

The why and how of the retro gaming phenomenon

A qualitative study about the motivation of Generation Z for playing retro FPS games

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been significant growth in the global video gaming industry. This tendency is expected to continue with the gaming industry achieving market growth of +2.9% by 2025. Furthermore, a rising trend has been noticed by many, namely the resurgence of retro games. This has established the need for researchers to study the retro gaming phenomenon and determine its academic and social significance. Through the research question: “What are the motivations of Generation Z for playing First-Person Shooter (FPS) retro games?” this study aims to examine the extrinsic and intrinsic motives of younger people for engaging with retro games in times of abundance of highly technological video games. The study is further aided by a sub-question, namely: “What is the difference between an (FPS) gamer and a retro (FPS) gamer?”. This question was used to aid the analysis of the data, as well as to emphasize the similarities and differences between the gamer and retro gamer identities. For the purpose of the research, a qualitative online survey method was used which aimed to increase the generalizability of the results. The data collected from the survey was then analysed through a qualitative content analysis which led to the establishment of the three major themes. The first important finding was the necessity of the participants to gain a gamer status through their engagement with retro FPS games. This status is maintained through three main activities, including improving one’s gaming abilities, belonging to a gamer community and critically evaluating the retro game at hand. Another important finding is the motivation of participants to play retro FPS games as a form of resistance towards the modern gaming industry. On the one hand, respondents showed an appreciation for the simplicity of retro FPS games, and on the other hand, they expressed disapproval of contemporary gaming industry practices, including the commodification of the gaming industry and the exploitation of loyal gaming fans for profit. The final essential finding revealed the motivation of younger players to engage with retro FPS games in order to elicit a specific feeling. Thus, (re)-playing a particular game is often used by participants to either recreate an emotion felt in the past, such as playing with a family member or to reflect upon the past itself, such as stepping into the shoes of the retro FPS game developers. Additionally, retro FPS games are used by many to escape the burdens of contemporary society and relieve one’s stress and anxiety. The findings of this study offer a ground for further research on the topic of retro gaming, including exploring further the meaning-making of retro (FPS) gamers and the motivations of certain gamers who engage with newly developed (FPS) games with retro aesthetics. The findings could also aid further studies on the topic of gamer identity and thus, help establish the characteristics of the retro (FPS) gamer.

KEYWORDS: *Uses and gratification, Retro gaming, First-person shooter (FPS) game genre. Gamer identity*

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1. Introduction

The global video gaming industry has been growing exponentially for the past decade, including PC and console games, as well as mobile gaming. The growth became especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic which had an unanticipated yet significant positive impact on the industry's revenue. Furthermore, the global video games market is expected to continue expanding, achieving market growth of +2.9% and reaching an annual revenue of \$206.4 billion by 2025 (McDonald, 2023).

Despite the continuous technological advancements in gaming and the vast library of newly released video games with high-quality graphics, over the past few years, the gaming industry has seen the emergence of a retro gaming phenomenon, namely the re-appreciation of games from past generations (Bosman, 2023). This has subsequently led to the need for researchers to examine the meanings behind this rising trend and investigate the motivations of people who partake in the resurgence of the popularity of older video games.

For the purpose of this study, retro gaming will be defined as playing any game, perceived as old by the participants in the research (Redhead Ahm, 2021). The primary idea is, however, for the video game played by the participant to have been developed before their birth year. Therefore, Newman's (2004) definition of retro games will also be considered – which includes any game developed between the 1970s – 1990s.

1.1 Personal experience and research question

My personal experience with retro gaming is connected to playing old First-Person Shooter (FPS) games, such as *Wolfenstein 3D* (id Software 1992) (Figure 1.) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993) due to being exposed to them at young age and most specifically because of my parents' influence. Playing the aforementioned retro FPS games together with my father was a significant part of my childhood which is also the reason for me to revisit those games in times of stress and sadness. Subsequently, this determination to continue to (re)-play retro FPS games is often accompanied by a feeling of nostalgia and a willingness to revisit my childhood years which I consider to be a time of curiosity and freedom. The resurgence of retro games, together with my experience and participation in the retro gaming trend is what motivated me to conduct this research. Through it, I aimed to find out more about why other people turn to retro games in the age of technological advancements. Furthermore, since retro gaming in terms of people's general motivations and gratifications has already been explored by other researchers, my objective was to centre this study exclusively on people who fall within my age category. Furthermore, since I am most familiar with and have experience in retro FPS games, I decided to focus on the same genre for the purpose of the research. Therefore, with this thesis, I would like to explore people's personal perspectives and motives, discover their main sources of inspiration, and find out whether they align with my expectations on the matter.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the author's *Wolfenstein 3D* game (id Software 1992)

The aim of this research is to explore the motivations of Generation Z for playing First-Person Shooter (FPS) retro games by conducting a qualitative online survey and analyzing the collected data. Therefore, the formulated research question is as follows: *What are the motivations of Generation Z for playing First-Person Shooter (FPS) retro games?*

Since the topic of retro gaming contains a multitude of complex concepts within itself, the research will be guided by an additional sub-question which will be kept in mind throughout the data analysis process, namely: *What is the difference between an (FPS) gamer and a retro (FPS) gamer?*

Gamer identity has recently become a popular research topic in the video games field (Ćwil & Howe, 2020; Kuss et al., 2022;; Yim et al., 2023), however as it is mostly related to gamers playing newly developed games, it is essential to also recognize the retro gamer as a subject for further exploration through conducting the respective research. Therefore, answering the aforementioned follow-up question will not only aid the understanding of the motivations of Generation Z for playing retro FPS games but will also establish the base for any further studies on the identity of the retro (FPS) gamer.

1.2 Academic and social relevance

The reason for the retro gaming practices of Generation Z is a particularly interesting subject to examine as retro games, as defined by Newman (2004), are games that originated between the 1970s - 1990s which is before the start of Generation Z (1995 - 2010) (Özkan & Solmaz, 2017). While the overall consumption of retro goods among the younger generation has been a subject of interest and has therefore been examined by a few researchers (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Olsson & Höglund, 2019), the popularity of retro gaming within the same age group has not yet been thoroughly explored. The lack of information on the topic provides this thesis with the opportunity to fill the gap in retro

gaming studies by investigating the meaning-making process of younger consumers regarding their retro gaming habits. Thus, this qualitative research aims to provide new insights into the cause of the rise of retro gaming from the perspective of Generation Z.

As aforementioned, the focus of this study is on the FPS game genre due to my familiarity with it and interest in it which was helpful to the research process. Existing FPS literature is often focused on the FPS gamer identity, including the age, gender and gratifications received from engaging in FPS games (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022; Jansz & Tanis, 2007). However, this research will not only add to existing FPS literature by revealing the characteristics of the retro FPS gamer but will also inform further research on the niche topic of retro FPS games. Furthermore, to gain a better understanding of the reason behind the retro gaming phenomenon among younger consumers, it is essential for researchers to further explore their engagement with specific older games, such as games within the FPS genre category. Discovering the unique motivations of people for engaging with older games by genre could later inform any genre-related video game studies, including the difference in preferences between female and male retro gamers or the gratifications gamers receive from retro in comparison to newer FPS games. Additionally, this study's objective is to not only draw upon existing literature on game studies and FPS retro games but also add to it through additional insights into the gaming habits of the younger generation.

1.3 Thesis structure

Following this introduction, the thesis is split into additional four main sections, including theoretical framework, methodology, analysis and conclusion. The theoretical chapter introduces four main concepts which helped inform the questionnaire used to collect the data: Uses and Gratifications, Retro gaming, Video Games Genre and Gamer Identity. What follows is the methodological chapter which covers the method used to collect and examine the data, namely a qualitative online survey, the results from which were analyzed by conducting a qualitative content analysis. The fourth section covers an in-depth analysis of the motivations of the participants for partaking in the retro gaming phenomenon. Three major motivations were discovered, including building upon one's gamer identity, expressing discontent with the modern gaming industry and playing to elicit or soothe a particular emotion. The conclusion then gives an answer to the research question through a discussion of the findings and their implications. It also identifies areas of limitation in this study and offers suggestions for further research on the topic of retro gaming.

2. Theoretical framework

The following sections will discuss key theories and concepts found in the existing literature which will help inform the research and provide an appropriate framework for tackling the research problem. Firstly, the uses and gratifications theory will be presented in relation to people's motivation for playing games as well as a basis for understanding the overall retro consumption wave among the younger generation. In addition, relevant concepts within the retro gaming literature will be presented to show what existing research on the topic has discovered. Some literature on the video game genres will also be provided, with a focus on the FPS genre and its characteristics. Finally, the chapter will address key theories within the newly emerged research topic of gamer identity.

2.1 Uses and gratifications (U&G)

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) emerged in the 1940s as a counter-theory of the 'transmission' model of influence used in the Payne Fund studies, which aimed to prove the considerable 'damage' done to young people as a result of going to the cinema but failed to do so (Barker, 2021). Its purpose is to establish why people consume mass media, how they engage with it and what impact it has on them. A more contemporary interpretation of the classic UGT is McQuail's (1994) uses and gratifications (U&G) approach which examines further the 'audience activity' in the selection of their preferred media outlet according to their 'needs'. The U&G theory is relevant to the proposed study as it focuses on the 'why' and 'how' of people's media preferences and motivations. In this case, I am interested in finding out more about Generation Z's precise motivations and their origin, as well as how they are being gratified through playing retro games. In accordance with the U&G approach, this can include any type of need being satisfied, such as aesthetic, cognitive or expressive needs, as well as self-actualization (Samuels, 1984). Moreover, the use of this particular framework will allow for a distinction between gratifications sought and gratifications received which is essential to note when formulating the answer to the proposed research question (McLeod et al., 1982). To sum up, gratifications sought are the needs that consumers are seeking to satisfy through their preferred choice of media, for example, a particular video game, and gratifications received is the experience that they end up obtaining from that particular media which could either be in line with their expectations or not (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979).

2.1.1 Video games motivations

The uses and gratifications theory has often been used in video game studies to determine the usage of players (Greenberg et al., 2010; Sherry et al., 2006). Subsequently, this has led to the discovery of numerous video game uses and gratification traits.

