something he sees as one of the most significant aspects of his historical mod. He states that “It may only be a detail for me, but for a 12-year player, it's something great.” In addition, the modder hopes that the inclusion of the different details in culture and architecture leads to (young) people playing his mod to studying history.

This example indicates that modders view videogames and mods as serious forms of historical expression. The serious approach of modders is illustrated by the efforts modders present in creation an authentic representation of history through modding. The effort of recreating history authentically in videogames reinterprets the traditional values held by ‘real’ reenactment. As explained by Crabtree in *Modding as Digital Reenactment* modding and reenactment is a ritual of performance, the ritual is created by generating a closer simulation of the past. Supposedly, videogames and game modifications provide an even closer simulation to history than other forms of reenactment can offer.¹⁵³ The modder King85 who created the mod *The American Civil War: Revived!* offers adjacent motivation for his modding. As can be derived from the game modification's description on ModdB. The description ends with a statement on why the modder recreated the American Civil War:

¹⁵³ Crabtree, “Modding as Digital Reenactment.” 204.

“In solemn memory of all those who gave their lives in the American Civil War, on both sides of the conflict. One of the greatest tragedies of that war is that whether they were fighting for the Union or for the Confederacy, they were all Americans, and we should not soon forget the lessons of that bloody and brutal war. We honor the sacrifice of those brave men who gave their lives for what they so strongly believed in, when we ourselves attempt to catch a glimpse of our past and step into their shoes, even in such small ways as this. Let us strive to keep our history alive and carry the lessons with us always. May they rest in everlasting peace and may we all look toward a better future for ourselves and for those who will come after us”¹⁵⁴.

Important to note is aim of the modder to “not forget the lessons of that bloody and brutal war” and to “carry the lessons with us always”. This idea is, according to Crabtree, is a key part of reenactment. Crabtree states that reenactment is the expression of “living history,” an exercise centered on the belief that reliving the past is the best way to learn from it.¹⁵⁵ However, King85’s main motivation was not only to teach and re-live history. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the mod started as a different mod, “A House Divided”, because of this King85’s motivation was based on the goal to redevelop and improve the mod. The modder redeveloped the game modification as a hobby. A hobby that derived from his “love for the game, for the history and for the gaming community.”.

The motivation of the modder Mauromagno_Patriota adds a different motive. As can be deduced from the reply of the modder:

“I am a lover of everything old and of the history of my country, especially the period of independence, of the important characters and of culture and traditions. I really like the game and I really like my mod, I wanted there to be a mod from the Chilean Independence, I wanted to have something of my own, that my compatriots felt proud to have, something from my country, something that represents them in traditions and culture.”

The motivation of the modder exceeds the re-enactive and educational motivations of King85. The modder wants his nation’s struggle for independence to be represented in videogames. He wants to make his fellow countrymen proud of the history of their country. This strongly nationalistic motivation is a new and different type of motivation than found in existing literature. The motivation of Mauromagno_Patriota to represent Chile’s history goes against the narrowing selection of commercial videogames. The modders motivation can be regarded as going against the overrepresentation of the Second World War in the game industry.¹⁵⁶ The overrepresentation stems from the beginning of the game industry. In the beginning, the soon-to-be industry was incredibly diverse. Videogames were loosely defined, which allowed developers to experiment with new forms of gameplay and new ideas freely. However, as the industries profit began to increase through the establishment of multinational gaming organizations, these organizations erupted in accordance with the development of better graphics, faster functioning computers and bigger audiences. As the budgets increased, so too did the need for increased returns.¹⁵⁷ This turned the industry from its free and experimentative origin to become increasingly more risk-averse. For the player, this meant that the selection of games is becoming narrower. As the industry is focused on 'hits', marketing young, white males and over-representing certain popular selling situations. The hegemony of the industry in videogame marginalizes other groups whose preferences and opinions are ignored. Modding as a

¹⁵⁴ “The American Civil War Mod.”

¹⁵⁵ Crabtree, “Modding as Digital Reenactment.”

¹⁵⁶ Yannick Rochat, “A Quantitative Study of Historical Video Games (1981–2015),” 2019, 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429345616-1>.

