The new gatekeepers: The occupational ideology of game journalism

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ABSTRACT
This paper will contextualize the occupational ideology of game journalism by providing a brief introduction to the political economy of game publications. The role of various industry actors (e.g. game publishers, PR agents and brand managers) will be positioned against those of the peripheral industry (e.g. critics, journalists, and editors). Because the game industry is the principal advertiser for many game publications, and because of its tight grip on the most valuable source material, i.e. (early) access to games and restricted insider information, the job of a game journalist consists in many ways of balancing acts between a perceived loyalty to the reading public and a dependency on industry material.

Author Keywords
Game journalism, game capital, political economy, game industry

SITUATING GAME JOURNALISM

Game journalism has a history of almost thirty years, and in that time the evolution of the gaming press has followed the progression of the culture of gaming from a geeky subculture to the exponentially growing, mass-market video game industry we know today. The first game magazines, such as Computer & Video Games (UK) and Electronic Games (USA), got in business in 1981, and in addition to game news and gameplay tips they also featured articles on programming and hardware maintenance [17]. It was not until the late 1980s, however, that the print magazines managed to identify and shape a distinctive market niche whose needs they would cater to -- the power gamer [8]. Magazines like Nintendo Power easily reached popularity in their approachable way of dealing with game capital; since Nintendo was the largest game console manufacturer and software supplier, it could provide the gamers with exactly the kind of information and news they were craving for. It seems that the game industry's intermingling with game magazines has been rather systematic from the beginning.

On the basis of game studies literature and game-centric popular discourses, "game journalism" appears as a rather difficult pairing of words. It is accused of having problems pertaining to its contents and form, its organisational structure, as well as its ethics [e.g. 21]. Yet, game magazines and online sites are avidly read by game players, and new game releases typically arouse wide interest and debates on the Internet. Even though game magazines effectively are, as game journalist Kieron Gillen puts it, buying guides that offer mainly previews and reviews of forthcoming games, at the same time they often function as important promoters of online gamer communities [18]. Game magazines also act as platforms for negotiating gamer identity and shared value systems.

In this paper, we will bring up two sets of questions with which we aim to 1) situate game journalism in the scope of other journalisms and public discourses, and 2) analyse the basic operating principles that make game journalism indispensable to gamers, but possibly ridden with deep ethical problems in the wider context of the media industry. Therefore, we want to ask; how is game journalism situated in between its readers and the game industry, allegedly mediating the value systems of both? Also, we are interested in finding out, what kind of discourses characterize the scope of game journalism - its "occupational ideology" -, and how are these maintained and negotiated in the networked public sphere? Although our work is not focused on the practicalities of game journalism, we will briefly discuss issues such as print media versus online websites and portals, as a backdrop of our theoretical extrapolation.

According to a number of studies [e.g. 25, 27], the gamer culture tends to be highly male-oriented. It should come as no surprise then that the typical game journalist is unquestionably regarded as a 20-30-year-old man who feels passionately about games. Similar to those developing games [10], the employment of game journalists is often highly precarious. For example, it is not uncommon for major Dutch online game news portals to have young guys working for free on high profile features and reviews. Conversely, their work is supported by a small team of paid

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professionals such as an editor, a sales manager and a media controller whose work apparently cannot be outsourced to young enthusiasts.

From the perspective of those in the game industry the work of a game journalist -- for example, writing and publishing a game preview for a widely read website or magazine -- is a crucial piece of free publicity. However, there are a lot of costs associated with wooing game journalists, i.e the ubiquitous free games, sending out debug consoles, organizing press trips, and doling out "swag" (promotional material). To contextualize the occupational ideology of game journalists that we set out to investigate in this paper, we will provide a background of the political economy of game publications. Our focus will be on those who can straightforwardly be considered game journalists (or critics); people who are usually full-time, professionally involved in the dissemination of game-related news and analyses in magazines and newspapers, as well as blogs and news portals on the internet. As offline and online forms of media are in the process of converging – the printed press have their respective websites which host podcasts, videos, news feeds and feature articles, and online zines can often be printed out as .pdf's – it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the different outlets. To an extent, game journalism is non-specific to the medium, and that is why we have chosen to not talk about individual dissemination channels here separately.