Early studies had established the needs met by playing video games at arcades, including companionship, activity/action and solitude/escape (Selnow, 1984). Another study done by Wigand et al. (1986) whose main focus was once again arcade video games, showed that the main motivators

were excitement, the satisfaction of doing well, and the reduction of tension. Moving forward to 1990, Myers found four main factors for playing video games - fantasy, curiosity, challenge and interactivity. All aforementioned gratifications were summarized in the form of six dimensions (Sherry et al., 2006), including arousal; challenge; competition; diversion; fantasy and social interaction.

Although these studies could be considered outdated, more recent research shows that the aforementioned needs and gratifications align with the motivations of modern-day players (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022). Furthermore, the key motivators vary depending on the video game genre. For example, for multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBA), social interaction is the most sought gratification (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022), while enjoyment and challenge are the main motivators for playing first-person shooter games (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022; Jansz & Tanis, 2007) and control and enjoyment for simulation games, such as the SIMS franchise (Jansz et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Retro consumption

In order to better understand the gratifications that younger people derive from playing retro video games, it is important to, first of all, examine the overall developing trend for retro consumption. In recent years, the consumption of retro products, also known as retro consumption, has been gaining popularity among the younger generations. In other words “the old has been becoming the newest” for the past few decades (Ahlberg, 2021, p. 158). This phenomenon is present in a variety of product categories including video games, films, music, etc. (Brown, 2018; Brown et al., 2003; Brunk et al., 2018) and is the result of a progressively “nostalgia-steeped world” (Brown, 2013, p. 522). What causes this nostalgia remains a subject of research, especially regarding the benefits that the younger generations receive from consuming such products as they themselves have not truly experienced the ages that they tend to feel nostalgic about. According to numerous studies, there are different factors regarding this behavior in younger people yet there seem to be three apparent motivators, including authenticity (Brown et al., 2003; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Jansz, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006), resistance (Brown, 1999, 2018; Higson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015; Reynolds, 2011; Routledge, 2015) and enchantment (Benjamin et al., 1999; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Ritzer, 2004, 2005, 2010;).

Authenticity

When it comes to retro consumption, it is important to acknowledge the difference between ‘new and old’ and ‘special and ordinary’ (Ahlberg et al., 2021). For example, despite the availability of multiple music streaming platforms, people continue to buy vinyl records. This is because they are considered special and far from the ordinary. Nowadays, retro products and retro brands are perceived as nostalgic and authentic and are used by the younger generations as a way to construct their identity by having something with a historical value that they can identify with (Hemetsberger et al., 2011). To a certain extent, the retro feel of a product provides young consumers with the reassurance of its

reliability and longevity (Brown et al., 2003). Therefore, retro products are often used as tokens of authenticity in the identity-building process of the younger generations.

In today's age of mass production and commercialization, young people are expected to demonstrate their individual identities through consumption (Ahlberg et al., 2021; Jenss, 2004). As a result, authenticity has become even more crucial to express one's belongingness. Due to this, the younger generations view vintage products and brands as statements to reveal their unique individuality and be socially accepted (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Hemetsberger et al., 2011). Retro consumption, especially from the younger generation, has adequately been described as "searching for authenticity in an inauthentic world" (Brown et al., 2003a, p. 140). The stressful cosmopolitan life has pushed young consumers to pursue something that is fixed and timeless which is something that retro brands and products can provide them with. Furthermore, many brands have been taking advantage of this nostalgia-induced retro consumption wave and have been profiting off of young consumers through retro-style products and marketing campaigns (Ahlberg, 2021; Brown et al., 2003; Olsson & Höglund, 2019). The retro phenomenon has additionally inspired the emergence of many new brands with a retro aesthetic striving to attract any retro enthusiast (Olsson & Höglund, 2019). This includes brands in many different product categories, including film, music, fashion and even home appliances. An example of such brands includes the Swedish guitar brand "Hagström" or the Italian home appliance brand "SMEG" (Olsson & Höglund, 2019).

Resistance

Nowadays society is often defined as turbulent due to the rapid developments and constantly changing trends (Ahlberg et al, 2021). Furthermore, such turbulent times are often followed by a wave of longing for the past according to the theory of Davis (1979) on collective nostalgia. This type of nostalgia is experienced by a whole population rather than a single person and causes people to collectively look for something more reliable and timeless, in this case, in the form of retro products. Despite the great technological advancements, a lot of young people find modern society exhausting due to always being connected and never being able to get time off from technology and social media (Ahlberg et al., 2021). In other words, one can always get in touch with anyone, all the time. In this case, retro products give a sense of security and an opportunity for the younger generations to express their discontent with modern-day society (Routledge, 2015).

Although longing for the past does not necessarily mean that one despises the present, it does indicate that there are certain characteristics of the past that contemporary society does not fulfill (Ahlberg et al., 2021). This feeling of a 'lack of something' is additionally strengthened by the media's representation of the past as a time before mass production and commercialization leading to further disenchantment with modern life (Brown et al., 2001; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Higson, 2014). This is especially true for the younger generations who have not lived through these specific eras and whose sole access to information about how life was before comes from the media. Younger

consumers are drawn to retro products due to the romanticization of the past combined with their dissatisfaction with contemporary society. Subsequently, they replace the sensation of loss with the delight of owning something that is “no longer irrecoverable” (Higson, 2014).

Enchantment

Nostalgia seems to be a counterintuitive form of motivation for people who have not experienced the past that they are longing for. This nostalgia is typically due to the fantasy version of the past that the media has generated. This phenomenon is known as mediated nostalgia (David, 1979; Picking & Keightley, 2006). Consequently, the younger generations have started to romanticize the past and have started to consume retro products as a way to remind themselves about a time when “everything was seemingly better” (Brown, 2001; Olsson & Höglund, 2019), a notion often communicated by the media. In addition, the abundance of offerings nowadays has led to mass rationalization and standardization in society and an absence of uniqueness in the products (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2012). This has subsequently led to a feeling of dissatisfaction or even disenchantment among consumers with contemporary standards. This discontent has left people searching for something that can bewilder them, such as products or services that are vintage and hence non-standardized (Ritzer, 2005). Therefore, retro items can also serve as reminders about a bygone era prior to mass production and commercialization - two characteristics that are often viewed as the reasons behind the disenchantment of the modern world and hence the enchantment of the past (Brown et al., 2001; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Higson, 2014).

The increased motivation for retro consumption, especially in younger people, indicates that the oldest has become the newest and trendiest. To summarize, the gratifications received by the younger generations through consuming retro products are authenticity in a demanding cosmopolitan life (Brown et al., 2003a), and a collective aspiration to go back to former times (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007) caused by a resistance towards contemporary society or/and due to a romanticized version of the past, created by different kinds of media.

2.2 Retro gaming

Retro gaming, as defined by Newman (2004), is the contemporary playing of video games that originated between the 1970s - 1990s and are accessible on both original hardware and emulators. Since the beginning of the 2000s, retro gaming has become a rising trend in the video gaming industry and has been explained by the rapidly changing gaming cultures and the sudden demise of certain gamers’ beloved video games (Newman, 2004; Suominen, 2008). Previous studies indicate the need for further research into the reasons for people continuing to play old video games despite the current technological advancements (Suominen & Vaahensalo, 2008) which is the topic that this study will focus on.

Additionally, existing retro gaming literature argues that there are multiple ways in which players engage with the content. The first mode is nostalgic play, which despite popular beliefs, is not a substitute word for retro gaming. It is actually a concept within retro gaming marked by the desire of an individual to replicate an emotion experienced in the past surrounding the playing of a particular game (Redhead Ahm, 2021). Accordingly, two separate nostalgia-based responses are indicated, including “restorative” nostalgia which stresses the longing for a lost home and the attempt to reconstruct it and “reflective” nostalgia which is mainly focused on the feeling of longing itself and the reflection on life (Boym, 2007). Although different, it seems that the two retro gaming manners can occur simultaneously as one may try to reconstruct a past feeling in order to reflect on the present.

The second mode is historical play which indicates the exploration of video games as objects for play rather than a limiting structure of pre-determined paths for gamers (Newman, 2004). This means that one plays old games out of an interest in the history of the game itself. The player not only interprets but also critically evaluates the game in its historical content, including its aesthetics, graphics and technology used for playing it. While retro games continue to serve their purpose as a subject for play, they also have the ability to encourage gamers to reflect upon the game’s history and its development (Acland, 2007). Furthermore, it allows for a better understanding of the evolution of the product itself, including any technological changes and design improvements that may have occurred in the later version of the game. In accordance with a study done by Redhead Ahm (2021), many gamers explore retro games as a way to gain further knowledge of the work of game developers in a time of technological limitations. Furthermore, any remakes of or graphical upgrades on traditional retro games are seen as unnecessary as they take away from the “pastness” and classic ambience of the game (Redhead Ahm, 2021). What is more, gaining not only knowledge but also experience in a video game considered a “classic” by the broad gaming community, is an important determinant for labeling one a gamer (Suominen and Sivula, 2016).

Needless to say, there are other various explanations behind the retro gaming phenomenon including retro games providing their players with a sense of self and well-being by letting them go back in time to a bygone era (Wulf et al., 2018). By engaging with retro games, people are able to virtually go back in time and explore earlier times through which they may “constitute an identity for themselves that is grounded in nostalgia, expertise, and an agonistic relationship to the modern gaming industry” (Heineman, 2014, p. 19). Therefore, retro gaming enables players to preserve their gamer identity. Being a “gamer” often involves having to fight against negative stereotypes (Kneer et al., 2012; Nauroth et al., 2015) yet retro gaming enthusiasts are perceived as having a very complex and intriguing gamer identity (Suominen, 2008) which will be discussed further on. Retro gaming therefore can be seen as a way to build a stable gamer identity and additionally, as a way to rebel against the rapidly changing contemporary video game culture. Nowadays video gaming companies have accepted a model of continuous microtransactions to ensure an ongoing flow of monetization (Petrovskaya & Zendle, 2021). An example of such practices includes the selling of additional

downloadable content (DLC) or expansion packs as add-ons for the base game for a price that is often as high as the cost of the original game (Tomić, 2017). This type of upselling is often used as a way to “extend the life” of a video game and create a system of constant “exploitation and perpetual commodification” for devoted fans of the game (Lizardi, 2012, p. 43). Another practice of contemporary video gaming companies aimed at increasing their profitability is the creation of ‘free’ video games which include strategically placed paywalls that require the player to pay before enabling them to continue the game (Petrovskaya & Zendle, 2021).