¹⁵⁷ Champion, *Game Mods*. 37.

counter-hegemonic process than provides an option to diversify the selection of games by creating videogames that normally would not be developed.¹⁵⁸

4.2 Existing literature

The following part of the chapter aims to compare the motivations found by this study to the motivations found in existing literature. As mentioned in Chapter 1 in *From Pong to Planet Quake* by Postigo three different motivations for modders are defined. The first motive Postigo discerns is that some modders engage in modding in order to gain experience and recognition in working in the gaming industry.¹⁵⁹ According to Postigo, the status modders gain by participating in a successful game modification ensures a position in a commercial development team. The second motive Postigo establishes is that modding is regarded as an artistic undertaking, allowing the modders to have a creative outlet. This motive relates strongly to the community of the mods since the participants in the community strongly credit modders who provide exemplary work.¹⁶⁰ The final motivation found by Postigo is that modders identified more with the technical complexity of games, thus increasing their joy in playing the game. The author Olli Sotamaa in *When the Game is Not Enough* researches the shooter-game *Operation Flashpoint* and its modding scene. In his research into the motivations of the *Operation Flashpoint* modders, Sotamaa establishes that the same three motivational themes as Postigo can be discerned. However, Sotamaa aims to explore the modders motivations further by formulating a larger number and more detailed groupings.¹⁶¹ Sotamaa formulates these extended motivational groupings through two steps. Firstly, the author considers the output of *Operation Flashpoint's* modding scene. Sotamaa divides the mods of *Operation Flashpoint* in three different categories: mission makers, add-on makers and mod makers.¹⁶² The second step is to analyze the different roles a modder, or mod-team can possess as the different roles inside mod development can also indicate different motivations among modders. Although the author focusses on a single videogame, he believes that the proposed categorization can be identified among other games.

Following the research of Sotamaa in *When the Game is not Enough* an analyzation of the different *Mount and Blade* mod categories can be made. The different categories of game modifications will be based on the different type of game modifications found on *Moddb*. This is due to the *Moddb* being one of the biggest and most popular platforms to share game mods. *Moddb* includes 683 *Mount and Blade* mods, and although some of these mods may overlap categories, the division helps in providing an overview of the different type of mod makers for *Mount and Blade*. The first category that is clearly noticeable is 'extension' mods. Mods that fall under this category are mods that aim to improve or add to the original game. The most popular example of mod in this category is *Bannerpage*. The mod aims to "significantly improve areas in which the game has not aged well."¹⁶³ The mod overhauls graphics, factions, improves animations, tweaks AI, adds diplomacy and much more.¹⁶⁴ The second category found for the game *Mount and Blade* are 'frolic mods'. Mods that fall under this category are aimed to amuse player in a ludicrous way. The *Mount and Blade* mod that strongly represents this category is the *Calradia Football WorldCup*. As the name implies the aim of the mod maker is to change the game from the original medieval fighting and killing to football

¹⁵⁸ Champion. 38.

¹⁵⁹ Postigo, "From Pong to Planet Quake." 600.

¹⁶⁰ Postigo. 601.

¹⁶¹ Sotamaa, "When the Game Is Not Enough."

¹⁶² Sotamaa.

¹⁶³ "BannerPage Mod for Mount & Blade: Warband - Mod DB," accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/bannerpage>.

¹⁶⁴ "BannerPage Features and Installation," Mod DB, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/bannerpage/features/bannerpage-features-and-installation>.

matches deciding who wins wars.¹⁶⁵ The third and largest category are the game modifications that fit the more traditional and conventional understanding of mods. Game modifications in this category are, for example, the mods explored in the previous chapter the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* and *The Independence of Chile Mod*. These mods are generally aimed to alter the historical setting of *Mount and Blade*. This category also includes mods such as *A World of Ice and Fire*, which changes *Mount and Blade* to the fictional world of *Game of Thrones*.¹⁶⁶ These game modifications embody the more conventional understanding of mods in the sense that they are total conversion mods, overhauling the art and gameplay assets to generate an entirely new experience. The three different *Mount and Blade* categories; extension, frolic and conventional differ slightly from the categories identified by the author. The videogame studied by Sotamaa, *Operation Flashpoint* provides potential modders with an in-game mission editor. This option explains the lack of such a category in *Mount and Blade*. The second category defined by Sotamaa, the add-ons differ are similar to the extension mods found in *Mount and Blade*.¹⁶⁷ The final category of the *Operation Flashpoint* and *Mount and Blade* can be considered similar.