Studying something like game journalism without extensive empirical survey material or databases is a demanding task. This paper is an attempt to outline some of what we think are the most pressing issues with the subject at hand. It is not an inclusive take on game journalism but rather a theoretically-inclined conversation piece that is meant to spark future research on the topic. Our viewpoint is based on textual analysis of game-oriented magazines and websites, as well as participatory observation, since we have both worked in game journalism. Also, we draw on formal and informal interviews with colleagues, marketing and PR representatives, editors, and staffers from game publishers. This text makes reference mainly to European game journalism, with a special emphasis on the Dutch, Nordic, and German-speaking media.1

The foundations and the status quo of game journalism

Whereas traditional print journalism in general seems to be in crisis (in terms of identity, economy, and it losing its once-hegemonic power), specialized fields such as game journalism, if only in terms of output, are booming in comparison [e.g. 29]. Game magazines along with other game publications in newspapers and online, such as news portals, blogs and podcasts continue to attract wide audiences, effectively disseminate news stories and other information, and foster heated debates. Game journalism is adaptable and versatile: it operates rather smoothly on the internet, and, while print is struggling and subscriptions and advertisement revenues are dwindling, the offline market is still competitive and new magazines (e.g. Nintendo Wii focused projects) are launched every so often. At the same time, the advent of affordable Internet publishing opportunities, Web 2.0 applications in particular, is regarded to disrupt the expertise-based and hierarchically structured positions of the traditional print journalist. The expansion of non-specialist texts online (blogs, fan forums, podcasts, etc.) has engulfed traditional (news) journalism in a place where neither its producers nor its consumers are happy.

Even though game magazines and webzines continue to attract a rather sizable reader-base, game journalism has been bashed by both its practitioners and its readers. Reviewers and active online discussants [5, 6, 9, 31], as well as more analytically minded debaters, have been criticizing their fellow game journalists for their use of language, inconsistencies in style, and their inability to contextualize single games in larger settings. According to Zagal, Ladd, and Johnson, game journalism is so concentrated on reviews that news, investigative reporting and any other forms of analytical writing are often overshadowed by them [37]. This observation holds true especially for all the continental European game journalism we have been looking into, where the review/preview structure is the bread and butter of the majority of game publications; with very few exceptions, there is no culture of historically and critically informed game journalism to speak off. Mia Consalvo has similarly been disparaging game journalism for its lack of critique and its often rather blatant commercial ties that have considerably shaped the arena, in some cases for as long as decades [8].

The core principles of journalism generally speaking therefore do not seem to be on a par with how game journalism works in practice. The discrepancy is sometimes considered to be so major that game critics refuse to refer to themselves as "journalists", and some prefer to talk about "game writing" instead of game journalism [35], whereas others label themselves as "game critics" to steer away from the more rigid understanding of journalism as an objective realm free from external (i.e. industry) influences. To signal a clear break with news journalism, Carlson speaks of the "enthusiast gaming press", a notion which emphasizes the close relationship game journalism holds relative to game fandom [7].

There have also been attempts to distinguish the field of (game) reviews from the expectations the word "journalism" brings about altogether. Gemser et al. discuss the work of film critics, a practice which they call

"evaluative journalism" [16]. Martin Eide and Graham Knight aim to draw attention to the "functional" aspects of journalism in the daily life, to the practices they call "service journalism" -- a term that could perhaps be applied to our analytic framework as well [13]. The problem with these kinds of confined "journalisms" is that they may still leave the vague idea of proper journalism too intact and unproblematized. Therefore, despite efforts to rebrand game journalism as "new", "enthusiast", or to adopt concepts like "evaluative" or "service" journalism, we prefer to use the broader and more neutral notion of game journalism in this research in order to position game journalism within the wider set of practices associated with general journalism.

In an attempt to bring game journalism closer to the area of traditional journalism and as a response to the criticism that game reviews fail to contextualize individual games or meaningfully explain the playing experience to readers, an attempt to drastically revamp game journalism was made and named "New Game Journalism" [18].2

New Game Journalism is considered especially important as it goes beyond the technical barrier by dismissing the consideration of what games consist of, and instead focusing on the connections between technology and the player's experience [31]. Generally speaking, it seems plausible that game journalism both shares some common ground with other (more traditional) forms of journalism, while it at the same time differs from them. We think it is also crucial to keep in mind that despite the recurrent claims of its dubious take on issues such as journalistic integrity, game journalism takes part in the constitution of gaming communities in several important ways. Also, many gamers seem to be happy with their specialist niche magazines that are allegedly edited by "fanboys" and not by proper journalists; in fact, some even seem to think this is the ideal situation.