Additionally, further studies have found evidence of retro gaming having a positive effect on one’s well-being when motivated by nostalgia brought on by fond memories of fun video gaming experiences (Wulf et al., 2017). It has been suggested that playing retro games can decrease sadness (Barrett et al., 2010) as well as boredom (van Tilburg et al., 2013). Therefore, being nostalgic can improve one’s well-being by delivering an enjoyable gaming experience. What is more, as mentioned in the previous section, since young consumers perceive the rapid changes in our contemporary society as stressful, playing retro games due to nostalgia seems to be a way for them to find calmness and feel secure. The existing literature on retro gaming provides a stable basis for my study on the motivations of Generation Z for playing older FPS games. Additionally, this study will focus on the ways in which the participants engage with the content in order to discover potential new playing motivations related to retro gaming and add to the existing body of retro gaming literature.

2.3 Video games genre

The video games genre can be considered a fruitful model that classifies the various types of currently available games (Arsenault, 2009). It is, however, an evolving and ever-changing concept due to the fast-paced technological advancements and innovations within the gaming industry. This research will focus on the First-Person Shooter genre, a category which is home to many video games, considered retro according to Newman’s (2004) definition. Although the genre’s origins can be found in 1974 with the game *Maze War* (Lebling, 1974), its breakthrough was with *Wolfenstein 3D* due to its then-advanced technology, including 3D graphics. The main action in the FPS genre is “shooting”, including elements of melee fighting, meaning hand-to-hand combat, for example, using a chainsaw in *Doom* or a knife in *Wolfenstein 3D* (Arsenault, 2009). The game is played from a first-person perspective as if the player is the person executing the game’s actions.

The lack of extensive existing literature on FPS retro games presents an opportunity for further investigation on the topic. Existing literature on the FPS game genre often focuses on its history and evolution throughout the years rather than the motivations of people for playing such video games, especially when it comes to older games (Arsenault, 2009). FPS games are most often than not a controversial topic due to the graphic violence that they include. Consequently, a popular theme in research related to the FPS genre is violence, namely investigating the potential relationship between playing FPS video games and people’s aggressive behavior (Dill & Dill, 1998). Most of the studies on

that topic have proven that playing violent FPS games does not necessarily induce aggressive behavior as the effects of the game on the players are short-term and seem to disappear in a naturalistic environment (Elson, 2011; Endestad & Torgersen, 2003).

Other popular research includes the effect of gender on video game preferences showing that male players are more likely to prefer FPS games due to the competitiveness in the genre (Hopp & Fisher, 2017; Tekofsky et al., 2017) while female players place less value on winning and prefer immersion-based games (Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006). The relationship between FPS games and the age of the players has also been studied by a number of scholars leading to the conclusion that the younger generations are more receptive to the negative impact of the media and therefore could be more impacted by the content of the FPS games (Scharrer & Leone, 2008; Tekofsky, 2017). Additional studies have established that players' motivations for playing video games vary depending on the genre (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022; Frostling-Henningsson, 2009). For example, online-based games such as multiplayer shooter games attract players who seek cooperation, communication and sociality (Frostling-Henningsson, 2009) unlike traditional FPS games which are played for the enjoyment and challenge of the game itself (Jansz & Tanis, 2007).

When it comes to the most frequent players of this particular game genre, studies have shown that most players are young men, about 18 years old, who game every day for about 2-3 hours (Jansz & Tanis, 2007). Furthermore, these gamers are often split into three categories, according to whether or not they are participants in an online gamers' community. This includes an amateur community, a semi (professional) community and non-clan members (people who are not part of any gaming social network). Although these groups share some similarities, they tend to have different motivations for playing such video games. For example, the amateurs are motivated by social interaction and excitement, most probably because they are currently being "constructed" as players, whereas the semi(professionals) are mainly focused on competing with others and seeking challenges (Jansz & Tanis, 2007). Furthermore, FPS game players could be considered "heavy gamers". In other words, they spent a lot of time gaming, competing with others, and searching for new challenges while entertaining themselves in the process.

Accordingly, this research aims to add to existing FPS literature and give further insight into the reason for the retro gaming phenomenon. Understanding why people engage in retro gaming while focusing on one particular genre of games will create its own niche and allow for further research into the matter.

2.4 Gamer Identity

The term "gamer" was and continues to be associated with young white men (Dill & Thill, 2007). The stereotypical gamer is seen as nerdy and socially awkward (Storla, 2011; Taylor, 2012), as well as introverted, careless, aggressive and inactive yet intelligent (Amby et al., 2020). To help

reduce the marginalization of the gamer community, a lot of research has been conducted on the gamer identity - both as a societal construct as well as a self-identification process.

Research has shown that although the gaming community continues to be male-dominated (Shaw, 2013) it is important to acknowledge that the image of the gamer as a pale-skinned teenager has begun to disappear (Kowert et al., 2012). Needless to say, numerous recent studies have managed to debunk many of the stereotypes associated with the gamer identity and have proven that nowadays gamers come in all shapes and sizes, including gender, nationality and sexuality (Yim et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is an emerging trend for conducting research on the underrepresented groups in gaming, such as female gamers (Kuss et al., 2022; Storla, 2011; Taylor, 2012). These studies have proven the gamer identity to be significantly more complex than the initial stereotypical image. Many differences have been identified between the different groups of players, including the preference for a gaming platform or game genre and the motivations for playing video games. (Ćwil & Howe, 2020)

Additionally, many researchers have begun to differentiate between gamers and non-gamers by asking them to self-identify (Kowert et al., 2012). This method is believed to provide a more accurate representation of a 'gamer' as self-identification is based on one's subjectivity for belonging to a specific group. This allows the researchers to reshape the qualities and characteristics of the gamer identity and build a more inclusive example of it (Shaw, 2013).

2.4.1 Sense of belonging

Studies have shown that a person is more likely to identify as a gamer if they have a well-established connection with other gamers (Shaw, 2013). Furthermore, such connections often lead to the creation of online sub-communities surrounding a particular gaming genre or even a specific game which the participants feel passionate about. These gaming communities provide a virtual space where people can satisfy their basic desires for social connection and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Subsequently, being a member of a particular gaming community is often an indicator of a gamer's self-identity (Brown, 2000).

Consumption is another aspect that has been associated in the past with one's belonging to a particular community since it requires one to devote resources, including time, money and energy to particular goods and media (Bourdieu, 1987; Hebdige, 1979; Simmel, 1957; Thornton, 1996; Veblen, 1965). To confirm the validity of the aforementioned statement, more recent studies on gaming show that the consumption of tangible objects such as new gaming software or hardware is closely linked to gamer identity. Economic investment has proven to be important for the earning of a gamer status (Shaw, 2013). However, according to the results of this study, retro gamers often join retro gaming communities to receive free content rather than satisfy any consumerist desires. This might be due to the differences in the characteristics between the modern gamer and the retro FPS gamer which will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

2.4.2 Gaining skills

Gaming as a skill set and as a consumption practice is not accessible to everyone which is why being an expert in gaming can be seen as a “status symbol” (Shaw, 2013). Gamers perceive the virtual world as a safe place in which they can practice their skills without the risks they may encounter in the real world. While for some gamers the skills that they acquire are exclusively game-related, others claim that these skills can be applied to other areas of their lives (Kuss et al., 2022). These skills include common sense; interacting with others and problem-solving.

Additionally, research done on the benefits of playing video games has somewhat confirmed the self-observations of gamers who find that playing video games enhances their real-life abilities. Playing real-time strategy games has been scientifically proven to be “good for the brain activity” (Gagné et al., 2012; Glass et al., 2013). This is because according to the study the capacity of the brain to acquire new skills and memories improved among the participants who played similar games (Howe et al., 2019).

2.4.3 The FPS gamer

The FPS genre is considered to be too violent in nature (Eastin & Griffiths, 2006; Weber et al., 2009) as well as created with the aim to evoke feelings of challenge and competition (Eastin & Griffiths, 2006; Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Nacke et al., 2010). These game characteristics are often closely linked with the preferences of male gamers which is why the FPS genre is predominantly male-centric (Hopp & Fisher, 2017). According to research, the majority of FPS gamers are often males between the ages of 15 and 35 (Hartmann et al., 2015; Jansz & Tanis, 2007; Lenhart, 2009; Montag et al., 2012). Thus, male gamers are seen as the ideal users and target audience for this particular genre. Their preferences are taken into account for both the development, as well as promotion of FPS video games (Hopp & Fisher, 2017).

Since the existing literature on the identity of the FPS gamer is limited, this thesis will aim to fill the gap and inform scholars about potential further research which could be done on the topic.

3. Methodology

This thesis seeks to explore the motivations of Generation Z for playing retro FPS video games, which means that the perspective and opinions of the target demographic are essential for the study. Thus, a qualitative research method would be the most appropriate method to gather information and answer the proposed research question. This is a suitable approach to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings created by members, participating in the same event or activity, in this case, playing old games (Johnson, 2011). This will give an opportunity to grasp the multiple perspectives the participants may have on playing retro games. It will help understand the retro gaming phenomena through the meaning-making process of the participants (Boeije, 2009).

An online qualitative survey was used to collect the data as to increase the generalizability of the results and increase the number of participants. The respondents were recruited through online community platforms due to the specificity of the topic and the niche interest of the participants. A qualitative content analysis was then used to analyze the collected data and identify the main themes and sub-themes. The next sections will cover the specificities of the research design in-depth.

3.1 Data collection

An online qualitative survey was used to collect the data for this research (see Appendix A). This allowed for the survey to reach a wider audience than it would have been possible through conducting in-depth interviews. It also helped to achieve ‘maximum heterogeneity’ rather than typicality by gathering a variety of perspectives (Braun et al., 2017; Fassinger, 2005). Although qualitative surveys are a relatively new and therefore rarely used method, they present many advantages for both the researcher and the participants (Vannette & Krosnick, 2017; Wolf et al., 2016). One of those is that they are easily accessible and low-cost and have the likelihood of reaching many potential respondents despite where they may be located (Fricker, 2016). Additionally, since the participants respond in their own words, qualitative surveys can capture their sense-making process, such as their personal opinions and subjectivity regarding their retro gaming experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The variety of viewpoints and perspectives can help enrich the study and provide a well-informed answer to the research question.