Sotamaa's conceptualization of the different motivations for modders can be seen in *Table 1*. The left column illustrates the category, whilst the column on the right the categories description. The five mentioned motivations for modders do not seem to fit to the motivations stated by the modders in this research. Looking at the motivation for King85's mod revolved more about the reenacting, educational and remembrance properties of the American Civil War. Therefore, this research argues that an additional category to modder's motivation can be defined. A category which more clearly resonates the expression of "living history" that centers on the belief that reliving the past is the best way to learn from it.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the motivation of the modder Mauromagno_Patriota also falls outside of the categorization of Sotamaa. The modder mentions that he created *The Independence of Chile* as a way to make himself and his countrymen proud of the history of Chile and to represent them and their past. Evidently, this motivation is dissimilar from what King85's motivation. Thus, it can be argued that there is a more nationalist motivation among modders to create game modifications. It can be argued that the cause for this motivation lies in the Eurocentric and western over representation in (historical) videogames.

Playing	Viewing the game as 'incomplete', thus adding new features such as playgrounds, objectives, weapons, etc.
Hacking	Modding in order to crack the complex code system of the original game
Researching	Research in order to clarify, improve or alter the game's details.
Artistic expression	Using the game as a medium of expression, or creative outlet.
Co-operation	Communal aspects such as the goal to find like-minded people, making friends or working towards a shared goal

Table 1 Sotamaa's key modder motivations

¹⁶⁵ "Calradia Football WorldCup Mod for Mount & Blade: Warband," Mod DB, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/calradia-football-worldcup>.

¹⁶⁶ "A World of Ice and Fire (Game of Thrones) Mod for Mount & Blade: Warband," Mod DB, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/a-world-of-ice-and-fire>.

¹⁶⁷ Sotamaa, "When the Game Is Not Enough." 6.

¹⁶⁸ Crabtree, "Modding as Digital Reenactment."

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The growth of videogames and the videogame industry has been tremendous over the last three decades. The virtual forms of interactive entertainment started from humble coin-operated machines and rose to the desktop computers and *PlayStations* we know today. The most popular and highest-grossing videogames, such as *Call of Duty*, *Red Dead Redemption* and *Battlefield* are all based on historical events or deals with an historical subject¹⁶⁹ Even when the original game has no or barely any historical influences, the participatory culture surrounding videogames has users who aim to modify game content in order to (completely) alter videogames to historical settings. Altering videogames is known as 'modding', and these players produce, what is known as game mods.¹⁷⁰ This research aims to gain more insight into videogames and game modifications as expressions of contemporary historical culture. Although the field of study has undoubtedly developed over the two decades since the beginning of videogame studies, there are still lots to explore, and the academic community can certainly benefit from additional research into videogames and game modifications. This thesis devotion to videogames and game modifications will contribute to the developing field of study. Especially, the focus on game modification is important as it is a relatively unresearched aspect of videogames. Mods are also a way for players and communities to react against the dominant historical representation put forward in commercial games. To aid in focusing and structuring this thesis, the following research question was formulated; *How do players appropriate the content of historical digital entertainment game Mount and Blade through the practice of 'modding'?* to contribute to focusing the research question, several sub-questions were formulated. First, the sub-question *'how is the past represented in the videogame Mount and Blade?'* This sub-question aimed to contextualize the videogame *Mount and Blade*. The continuation of the research relied on a thorough analysis of the videogame in order see how and what the game modifications changed. The second sub-question is as follows *'What historical representations can be traced in the mods for popular digital games, such as Mount and Blade?'* this question was aimed to highlight what different historical representation can be found in mods for *Mount and Blade*. The second question was studied through an in-depth case study of two historical *Mount and Blade* mods; *The American Civil War Mod: Revived!* and the *Independence of Chile mod*. The third and final sub-question deals with the motivations of the creators of historical *Mount and Blade* mods. The question *'What motivations do the creators of Mount and Blade mods present?'* intends to provide a deeper insight into the motivations of modders to modify historical videogames. The answer to this sub-question is based on existing literature as well as empirical evidence.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I analyzed how the past is represented in *Mount and Blade*. The representation of the past in the videogame was assessed through the systemic analysis model proposed by Óliver Pérez Latorre in *The Social Discourse of Videogames*. The model states that the design of videogames influences the representation in the game. The exploration of *Mount and Blade* through this model has shown that the representation of the character/player the videogame provides the player with a strong role in relation to the performance rules. Moreover, the game provides the player with extraordinary customization options. These customizable features provide the player with the option to influence how the game interacts with the character and how the character interacts with the game. The player defines the background of the character, which in turn defines the skills, an attributes of the character. These skills manage, for example, how accurate a

¹⁶⁹ Kevin Anderton, "The Business Of Video Games: Market Share For Gaming Platforms in 2019 [Infographic]," *Forbes*, accessed January 8, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinanderton/2019/06/26/the-business-of-video-games-market-share-for-gaming-platforms-in-2019-infographic/>.

¹⁷⁰ Sotamaa, "When the Game Is Not Enough." 242

character follows the operation rules. Analyzing the state rules of the game has shown how the videogame represents the health, experience points or the reputation states of the character.

At the core of the representation of the character/player are the game mechanics. The most important game mechanics in *Mount and Blade* are combat mechanics and the game mechanics governing the game's currency, renown, honour and reputation. These mechanics are aimed to represent the way how humankind during the medieval period fought and functioned politically and economically. The assessment of the representation of the game world has shown significant relevance in order to recreate the medieval past in *Mount and Blade*. The spatiotemporal design, in addition to the rules of objects in the game world and the active environment generated through the behaviour of NPCs, most strongly influenced the recreation of the medieval. The game world includes different factions based on historical counterparts. Additionally, the cities, towns, castles and landscapes of these factions are based off the faction's culture. The nobles of these factions compete with each other in order to rise politically and economically, similar to the thirst for power found in the ruling class throughout history. The game world is filled by four categories of items: weapons, equipment, goods and horses. These categories of items are filled with historically accurate or items reminiscent of the medieval era. The videogame's gameplay activities are what tie the character/player and the game world together. The design factor relies on many different activities that govern the winning conditions, final objectives and chains of actions. Important to note is that *Mount and Blade* does not include a goal, winning condition or final objectives. Instead, the game aims to give the player a sense of freedom and medieval simulation by giving the player the option to create their own character, armed by their own equipment and reaching their own goals. This is achieved through the large degree of variability and flexibility in the game. Moreover, the game also lacks a set chain of action or scripted narrative. It can be concluded that in relation to *Mount and Blade* the following factors are paramount in the representation of the past: the game mechanics, the spatiotemporal design, the game rules in relation to objects in the game world and the chains of action.

The second sub-question '*What historical representations can be traced in the mods for popular digital games, such as Mount and Blade?*' is answered through an assessment of two case studies. These two examples of historical game modifications were analyzed using the same model applied to the videogame *Mount and Blade*. This allowed for the ability to uncover the biggest differences between the historical representation in the mod and in the original videogame.

5.1 The American Civil War Mod

The first case study explored is the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* by the modder King85. The mod is set during the conflict between the American Northern and Southern states. Following the analysis model proposed by Óliver Latorre, it is evident that in relation to the player/character, the most significant changes were made to *Mount and Blade's* operation rules. The modder expanded the command option of the character in order to recreate the warfare of the early modern period such as the mod's inclusion of line infantry tactics. Moreover, the operation rules of the original game were expanded by the addition of voice commands, further immersing the player. In relation to the game mechanics, the modder included firearms which are not included in *Mount and Blade*, thus making this addition very technically difficult. Noticeably, the other game rules were only slightly altered to ensure that the game fits the historical setting. For example, the modder changed the background option from hunter to frontiersman in terms of the game's functioning nothing changes, but the name. Regarding the representation of the game world in the mod and *Mount and Blade*, many differences are noteworthy. The mod's spatiotemporal design is unrecognizable to the original. Instead of the original's fictive Calradia the mod's map shows the United States. On the map, the