Another advantage with regard to the participants is the lack of “social pressure resulting from the researcher sitting opposite them” (Braun et al., 2021). According to Davey et al. (2019), participants frequently choose to complete surveys at unlikely hours for a scheduled interview, such as very early in the morning or later at night. Hence, online qualitative surveys enable participants to make their own decision on when and where they conduct the survey, as well as the time they spent on it. It also allows them to express their thoughts more clearly and in some cases, to “talk back” to the researcher (Braun et al., 2017; Terry & Braun, 2017).

The survey was split into 4 sections. The first consisted of standard demographic questions, including asking about the participant's age and gender to establish whether they are suitable for the

purpose of the research. These questions were placed at the start of the survey as they were simple and the ‘least threatening’ in the research (Terry & Braun, 2017). The second section included warm-up questions regarding the benefits that the participants gain from playing video games, in general. The survey proceeded with the research topic-based questions regarding the respondents’ experience with FPS retro games. As it is essential to refrain from making assumptions about the participants’ sense-making process and ensure that they have understood the key concepts correctly, a definition of retro gaming was provided before the start of the main section. It was followed by a question about the respondent’s own perspective on the meaning of retro gaming allowing for a better understanding of their own personal stance on the topic (Braun et al., 2021). Some of the questions also contained brief guidance on what was expected from the participants to discuss, such as “What is your definition of the term ‘retro games’ (e.g. year of development, types of genre, video game titles)?”. The last section required the participants to answer more in-depth questions about their personal choice to play retro FPS video games, such as “Is there a specific memory or story related to playing this/these particular retro FPS game(s) that you would like to share?” or “Is there any type of quality of characteristics that retro games have that the newly developed games lack?”. These types of questions were included with the intention to address the respondents’ involvement with retro games while possibly revealing any latent motivations that the participants may not have previously thought of.

3.2 Sampling

The participants in the survey were chosen based on two criteria - their age and interest in playing retro FPS video games. This included both people who re-play retro games that they first encountered at a younger age and people who have just discovered them. The only demographic requirement for the participants in order to gain access to the survey was to fall within the Generation Z category, meaning to be born in or after the year 1995. For ethical considerations, the participants had to be older than 18 years old, making the target age category 18-28 years old.

Due to the specificity of the sample group, a non-probability sampling method was applied, namely snowball sampling, which is often used as a strategy to select participants based on specific characteristics and/or belonging to a community (Sarstedt et al., 2018). Gender, nationality, sexuality, etc. was not taken into account so as to increase the generalizability and not limit the scope of the research. Because of their particularities and niche shared interests, the sample group could be considered difficult to reach which is why snowball sampling is an appropriate method (Fricker, 2016). For this reason, the participants were sought and recruited through online community websites, including Reddit and Discord (see Appendix B). The survey was spread in community groups on those websites with broader gaming interests, including groups such as *IndieGaming*; *Retrogaming*; *Gamer*; *BethesdaSoftworks* and *PlayStation*, as well as groups created around people’s interest in specific retro games such as *Doom*; *DukeNukem*; *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. The survey was also distributed in groups such as *GenZ* and *OlderGenZ* in order to reach more respondents within the target population.

While over 180 people were interested in taking part in the study, the online survey got a total of 68 initial respondents who fell within the target age group of 18-28 years old. Since not all questions were considered mandatory, some questions received fewer responses. The questions which were exclusively on the topic of retro FPS games were not made mandatory since the aim was to detect the most experienced and dedicated retro gamers. Additionally, the reason for making most questions optional was to give freedom to the participants and refrain from making assumptions about their feelings or experiences regarding retro gaming (Braun et al., 2021). For example, if any of the participants felt that they could not provide specific information that would inform the study they should not feel obligated to answer and should feel free to skip the question. This would enable the survey to collect more accurate and authentic data from the participants. Subsequently, the average response rate per question was 48 respondents. Despite some of the participants not having completed the questionnaire in its entirety, their answers were kept for the analysis as they added to the understanding of their gaming motivations. Furthermore, although the average number of responses is significantly smaller than the initial number of participants, it remains within the suitable range for qualitative survey studies (Braun et al., 2021). Considering the limited time span for conducting the research, the number of participants is satisfactory and remains within expectations, with 20-49 participants being the appropriate lower-end range for a qualitative survey method (e.g. Clarke & Smith, 2015; Clarke & Spence, 2013; Grogan & Mechan, 2017; Grogan et al., 2018; Hayfield, 2013).

Furthermore, as gender is not taken into account for the purpose of this research, the survey got significantly more responses from male participants. The respondents included 58 male, 1 female, 6 non-binary and 3 participants who preferred to not disclose their gender. As explained in the theoretical framework, FPS video games are preferred by male rather than female players due to video game factors such as challenge and competition (Hopp & Fisher, 2017; Tekofsky et al., 2017). Therefore, the gender imbalance in the respondents was expected.

3.3 Operationalization

The theoretical concepts which were explored in-depth in the second section of the paper provided the foundation for the analysis of the gathered data. The theory managed to guide the research in testing any existing expectations about players engaging in retro gaming activities. Furthermore, it also informed an inductive approach to analyzing the data and discovering any hidden meanings in the participant's messages (Schreier, 2014).

The three main discussions taken into account for the purpose of the study included McQuail's (1994) uses and gratifications theory, Newman's (2004) retro gaming concept and Arsenault's (2009) concept of the video games genre accompanied by supporting concepts as discussed in the previous chapters. The table below demonstrates how the sensitizing concepts were operationalized into survey questions (see Table 1).

Since the concept of gamer identity was only briefly touched upon in the overall theme of retro gaming, it was added as its sub-theme in the table below. Nonetheless, the concept of gamer identity as an independent in-depth topic was included in the theoretical framework chapter later in the research process, as a direct result of the analysis of the survey data. Since the broader discussion was not initially part of the theoretical framework it was not taken into consideration for the creation of the survey questions. The sub-concepts within the existing literature on gamer identity were subsequently used in the analysis process to better interpret the results of the survey questions.

Table 1.

Operationalization of the key theoretical concepts

Sensitizing Concepts	Survey Questions	Operationalization
Uses & Gratifications Authenticity Enchantment Resistance Needs Satisfaction	<p>What benefits or experiences do you derive from playing video games?</p> <p>What is it about retro FPS games that draw your interest? Please elaborate.</p> <p>Do you replay this/these game(s)? If yes, what is the reason for you to replay them? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>The concepts were not explicitly stated in the questions as to avoid showing any bias. Yet these questions were used to observe the patterns in needs sought and gratifications received by the participants, such as playing retro games to express discontent with contemporary society; showing any signs of romanticization of the past; receiving gratifications from the video game features, such as aesthetics, graphics, etc.</p>
Retro gaming “Restorative nostalgia” “Reflective nostalgia” Historical play Gamer identity	<p>What is your definition of the term “retro games” (e.g. year of development, types of genre, video game titles)?</p> <p>Is there a specific memory or story related to playing this/these particular retro FPS game(s) that you would like to share?</p> <p>Does playing this game provoke any type of feeling or emotions in you? Please elaborate.</p> <p>What is it about retro FPS games that draw your interest? Please elaborate.</p> <p>Besides the difference in graphics between new and retro FPS games, are</p>	<p>The first question in the column on the left was used to observe the understanding of the participants’ perspectives of the term ‘retro games’.</p> <p>The second and third questions were constructed to detect any latent motivators for playing retro games which the participants might not have initially thought of, such as longing towards a particular person/situation/feeling from their past or even attempting the reconstruct that feeling through (re-)playing a specific game.</p>

	<p>there any other differences that you can identify?</p> <p>Is there any type of quality or characteristics that retro games have that the newly developed video games lack?</p> <p>Would you consider yourself a retro gamer and why?</p>	<p>The next few questions were used to test the participants' level of commitment to retro games and their overall knowledge about old and new gaming practices.</p>
<p>Video games genre</p> <p>First-Person Shooter game genre</p> <p>Video game motivators by genre</p> <p>Video game communities</p>	<p>Do you have any experience with retro FPS games such as Wolfenstein 3D, Doom (Classic), Duke Nukem 3D, Quake or any other game within this category? Please elaborate.</p> <p>What is it about retro FPS games that draw your interest? Please elaborate.</p> <p>How often do you play retro FPS games?</p> <p>Why have you chosen to play this/these particular game(s) despite the abundance of newly developed video games with higher quality?</p>	<p>These questions aimed to better understand the motivations of people for choosing the FPS retro genre over other video game genres.</p> <p>Subsequently, there were also used to understand the meaning behind the preference of the respondents for older FPS games over contemporary FPS games. The aim was to further test whether playing retro FPS games induces a particular emotion in the participants, such as a feeling of competitiveness, enjoyment, challenge, etc.</p>

3.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is suitable for the purpose of the research as it is often used to create meaning of certain phenomena beyond the explicit. Furthermore, it allows for a reduction of the data and its segregation into common patterns or themes relevant to answering the research question (Schreier, 2014).

The first step was open coding, including the division of the data collected through the survey, into smaller coherent fragments. To do so, the data was read repeatedly to determine the exact fragments that will help answer the research question. The fragments were then assigned a suitable name (code) and were further compared and grouped into bigger fragments, if necessary. Fragments similar in meaning were given the same code (Boeije, 2009). The codes used were both concept-driven codes, derived from existing literature, as well as data-driven codes, made up by the researcher themselves in accordance with the answers given by the participants (Boeije, 2009). The open coding provided a basis for understanding the experience of the participants in relation to retro games.

The second step was axial coding which helped reduce the data further and make it more manageable. This step included evaluating the appropriateness of the coded fragments and grouping

them into broader categories or main codes. A brief description of each main code was provided as a way of making sense of each category (Boeije, 2009).

The final step was grouping the main codes into even bigger and thus more manageable themes, closely linked to the literature. The themes represent the main messages of the respondents, in this case, providing an answer on their motivations to play FPS retro games in times of abundance of contemporary, graphically-advanced video games. The three main themes identified in the research were: “Gamer Identity”, “Modern gaming industry disenchantment”, and “Emotional response”. All three themes include subsections. The fourth section of this paper contains in-depth information about the overall results of the study.