modder aims to accurately depict the different cities, towns, rivers and landscapes. The map's different locations are divided between six different factions—each of these factions representing their historical counterpart. The factions the modders chose to add are not the typical belligerents often thought of in popular history. Instead, the modder chose to pick more historically accurate factions. The modders also strived to represent the objects recreated in the game in accordance with history. The rules of objects of the game world are altered nearly completely although the same item categories the different weapons, horses, goods and equipment were changed to fit the historical American Civil War period. Moreover, the mod includes battle flags. During the American Civil War, there was great emphasis on the use of flags in battle, making the addition of these flags very fitting. Concerning the mod differences from *Mount and Blade's* gameplay activities are relatively few. The most significant difference is the increased difficulty in strategic/tactical dilemmas in the game modification. The difference is because of the mod's slightly different functioning in faction relations and the different style of warfare.

5.2 The Independence of Chile Mod

The second case study explored is the *Independence of Chile* mod by Mauromagno_Patriota. The mod deals with the Spanish American Independence Wars, centering on the Independence wars of Chile around 1810. The historical setting of the historical modification is an exceptional example of a break from the gaming industry hegemonic overrepresentation of historical videogames. Similar to the previous case study, the mod's representation of this historical era is assessed through the analysis model proposed by Latorre. Regarding the player/character, there are a few interesting differences noticeable. In relation to the performance rules, the mod does not change any of the background options, which is an odd choice of the modder. However, the mod does add to the operation rules. The mod includes the option of the player to crouch, besides jumping and running. This seems like a frivolous addition; however, the mod's crouching combined with the expanded tactical formations for the infantry greatly increases combat strategy options. Regarding the game mechanics, the mod introduces firearms to the original game. Similar to the American Civil War mod, the operation rules alterations and the addition of firearms to *Mount and Blade* improves the representation of the style of warfare of the historical setting. The *Independence of Chile* mod incorporates several major changes in the representation of the game world. Especially the mod's spatiotemporal altered. The original map of Calradia is changed to represent the south side of the South American continent. Similar to the American Civil War mod the map is filled with locations matching the real world such as cities, terrains and towns. Additionally, the towns are recreated to resemble Spanish colonial architecture. The factions of the original are swapped with six different factions relevant to the independence wars of Chile. A uniformed user of the mod might assume the inclusion of the Spanish empire fighting rebellious Chileans, however, the modder decided to represent the conflict through the inclusion of the many different and complex factions.

Mauromagno_Patriota effort to represent the objects in the game world is also a signification aspect of the historical mod. The original game's outdated medieval weaponry and equipment are swapped with early 19th century firearms, swords and uniforms. As the mod description shows, the modder referred to scholarly sources in order to accurately present the user with the different soldiers of the past. In terms of the representation of gameplay activities, the game modification changes little.

Regarding the overarching representation of history in both the case studies of game modifications, several corresponding observations can be made. Both the historical mods intricately change the operation rules, adding to the already existing ways in which the player actions are linked to actions of the character—improving the player's immersion into their respective historical periods.

Furthermore, the two case studies also show extensive alterations to the spatiotemporal design and the way objects act, affect and look in the game world. Interestingly, two game design rules coincide

with the most important aspects of *Mount and Blade*, such as the spatiotemporal design and the game rules in relation to objects in the game world. Which suggests these two design factors are the most important in representing history. Moreover, both the modders illustrate their effort in researching and depicting history, often choosing the more difficult and unknown representation of their historical periods educating the users of the mod.

Both game modifications deal with historical periods that are underrepresented in commercial videogames. However, the mods refrain from dealing with the underrepresented histories of these historical periods. Using the American Civil War mod as an example we see that the mod portrays a historical period not often found in commercial videogames. Although the underrepresented historical period is depicted the mod does not include the history and representation of slavery during the American Civil War, only depicting the struggle of the white American military activities and battles. Which would have tremendously increased the depth of the counter-hegemonic features of the game modification.

The final sub-question revolved around what motivations do the creators of *Mount and Blade* mods present seeing as the benefits for creating modifications are more apparent for the gaming industry than for (individual) modders. The sub-question is intended to enhance the understanding of modding through an in-depth analysis of the motivations different modders present as a result of an (online) interview. The motivations of the modders in literature are widespread. Different academics such as Postigo and Sotamaa delve into a motivational study of modders. Postigo's research concluded that there were three main strands of motives for modders. The first is that modders engage in modding in order to gain experience and to be recruited into professional mod teams. Secondly, the modders motivations revolve around the artistic expression of modding, rendering it a creative outlet. The third motivation centers on increasing the joy from playing the game through a deeper understanding of the technicalities of modding. The research of Sotamaa delved deeper into these three possible motivations by providing more detailed groupings: Playing, Hacking, Researching, Artistic Expression and Co-operation. However, (online) interviews with the modder of the historical *Mount and Blade* mod the *Independence of Chile* and analyzation of the statements of modders on mod descriptions has unearthed a different and additional motive of modders.

As is best illustrated through a quote of the modder Mauromagno_Patriota: "I wanted to have something of my own, I wanted to make others (Chileans) proud to have something from our country, something that represents them in traditions and culture." Additionally, the creator of the *American Civil War Mod: Revived!* states that he aims to "keep our history alive and carry the lessons with us always" This aptly shows that alongside the five detailed groupings of Sotamaa a sixth and possible a seventh category can be added, that aims to represent the history or identity of the modder and the reenactment properties of historical game modification.

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Appendix

A. Participation Consent Form

Participation Consent Form

Title of the project:

Master thesis: "Appropriation & Motivation in Game Modification" Analyzing historical representation in digital games and game mods

Researcher:

Name: Coen Weeke
Email: coen_weeke@hotmail.com

Organization:

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC), Erasmus University Rotterdam

Hello! Thank you for your interest in this research project of Erasmus University Rotterdam. We would like to ask you to read this document thoroughly and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research:

For the master thesis, I intend to gain insight in gaming as an expression of contemporary historical culture. The research is aimed to answer how player appropriate the content of historical digital entertainment games through the practice of modding. How the past is represented in videogames and game modifications and what motivates mod creators. In order to research historical representation, the research considers the videogame *Mount and Blade* and some of the mods.

To answer these questions, I would like to invite a number of modders to take part in the study on historical representation in videogames/mods.

Research procedure

Participation in the research is limited to a number of questions. The questions are aimed to explore personal experiences and thoughts on history, videogames, and game modifications. The interviewee is invited to answer these questions either through an online chat or email. (depending on the interviewees preference, you can also do this via video chat or another messaging system such as Discord.)

Sharing of the research results and confidentiality

All the collected data will be treated confidentially, and will be used for scientific purposes only. The data will also be anonymized in further reporting. All recordings and other data will be kept at a secure location by the researcher and Erasmus University Rotterdam, and will be destroyed after a period of ten years. If at the end of the study you would prefer to not let your data be used, you can always let the researcher know. If desired, the researcher can also contact you afterwards to give you the opportunity to correct the information and/or withdraw it. If you have any questions, concerns or complaints, please contact the researcher via the provided contact details.

Statement of consent:

By signing this document, you indicate that you are at least 18 years old; that you have read this form or have had it read aloud to you; that your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and that you agree to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of the signed consent form.

If you have additional questions, you can always contact the secretariat of the ethics review board of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC).

This can be done via the following email address: ethicsreview@eshcc.eur.nl.

I agree that the anonymized data are used for further research:

- Yes
- No

If you agree to participate in this study, please put your name (or username) and signature below:

Name participant:

Name researcher:
Coen Weeke

B. Interview Questions

General historical interest:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much does history interest you?
2. If we were talking about history in general, what subjects and period interest you most? And the least?

Mount and Blade questions:

1. Why do you play this game? What is your main reason to play this game?
2. What aspects of the game do you find particularly interesting?
3. What aspects of the game do you find annoying/bad/problematic? Why?

Mount and Blade mod questions:

1. How would you characterize your mod?
2. What are the most significant changes you've applied?
3. Why do you mod? What is your main motivation?
4. Why did you create this mod?