3.5 Reliability & Validity

The qualitative survey method chosen to collect the research data centers around hearing from multiple respondents and acquiring further knowledge about the retro gaming phenomenon. Thus, qualitative surveys are a convenient way to gain access to participants beyond the ‘usual suspects’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Terry & Braun, 2017). This variety of perspectives matters both for the quality, reliability and validity of the study (Terry et al., 2018). Reliability is further achieved through full transparency in the research process, which is made evident in this methodological chapter. Ensuring that all steps of the research have been introduced and thoroughly explained is what guarantees the transparency of the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

The codebook provided in Appendix C contains additional information regarding the process of analyzing that data. Descriptions of the meaning behind each of the main codes and the reason for their grouping were provided to strengthen the transparency effect.

4. Analysis

A qualitative survey was conducted to find an answer to the research question: “What are the motivations of Generation Z to play retro FPS games?”. The survey data was analyzed with the help of a content analysis which led to the discovery of three main themes (see Appendix C). The first theme “Gamer Identity” discusses how playing retro FPS games can aid the player in constructing their own gamer identity. This includes focusing on one’s interpersonal skills, and gaming abilities, as well as finding a sense of belonging through joining a particular gaming community. Additionally, many of the respondents showed a substantial dislike towards the modern gaming industry, in terms of industry specifics, as well as the specificities of the newly developed video games themselves. This helped identify the second theme, “Resistance towards the modern gaming industry”. Finally, nostalgia and escapism were examined as forms of motivation in the third and final theme “Emotional response”. This chapter aims to provide thorough and in-depth details of the three main themes, connecting them back to the key concepts from the theoretical framework chapter.

4.1 Gamer Identity

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, gamers are often dismissed as ‘socially withdrawn adolescents’ by society. This deprecating description increases the players' interest in escaping the diminishing community-created label and constructing a more complex gamer identity for themselves (Kowert et al., 2012).

The online survey included a question regarding the respondent's self-perception as a retro gamer which is a characterization that many participants were happy to identify with. The responses showed that ‘retro gamers’ often expressed three main motivations for playing retro FPS games that are also indicators of a possible “FPS gamer” identity. This included using the game as a training base for improving their personal skills such as problem-solving skills and memorization, gaining thorough knowledge about the background and history of a particular video game, and being part of a gaming community where one is able to share their passion for their beloved game with other enthusiasts. Additionally, the participants’ answers regarding which retro FPS games they play, how often they play them and whether they re-play them also played an important role in establishing “Gamer Identity” as a major theme and learning more about their gaming habits.

4.1.1 Interpersonal skills

Throughout the survey, participants had the opportunity to share their perspectives on retro games and their motivations, if applicable, for choosing them over newly developed games. While the respondents reported a variety of benefits that they derive from playing retro FPS games, a pattern of ‘(re-)playing for improvement’ became evident. This included both being motivated to enhance one’s gaming skills, such as being able to ‘find and kill the enemy’ quicker, as well as striving to improve one’s personal skills including problem-solving and strategic thinking.

Nineteen of the participants shared their motivation for using video games to improve their interpersonal skills. Some of them discovered that playing retro FPS games helps them stay “intellectually stimulated” and enhances their creativity in problem-solving. These observations confirm the findings of existing literature on the benefits that people acquire from playing video games. As mentioned by Kuss et al. (2022) many gamers notice an improvement in their common sense and problem-solving skills as a result of playing video games. Additionally, half of the nineteen respondents use video games to maintain quick reflexes, with “eye-to-hand coordination” being explicitly mentioned by a few of them. Other skills which the respondents aim to improve through playing retro FPS games include strategic thinking and memorization. The latter was mentioned a few times by the respondents when asked about why they replay certain retro FPS games. As stated by one of the participants, replaying is important for them for “memorization of secrets and monster placements” as this provides them with a “constant feeling of improvement”. This desire to constantly enhance one’s gaming abilities could be explained as a motivation to earn and maintain one’s gamer status. Furthermore, it relates back to Shaw’s study (2013) according to which gamers gain status from being familiar and having thorough experience with a particular game.

Another part of the respondents expressed their interest in retro FPS games as a desire to learn more about the development of the game itself which can help them boost their technical skills. One of the participants specifically mentions that playing retro FPS games helps them “understand the pattern and codes” that have been used by the game developers. While another respondent aims to observe the game’s patterns for “modding purposes”, namely to be able to create their own custom levels for the game or even become a game developer themselves. To clarify, video game modding is the practice of modifying a video game’s code and changing any aspects that were not originally planned by the developer, such as the visuals, behaviors, etc (Poretski & Arazy, 2017). This particular motivation is seemingly a unique characteristic of the retro “FPS gamer” as it is rarely mentioned in existing literature regarding the modern (FPS) gamer identity which is often reduced to a thrill-seeking young male with a preference for violent video games (Shaw, 2013). Engaging with retro games in order to learn more about the game itself, however, is closely linked to the motivation of people playing retro games in order to better comprehend a certain feature of the video game, such as its design or gameplay mechanism (Redhead Ahm, 2021). Furthermore, this motivation is a part of the historical play concept by Newman (2004) and it indicates that certain retro FPS gamers engage with the respective games critically, to gain a better understanding of their development, rather than simply playing to have fun.

4.1.3 Gaming Community

Among the participants’ responses, one of the most often mentioned benefits of retro FPS games is the access to limitless community-created content. This includes game modding, the concept of which was explained in the “Interpersonal skills” sub-section. As mentioned by the respondents,

many older FPS games used to provide open-source codes which enabled any enthusiast, who had the technical skills, to modify the game according to their liking and share it with others. This has inspired the creation of many modding communities that share their love for a particular retro FPS game by customizing its appearance and behavior according to their interest. The analysis of the results clearly indicates that the interest in modding motivates some of the players to join the respective communities. As shared by one of the participants: “Modding communities provide me with near-endless free content made by passionate creators that is often more compelling than newly-released games.” Since in this case a gamer’s sense of belonging is not expressed through spending resources, a differentiation could be made between the modern (FPS) gamer and the retro FPS gamer. While for the modern gamer being a member of a bigger community is manifested through economically investing in game-specific objects, such as technical equipment or merchandize (Shaw, 2013), the retro FPS gamer makes sense of their belonging in a gaming community through interacting with other retro gaming enthusiasts and exchanging community-made content, such as game mods:

love seeing the new mods that the passionate community have made to improve the game over the years that they just didn't have time or the technology or knowledge to do so in the first place back when they were released.

Since retro game mods are created by gamers for other gamers and are voluntarily shared with the respective communities, they were and still remain free of charge. Therefore, some of the participants refer to the practice of modding as an encouragement of creativity “rather than being used as a money-draining machine”, mostly referring to the practices of the modern gaming industry which will be more thoroughly discussed in the next sub-section of this chapter. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, nowadays, many gaming companies create and sell expansion packs in addition to the base games in order to increase the brand’s visibility, increase the shelf-life of the original game, as well as ensure a continuous profit for themselves (Tomić, 2017). In accordance with the survey data, this practice is often frowned upon by retro FPS gamers as retro FPS games provide users with the ability to create their own content, such as game mods and distribute it free of charge in the respective communities.

4.1.2 Historical play

A total of twelve respondents expressed a fascination with the historical aspect of retro FPS games. This aligns with Newman’s theory on historical play (2004) and the motivations of players to engage in retro gaming in order to explore the game in its historical content, such as closely observing the game’s graphics, storyline, etc. The most commonly shared interest in this category was to learn more about the retro FPS games that “invented the genre”, or as communicated by another one of the respondents - to explore “where the roots of modern games were set”. Although at first glance this motivation may not appear to be correlated with a gamer’s identity, engaging in historical play does offer a gamer status “update” for the gamer as it requires them to explore the game hermeneutically

(Redhead Ahm, 2021). This means that the gamer acquires additional knowledge on the particularities of the game due to exploring it “as material for play rather than necessarily restrictive, rule-bound structures that push gamers down prescribed paths” (Newman, 2005, p. 60). As aforementioned, being well acquainted and knowledgeable regarding a specific game asserts one’s reputation as a gamer (Shaw, 2013). Moreover, considering the results of the survey, engaging in historical play has proven to be an essential characteristic of the retro (FPS) gamer.

The participants’ answers also suggest that besides being motivated to play retro FPS games in order to explore the history of the genre, there is also an interest in comparing the old and the newly developed FPS games and experiencing the differences in the technological aspect first-hand. The theory refers to this comparison of past and present as the intertwinement of the old and new (Acland, 2007). Furthermore as mentioned in the theoretical framework, the retro (FPS) gamer is expected to not only be aware but to also have played certain games which have become memorialized by the retro gaming communities and accepted as part of video game history (Suominen & Sivula, 2016).

This closely relates to the final motivation of respondents within this sub-category, namely the popularity of the retro game as a motivator for engaging with it. A few of the respondents were persuaded to play due to the “extremely recognizable” nature of some of the retro FPS games, such as the Doom franchise which as of today continues to expand its gaming library (Wilhem, 2023). At a glance, having played the original version of a very reputable video game appears to add additional importance to one’s retro (FPS) gamer identity.

4.2 Resistance towards the modern gaming industry

While analyzing the survey data, a recurring narrative was established regarding the disadvantages of the newly developed games and the overall modern gaming industry whose main goal is to capitalize on the consumption habits the modern-day gamers. These narratives re-confirm the validity of the theoretical concept of ‘resistance’, part of the existing literature on retro consumption (Brown, 1999, 2018; Higson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015; Reynolds, 2011; Routledge, 2015).

For the purpose of exploring this theme in depth, the analysis was focused mainly on the participants’ answers to two key questions: “Besides the difference in graphics between new and retro FPS games, are there any other differences that you can identify?” and “Is there any type of quality or characteristics that retro games have that the newly developed video games lack?”. These questions collected a total of 40 responses each.

Although, as mentioned above, the survey itself contained questions asking participants to differentiate between modern and retro FPS games, the dislike of the modern gaming industry in respondents was already noticeable in previous questions such as “What it is about retro FPS games that draw your interest?” and “Do you replay this/these game(s) and why?”. When discussing the differences between the gaming industry before and the gaming industry currently, the participants’

responses fall within two distinct categories. The first one is game-specific differences related to benefits that they derive from retro FPS games that lack in newly developed FPS games. The second category summarizes the perspectives of the respondents about the monetization priorities of the modern gaming industry.

4.2.1 Game-specific differences

While analyzing the data it became apparent that almost all of the respondents are highly appreciative of the creativity of the retro FPS game developers. Many participants have praised the retro game developers for the passion with which they have “kick-started” the FPS genre and produced “fast and fun shooting games” despite the technical limitations:

Games were simple because they had to be, but you can still appreciate the way the games still make a fun and often imaginatively immersive experience despite your game environment being severely technically limited.

Subsequently, the participant’s answers show three evident game characteristics that have drawn the respondents’ interest to retro FPS games - the simplicity of the video game features, including the level design, sound effects, storyline, etc., the single-player mode approach of traditional FPS games and the “unrealistic” nature of the graphics which differentiates retro FPS games from today’s high definition hyper-realistic images. Playing a retro game to appreciate the creativity of the game developers despite the technological limitations could be linked back to existing research on retro gaming motivations. According to a study by Redhead Ahm (2021), some gamers believe that retro games should be praised because they are a product of technological constraints. Furthermore, hyper-realistic graphics are perceived to be limiting the classic appeal of video games (Redhead Ahm, 2021).

Simplicity as a main motivator for playing retro FPS games has explicitly been mentioned by 21 survey participants. This includes the non-linear level design, the diverse enemy and weapon roster, the sound effects, as well as the overall dynamics of the retro FPS genre which is seen as significantly more fast-paced and action-oriented than the modern FPS games. A great disadvantage of modern FPS games, as mentioned by some of the respondents, is the heavy storyline which “distracts from gameplay focus”. Most of the respondents express their dislike towards this particular characteristic of most modern-day video games and indicate a preference towards a more streamlined game design: “Some retro FPS games also excelled at telling a story through gameplay, a very effective and unique literary style which I feel has been forgotten since their heyday.”

Furthermore, when asked about their experience with retro FPS games, a few of the participants expressed their experience with and appreciation of both the traditional retro FPS games, such as *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake* (id Software 1996), *Duke Nukem* (3D Realms Entertainment ApS, 1991) and *Shadow Warrior* (3D Realms, 1997) as well as modern FPS games with a retro aesthetic such as *Dusk* (Szymanski, 2018), *Prodeus* (Bounding Box Software, 2022) and *Nightmare Reaper* (Blazing Bit Games, 2019) (see Figure 2). Simplicity is, therefore, a major motivator for not

only engaging with traditional retro FPS games but also discovering and playing newly developed FPS games with retro mechanisms and aesthetics.



Figure 2. Screenshot of *Nightmare Reaper*, a modern FPS game with retro aesthetics (Fox, 2022)

Additionally, the analyzed data stresses the preference of the participants for the retro game mechanisms and namely the single-player nature of the retro FPS games which subsequently draws them away from playing contemporary FPS games that usually require multiple players. Participants have expressed their liking of retro games due to their “respect and focus on single player” in comparison to modern-day FPS games. While some of the participants have not specified the exact reason for their preference for single-player games, one of the respondents expressed that their fondness of single payer FPS games is a result of the conflicting schedules of him and his friends: “while co-op is fun and awesome, my friends and I don't have a lot of time anymore to just sit and play games as much”. What the collected data shows is that although many of the participants join retro gaming communities to communicate with other members and exchange free content, most of them prefer single-player games over multiplayer ones which is a major reason for engaging with retro FPS games. This particular preference and motivation has not been thoroughly examined in existing literature yet it lays a promising foundation for future research on the rising popularity of retro gaming.

Intriguingly, a significantly large group of the survey participants believe that the lower-quality graphics of retro FPS games allow one to immerse themselves into a fantasy world created by the game developers. Some have stated that they even find the “unrealistic” graphics magical, especially when comparing them to newly developed games that focus on making the characters and the storyline hyper-realistic which “takes away from the fantasy feel”. According to many, retro game graphics “stimulate the imagination” and provide a greater immersive experience:

The usually abstract nature of the main character, allows for you to easily immerse yourself. Modern games can sometimes make you feel a bit detached from the main character due to overemphasis on personality.

Contemporary FPS video games are considered “bland and unappealing” by many of the respondents due to the overly realistic portrayal of the game’s characters. This dislike is further strengthened by the storyline-focused gameplay which is often slowed down by the highly demanding graphics of the game. In addition, the overall focus on realism of many modern games such as Call of Duty (see Figure 3), which was given by the participants as an example, simply does not provide the same experience that the surrealistic scenarios and visuals of retro FPS games offer. The constant attempts of modern gaming companies to flaunt their games’ “mind-blowing” graphics and “cinematic scenes and storytelling” seems to drive many gamers away, prompting them to turn to the consumption of retro games which are simpler and more straightforward. Additionally, the need to consistently push new gaming content for purchase strengthens the discontent of retro gamers with the modern-day industry and encourages them to continue their retro gaming practices as a form of resistance against the commercialization of the gaming sector (Brown et al., 2001; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Higson, 2014).



Figure 3. Screenshot of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II* (Infinity Ward, 2022), listed as one of the most graphically demanding PC games of last year (Burgar, 2022)

4.2.2 Industry-specific differences

As opposed to the previous sub-category “Game-specific differences” which was created on the basis of the survey questions on the same topic, this sub-category emerged due to the very apparent dislike of the participants towards the contemporary gaming industry, something which they shared on their own accord. 21 out of the 40 people who answered the two questions taken into account for this category expressed their discontent with the modern gaming industry in some manner. Their answers

related both to the technological limitations that people with older PC systems or a lack of additional hardware might face if they decide to play a newly released game, as well as the payment-based progress in most modern-day video games.

Accessibility seems to be an important factor for respondents when it comes to engaging with retro FPS games. On the surface, it appears that this is due to retro games being less expensive and more easily accessible than modern games. As stated by many of the participants, most retro FPS games run on any system and rarely require additional hardware, such as gaming consoles or controllers to play. For some, such technologically demanding games are inaccessible which acts as a motivator for them to pursue other gaming options, such as the retro FPS games.

Additional discontent for the contemporary gaming industry emerges from the practice of paying for your progress. As stated by one of the respondents regarding their motivation for playing retro FPS games: “The only advantage someone could have was knowing the map and gaining the skills through practice.” Participants have stated that many newly developed games include a paywall, which as stated in the theoretical framework is a point in the game at which you need to make a payment in order to continue the game (Petrovskaya & Zendle, 2021). The disenchantment of the modern gaming industry for the participants relates back to the theoretical concept of ‘resistance’ in retro consumption literature (Brown, 1999, 2018; Higson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015; Reynolds, 2011; Routledge, 2015).

Needless to say, many of the respondents are often discouraged to purchase or play newly developed games on account of having to not only invest time in them but also a lot of financial resources. When answering the question regarding the differences between modern and retro FPS gamers, one of the respondents expressed their preference for retro games due to the game developers “getting an entire game complete before releasing it”. Other participants have noted the same malicious pattern in newly released video games: “now games will be mostly complete, then the company will release updates and DLC”. These current industry practices of upselling video games through additional add-ons and expansion packs are making retro gamers long for “a time of myth and legend before mass production and commercialization engulfed contemporary existence” (Ahlberg et al., 2021). This particular characteristic of many contemporary companies was mentioned in the theoretical framework as a primary reason for retro enthusiasts’ discontent with modern-day society (Brown et al., 2001; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Higson, 2014).

4.3 Emotional response

The third major theme, identified in the participants’ answers was “emotional response” or the motivation of gamers to play a beloved retro FPS game in order to experience a particular emotion. Participants’ responses were grouped into two categories depending on the emotional gratification sought from playing retro FPS games. The results showed that while some of the respondents play retro FPS games for a sense of nostalgia, be it to reminisce about the “good old times” or recreate an

emotion, experienced in a particular situation from the past (Boym, 2007), others are looking for a sense of security due to today's stressful cosmopolitan life (Routledge, 2015).

The sub-categories for this theme were easily identified through a strategically posed question in the survey asking participants whether playing retro FPS games induces any type of emotion or feeling in them. Respondents were also asked if there is a specific story or any experience with a retro FPS game that would like to share. Thirty-one people expressed that playing retro games makes them feel a specific emotion, such as nostalgia, enjoyment or general satisfaction. Additionally, twenty-two of them shared a fond memory related to playing their favourite game from the past.

4.3.1 Nostalgia

Eighteen out of the thirty-one people who mentioned that playing retro FPS games provokes emotions in them listed nostalgia as their main emotional response when playing, as well as a motivator to re-play an old game. This particular finding was expected as according to existing research nostalgia is one of the main gratifications sought from retro gaming (Heineman, 2014; Wulf et al., 2018) or any type of retro consumption for that matter (Brown, 2013). This is often because being familiar with the product offers a sense of security and makes it easier for a person to overcome a moment of longing or sadness (Barrett et al. 2010). While many of the respondents rely on retro FPS games to recreate a particular emotion felt in the past, others play to experience the past from the perspective of gamers and game developers back in the day. Therefore, the participants' answers re-confirm the theoretical concept of "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia, respectively, in relation to retro gaming (Boym, 2007).

As aforementioned, "restorative" nostalgia is present in the answers of the participants and most often related to a fond memory from the past involving a family member or a friend that either introduced them to a particular retro FPS game or would regularly play together with them:

Playing Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast with my dad. We used to play a lot, and my dad is that one that got me into video games. We would play most days, and it was my favorite thing to do as a kid. He no longer is interested in playing video games anymore, but I still love the game and the memories of playing with him.

While in the aforementioned statement, the participant is aiming to recreate a sentimental moment from their past, other participants (re-)play their favorite retro FPS games in order to recreate the experience itself after not having played the game for a long time: "I treat them as I do movies that I like, where if I want to re-experience them, I will play them again."

Through this participant's response, as well as the others who 'spoke' fondly about a past situation, it became evident that not only does playing a specific retro FPS soothe the feeling of nostalgia in them but they are also willing to re-play that particular game in order to recreate that particular experience and emotion felt in the past.

The second group of people, who seek to experience nostalgia upon playing a retro FPS game, are the ones that show signs of “reflective” nostalgia. This means that the participants are not remembering a specific experience that they had in the past but are rather reminiscing about the past itself – why people used to play those games and how they felt during it. As described by one of the respondents, playing those games brings a feeling of melancholy even:

it’s like exploring a museum in a way, but the museum is old and a bit outdated, and while there are new things out there that are wild and exciting, its humbling in a way to look back at what we once considered to be an incredible achievement, and there’s a bit of melancholy in the way that we have surpassed these wild and fantastical landmarks of technological engineering.

The data provided by the participants validate Boym’s theory on nostalgic play (2007) and reconfirms nostalgia as one of the primary motivators of Generation Z to engage with retro games. Furthermore, the aforementioned quotes from the respondents show clear examples of both “restorative”, as well as “reflective” nostalgia, respectively. The first two quotes present a younger person’s longing towards a particular feeling/situation from the past and attempting to reconstruct it through playing a familiar retro game while the last quote shows a person using the game to reflect on the past and compare it to the current circumstances in the gaming scene.

Additionally, similarly to the participant who shared a memory of playing with his dad, half of the twenty-two participants who shared a specific fond memory related to playing a ‘favorite’ retro FPS game, mentioned a family member, most often their dad, as part of their story. For example, another participant not only played retro FPS games with his dad but also acquired additional skills as a direct result of this practice:

my dad showed me all these games when I was little and at first I was scared and didn't understand/like them, but then I began to like them and eventually I began to love them. I played them with him and on my own. He even made levels with me and showed me how to make my own [...] it was one of my favorite times.

Similarly to this participant, two other respondents have shared a similar experience of not only being introduced to a retro FPS by their dad but also playing the game together and obtaining technical skills, such as creating their own custom levels. This data has led to the establishment of a niche category within this sub-section, namely ‘people playing video games with their parents’. This concept has a noticeable relation to “restorative” nostalgia due to the evident motivation of certain Generation Z gamers to soothe their longing by recreating the emotion they felt when playing with their family members in the past. When asked about the emotion they feel when (re-)engaging with a particular retro FPS game, one of the respondents showed a clear example of nostalgic play: “Sometimes I’ll tear up thinking of those days spending time with my dad”.

Additionally, engaging in retro video games with one’s parent could also link back to the characteristics of the retro (FPS) gamer, especially since this particular topic is not present in the

existing literature on the modern-day gamer. Some of the participants have even presented playing retro FPS games as a form of ‘inheritance’ that they have received from their families: “DOOM was part of my upbringing by watching my family playing it”. This indicates that perhaps many retro (FPS) gamers have taken up gaming due to the direct influence of their parents which may have subsequently shaped their video gaming preferences and their identity as a gamer. This particular finding builds upon the research topic of the gamer identity and presents valuable insights into the potential characteristics of the retro (FPS) gamer.

4.3.2 Escapism

The rest of the participants who shared that playing retro FPS games evokes a sort of feeling in them and stimulates them to continue playing indicated a motivation for escapism, either from a particular situation or from the burdens of contemporary life. The most common answer in this category was related to playing in order to feel a sense of security. Many expressed the need to “escape” or even be distracted from “whatever is going on in the world” currently. Furthermore, some of the respondents shared that being familiar with the game itself provides them with comfort and helps them relax. Thus, one of the participants shared that an advantage of retro FPS games is: “familiarity and the ability to know exactly what I’m getting myself into”. This motivation is closely linked to the phenomenon of overall retro consumption among the younger generations (Brown, 2018; Brown et al., 2003; Brunk et al., 2018). Since modern-day society undergoes constant rapid developments and trends, young consumers are seeking out products that are stable and timeless (Ahlberg, 2021) which is something that retro games can provide.

Other participants expressed that playing retro FPS games brings them a sense of “enjoyment” which acts as a quick stress relief mechanism. They are motivated by the simple fun that the retro FPS games provide and feel the need to continue playing simply to “waste a bit of time”. As aforementioned, retro FPS games provide simple graphics, level design and overall gameplay which is another reason for those respondents to reach for them when in need of a quick distraction: “easy to pick up and put down thanks to easy gameplay mechanics and quick saves”. Referring back to the theoretical chapter, studies have indicated enjoyment as one of the main motivators for playing FPS games (Bonny & Castaneda, 2022; Jansz & Tans, 2007). In accordance with the survey data, the feeling of enjoyment from playing retro FPS games is further strengthened by the simplicity of the game design and the opportunity to retain one’s progress through a “quick save” button.

Another benefit of the lower-quality graphics as stated by the participants is that they create a much more “unrealistic” and therefore, “magical” world which makes it easier to escape reality and immerse oneself in the game. Many of the participants have shown their discontent with the excessively realistic storylines and characters of modern FPS games. The high-quality graphics and hyper-realistic game characters with their own back stories and embedded personalities pose a challenge for the players to “escape” and instead introduce them to yet another stressful reality:

there was a shift to games becoming more grounded in reality. Gone are the days of action heroes [...] blowing away monsters with guns the size of small cars, now you have a rifle in one hand, pistol in the other and you have to fight like a vulnerable soldier, not an overblown action hero.

In addition, the appreciation for lower resolution graphics in video games has stimulated some participants to explore certain newly developed games which have been heavily inspired by the visuals and mechanisms of the older FPS games: “the lower polygon count really draws me in, which is why I also like retro-looking modern FPSs, such as *Dusk*, *Amid Evil*, *HROT*, *Ion fury* etc”. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, existing literature on retro consumption indicates the need and want of younger people to escape contemporary society and immerse themselves in a romanticized version of the past (Brown, 2001; Olsson & Höglund, 2019). This explains the appeal of the unrealistic graphics for the respondents with the help of which they are not only experiencing a product of the past but are also becoming part of an imaginary world which brings “an atmosphere and a refreshing positive effects” (Olsson & Höglund, 2019).

4.4 Summary of the analysis

The analysis indicated three main categories of gratifications received by Generation Z by engaging with retro FPS games, including enhancing one’s status as a gamer, resisting the modern gaming industry and its practices and seeking to elicit, soothe or suppress a specific emotion. As continuously highlighted in this chapter, the three themes confirm the existing research conducted on the motivations for retro gaming, as well as for overall retro consumption. Furthermore, the results reveal the meaning-making of Generation Z of their retro gaming habits which subsequently helps “dissect” the identity of the retro FPS gamer.

5. Conclusion

The reasons for the rising popularity of retro products and services have been and continue to be studied by many researchers both in terms of the rise of general retro consumption (Brown, 2018; Brown et al., 2003; Brunk et al., 2018), as well as more specific practices, such as retro-style marketing (Ahlberg, 2021; Brown et al., 2003), the emergence of new retro-style brands (Hemetsberger et al., 2011; Olsson & Höglund, 2019), retro gaming (Newman, 2004; Redhead Ahm, 2021; Souminen, 2008), as well as many other retro-related categories. Subsequently, the aim of this study was to gain a better insight into the retro gaming phenomenon, namely explore in-depth the habits of Generation Z gamers and find out what motivates them to engage with older FPS games despite the abundance of newly developed, more technologically advanced games. More precisely, the study was interested in the needs and wants of the Generation Z gamers and subsequently the benefits that they derive from playing retro FPS games. During the analysis of the data collected from the online survey three major categories of motivators for playing retro FPS games were identified: gamer identity, resistance towards the modern gaming industry and emotional response. Furthermore, what the respondents' answers clearly indicated is that despite the newly released, more technologically advanced video games, retro (FPS) games continue to be highly appreciated, played and sometimes even preferred by many young people within the Generation Z age group.

5.1 Key findings and implications:

As aforementioned, three major themes emerged from the thorough analysis of the results. In combination with the subjects discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, an in-depth answer could be provided to the research question at hand. Firstly, the participants revealed a necessity to gain a gamer status through playing retro FPS games. In accordance with the results, this gamer status is maintained through partaking in three different activities which are closely linked to a gamer's identity. The first one includes improvement of one's gaming abilities, such as hand-to-eye coordination, strategical thinking or problem-solving which are skills that respondents often feel could be transferred to real-life situations. This particular gratification is reminiscent of existing research on general gaming motivations, such as the studies done by Shaw (2013) and Kuss et al., (2022). The second aspect identified as important to a gamer's identity is one's belonging to a gaming community. The participants' answers indicated that even though being a member of a retro gaming community, such as a modding community adds 'status' to one's gamer identity, in comparison to existing research on modern-day gaming (Shaw, 2013), the respondents' motivations to express their belonging is not achieved through spending resources but rather through participating in an exchange of free community-made content. Finally, the survey results conveyed historical play as the third aspect adding to one's gamer status and therefore, building upon their gamer identity. Participants revealed that by playing a retro FPS game they gain experience with the genre and thus become more knowledgeable which could be considered a point of differentiation between them and other gamers.

Although the relationship between historical play and gamer identity is not indicated in existing theory, both concepts have been researched in relation to retro gaming as well as overall gaming motivations, respectively. While engaging in historical play connects back to studies done by Newman (2004), gaining better skills and knowledge of a game and thus improving your gamer reputation is reminiscent of research done by Shaw (2013). Furthermore, this finding not only helps in answering the proposed research question, but it also sets the ground for further research on the gamer identity, and more particularly research on the characteristics of the retro (FPS) gamer.

Another significant finding in this research was the motivation of the participants to play retro FPS games as an effect of the modern gaming industry's disenchantment. The respondents showed evident dislike for newly developed games on account of their hyper-realistic nature and their overwhelmingly lengthy storylines. On the other hand, they showed their appreciation for the simplicity of retro FPS games, both in terms of their design and the overall game mechanisms which was a clear motivator for them to engage with these games. This particular motivation is somewhat present in existing research on retro gaming by Redhead Ahm (2021) where participants showed resistance towards any remakes of traditional retro games due to the loss of the classical appeal of the game. Nonetheless, some of the participants showed an evident contentment with some of the retro-inspired newly developed FPS games which offer the same simplicity in gameplay as traditional FPS games. Additionally, the results conveyed an evident preference for the single-player nature of retro FPS games over the multiplayer approach of modern-day games from the same genre. In addition to being discontent with the newly developed (FPS) games, the respondents indicated their disapproval of the modern gaming industry practices as another factor for their engagement with retro FPS games and thus, disengagement with modern games. The commodification of the industry and the constant need for gaming companies to profit off of loyal gaming fans is a significant reason for the disenchantment of the contemporary gaming market. Modern gaming companies often release games that urge players to invest in additional software which makes the games less accessible to the greater public and to gamers with less financial resources. Thus, the respondents refuse to become involved in and support the current gaming industry practices. This evident resistance towards any modern gaming industry methods is consistent with the literature on the overall motivations for retro consumption among the younger generations (Brown, 1999, 2018; Higson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015; Reynolds, 2011; Routledge, 2015).

The participants' answers revealed another major motivator for partaking in the retro gaming phenomenon: a need to elicit or soothe a specific emotion. As discussed in existing studies, nostalgia is a vital factor in playing retro games (Heineman, 2014; Wult et al., 2018) which this research re-confirms. Many of the participants have fond memories of being introduced to a particular retro FPS game by a friend or a family member, as well as playing the game together with them. Thus, through (re)-playing that FPS game, the respondents aim to recreate their past experiences and soothe their feeling of nostalgia. Another motivation related to nostalgia was the desire of certain participants to

play retro FPS games as a form of reflection upon the past before the commercialization of the industry. These nostalgia-steeped motivations confirm the existing theory of “restorative” and “reflective” modes of playing retro video games (Boym, 2007). Additionally, the participants indicated the use of retro FPS games as an escape mechanism. Due to the stress induced by contemporary society, in which technology has allowed for everyone to be reached whenever and wherever the respondents are searching for an alternate sense of space where they can feel a sense of security and relief. Thus, immersing oneself in a fantasy world of monsters and heroes is a coping mechanism used by the participants in the survey to relieve stress and escape from the burdens of contemporary society. In accordance with the collected data, the fantasy feel is further strengthened by the surrealistic graphics of the retro FPS games. This is another motivation reminiscent of literature on the overall retro consumption trend among younger people (Ahlberg, 2021).

5.2 Research limitations

Similarly to any other study, this research came across some limitations which must be recognized in order to provide a thorough and transparent evaluation of the results. Firstly, since the online survey was distributed solely on two online community platforms, Reddit and Discord, this might have prevented the survey from reaching a larger number of participants. Future studies, conducted over a longer period of time could ensure the distribution of the online survey on additional platforms in order to reach maximum generalizability. Furthermore, some of the online communities on the two respective platforms which were used for the purpose of this research had rules restricting the publication of any survey-related posts. This community regulation might have prevented the research from gathering further data from participants that might have fitted the requirements for the study. Another possible limitation is the imbalance between male and female participants. The groups where the survey announcement was posted might have been significantly male-dominated which could be a reason for the lower number of female participants. In order to avoid this in future studies, it could be helpful to search for any female online gaming communities or even conduct in-depth interviews in order to have higher control over the selection of the participants.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

Based on the findings of this thesis, several recommendations for further research could be suggested. Firstly, the survey data showed a tendency among some participants for having played or continuing to play video games with their parents which was also a major motivator for conducting this study. Further research could explore in-depth the motivations of parents and their children for engaging with video games together through conducting in-depth interviews with both parties. This will better the understanding of the meaning-making process of the participants and the benefits that they derive from this practice. In addition, it can help examine the effect of a parent’s influence on their children’s video gaming habits and thus, the construction of their gamer identity. Additionally,

the survey data analysis conveyed an interest among certain participants in playing newly developed video games with retro aesthetics. Therefore, the gratifications sought and received through this practice could be further explored through in-depth interviews with gamers who engage in similar retro-inspired games. Finally, in order to build upon the significant findings of this research on the retro (FPS) gamer identity, a further study on the same topic is suggested. This study could investigate the individual characteristics and preferences of people who engage with retro FPS games or any other type of retro games, and examine the goals that they achieve through engaging with those games. Additionally, the findings on the retro (FPS) gamer identity provided by this thesis offer a ground for an in-depth exploration of historical play as not only a characteristic of the retro FPS gamer but also as a potential part of the overall retro gamer identity. This could be achieved through in-depth interviews with gamers who engage in retro gaming with the intention of critically evaluating the game at hand.

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Ludography

3D Realms (1997). Shadow Warrior. GT Interactive

3D Realms Entertainment ApS (1991). Duke Nukem. 3D Realms Entertainment ApS.

Blazing Bit Games (2019). Nightmare Reaper. Blazing Bit Games.

Bounding Box Software (2022). Prodeus. Humble Games.

Infinity Ward (2022). Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II. Activision.

id Software (1992). DOOM. id Software.

id Software (1992). Wolfenstein 3D. 3D Realms Entertainment ApS.

id Software (1996). Quake. GT Interactive.

Szymanski D. (2018). Dusk. New Blood Interactive.

Lebling, D. (1974). Maze War.

Appendices

Appendix A. The online survey

Dear participants,

As part of my master thesis project I am conducting a research survey. The aim of this survey is to gather information regarding the motivations of people who fall within the Gen Z category to play retro First-Person Shooter (FPS) games. The survey is anonymous and your responses will be kept confidential. No personal information will be collected, and your privacy will be fully respected throughout the study. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any point. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, and your participation will be greatly appreciated. Your responses will contribute to the better understanding of the retro gaming phenomenon and will help inform further research in this field.

Thank you in advance for time and participation.

Q1. Please select your age group.

- Under 18
- 18-28
- Older than 28

Q2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/Third-gender
- Prefer not to say

Q3. Which video game genre(s) do you play?

- Action Games (including FPS, Fighting and Platformers)
- Adventure Games (including Action-Adventure)
- Role-Playing Games (including MMORPGs)
- Strategy Games (including RTS and TBS)
- Simulation Games (including Sport, Life, and Management Sims)
- Other. Please specify.

Q4. What benefits or experiences do you derive from playing video games? Please elaborate.

As defined by Newman (2004) retro games include any game developed between 1970s – late 1990s. Example of such games are [Wolfenstein 3D](#), [Doom \(Classic\)](#), etc. However, for the purpose of this research, retro game could be defined as any game perceived as old by the participant in the survey.

Q5. What is your definition of the term "retro games" (e.g. year of development, types of genre, video game titles)?

Q6. Do you have any experience with retro FPS games such as [Wolfenstein 3D](#), [Doom \(Classic\)](#), [Duke Nukem 3D](#), [Quake](#) or any other game within this category? Please elaborate.

Q7. What is it about retro FPS games that draws your interest? Please elaborate.

Q8. How often do you play retro FPS games?

For the following sequence of questions please provide your answers based on the retro FPS game that you are currently playing or have previously played.

Q9. Why have you chosen to play this/these particular game(s) despite the abundance of newly developed video games with higher quality?

Q10. Is there a specific memory or story related to playing this/these particular retro FPS game(s) that you would like to share?

Q11. Does playing this game provoke any type of feeling or emotions in you? Please elaborate.


Q12. Do you replay this/these game(s)? If yes, what is the reason for you to replay them? Please elaborate.

Q13. Besides the difference in graphics between new and retro FPS games, are there any other differences that you can identify?

Q14. Is there any type of quality or characteristics that retro games have that the newly developed video games lack?

Q15. Would you consider yourself a retro gamer and why?

Appendix B. Call for participants

 **r/Wolfenstein** · Posted by [u/VS_6434](#) 1 month ago

18 **Academic Survey on First-Person Shooter Retro Games, such as Wolfenstein 3D, Doom Classic, Duke Nukem, etc. (adults aged 18-28)**

[Wolfenstein 3D](#)


Hey everyone,

I'm currently working on a master thesis project about retro First-person shooter games and I'm looking for participants to take part in a survey. Specifically, I'm interested in hearing from Gen Z individuals (born from 1995 onwards and above 18) who currently play retro FPS games. The survey aims to better understand the motivations, preferences, and experiences of players of retro FPS games.


The questions in this survey are open-ended and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you fit this criteria and are interested in taking part in this survey, I would greatly appreciate your participation!

https://erasmusuniversity.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bgBc91rP8iPjbcG

Thank you in advance! :)

 **r/Wolfenstein**

A community for Wolfenstein fans.

 Created Jan 16, 2012

32.3k Members **54** Online

Joined

COMMUNITY OPTIONS

r/Wolfenstein Rules

Appendix C. Codebook

Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
Gamer identity	<p>Interpersonal skills</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of motivation for skill improvements, such as problem-solving skills, game mapping, etc.</i></p>	<p>Puzzle-solving; Problem-solving; Strategic thinking; Memorization; Technical knowledge; Reflexes</p>
	<p>Historical play</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of motivation for learning more about a game's background, history, etc.</i></p>	<p>Observing the roots of modern FPS games; Learning more about the history/culture of the genre; Observing the influence of retro games on modern games; Observing the game's design and aesthetic</p>
	<p>Gaming Community</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of motivation for joining a particular gaming community or making use of community-created content.</i></p>	<p>Interacting with a gaming community; Bonding with gamers, interested in the same game; Playing a game with friends/relatives; Making new friends or maintaining previous friendships through gaming; Creating game mods for or making use of game mods from modding communities</p>
Modern gaming industry disenchantment	<p>Game-specific differences</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of differences in video game features between old and modern FPS games, such as storyline, sound effect, etc.</i></p>	<p>Aesthetic; Level design; Dynamics; Simplicity of game design; Creativity of game developers; Single-player vs multiplayer</p>
	<p>Industry-specific differences</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of differences between the gaming industry before and now.</i></p>	<p>Additional hardware required for newly developed games (consoles; controllers; etc.); Price of product; Ease of accessibility to the game; Paid content within the game (extensions, add-ons, etc.)</p>
Emotional response	<p>Nostalgia</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of motivation for archiving a specific emotional state, such as reminiscing about the past of recreating a past situation.</i></p>	<p>Feeling nostalgic about a particular situation; Feeling nostalgia about the past itself (experiencing the past through the lens of retro gamers and developers)</p>
	<p>Escapism</p> <p><i>This code includes any mentions of motivation for escaping reality, such as immersion in a fantasy world, or relieving stress.</i></p>	<p>Having fun; wasting time; Releasing stress; Feeling a sense of security; Being enchanted by the graphics/aesthetics of the game; Immersing oneself in a fantasy world</p>