How has game journalism been able to secure and solidify its position while most of the other branches of journalism are undergoing identity crisis and financial hardship while rapidly losing ground to various online outlets? Our point of departure for addressing this question is Mia Consalvo's argument that game journalism is effectively acting as an indispensable mediator between the game industry and game players [8]. In fact, it has been argued that game journalism has secured its position in relation to both of the parties in such a way that it is on the way of liberating itself from the expectations of either of the two. Game journalists in this sense do not merely act as the mediators of value, but they are important instigators and arbiters of the common value system that has come to characterize the expanding field of games and gameplay [7].

A key notion to understanding this in-betweenness of game journalism is what Consalvo calls "game capital", a notion derived from Pierre Bourdieu's work on social capital [8]. Game capital is a fluid and always changing currency held by those who have gained knowledge and information about games and game culture and are able to voice their opinions or relate their experiences to others. Game capital can also be commodified, for example in the form of strategy guides. More importantly, game capital holds significant (monetary) value for game journalists. It is the game journalist who doles out game capital by telling gamers what to play, how, and why. Yet, we will argue that the game industry is indispensable for game journalists to be able to accrue the most valuable pieces of game capital. In the end it is the game publisher who grants a game journalist access to the often exclusive information nobody else has, thereby leveraging the journalist's prescribed use of game capital, while at the same time regulating and holding power over those who receive it.

However trivial the rather inwards-looking discourse on the workings of game journalism may at first seem, it is our belief that game journalism – and the communities that feed on it – still makes a significant difference in a gamer's life. If we take it seriously that journalism, in general, should provide a public forum for criticism as well as interesting and relevant discussions, and that it should act as an independent monitor of power, obliged to the truth and loyal foremost to its audiences [e.g. 28], we may begin to analyse how the practices of game journalism actually fit in with these criteria. After all, a lot we in academia know about games is brought to us by game journalists, fans, and industry insiders who publish magazines, write essay-length rants on message boards, and operate blogs. As of yet, the majority of research questions in game studies do not consider this part of game culture in any profound way, as major themes in academia have mainly been rather formalist ("what is a game?") or situationist ("who plays games and what does that mean?") in nature [e.g. 12]. If one considers the game industry to be young and growing, as many do, game journalism is still in its infancy. Furthermore, studies on game journalism are still in embryo.

The audience commodity revisited

The academic discourse of journalism has been concentrated on issues such as democratic principles, objectivity, and journalistic cultures. While there have been political economy approaches towards journalism [e.g. 22, 29], they have tended to receive less attention. The fate of game journalism, however, is invariably bound with that of the game industry. Traditionally, print media has been financed through collecting subscription fees and advertisement revenue. In the age of concentration in media

ownership, publishing houses have also been building up various kinds of cross-media linkages to promote the products of other subsidiaries and affiliated companies [2]. As subscription rates are generally declining, a business model which relies heavily on advertisement earnings has been gaining prominence in the last decade -- despite the fact that with the rise of the Internet, the advertisement revenue cake is to be shared with more eaters than before.

The transition from print magazines and newspaper sections to print publishers building up their own game-themed websites has not been too smooth, though. The situation in the European market mirrors what happened in the USA already a few years ago – paper publishers trying to get to grips with the Internet, learning how to host fan communities, and trying to make a financial success of print and online publishing concurrently. This is the result of established publishers having been forced to basically "cannibalize" their print business by "attracting marketing spend away from magazines by investing in websites" [15] while giving up on the the business model that made them successful in the first place (i.e. subscriptions and advertising). Some game websites, like Eurogamer and 1up.com, have done the transition successfully, but most of the traditional print publishers are struggling. With the sales decreasing, print newspapers and magazines have been forced to look out for new outlets, and many have tried building a presence on the Internet, only with a very different economic model (low dissemination but higher maintenance and moderation costs, and less advertising revenue). The same has happened with game magazines, but at least so far it looks like game-themed websites in general still manage to keep the finances in check.

Parallel to the trend of game journalism going online is the further commodification of news in general. For decades, media publishing operated under a capitalist logic where surplus value was extracted by selling physical goods such as magazines and newspapers. This changed when journalism, and this goes for game journalism as well, moved away from subscription-based revenue models. We would argue that understanding game journalism requires having a rudimentary idea of the ways in which power is regulated among the game industry (i.e. game publishers), game journalists, and the reading public.

In an exemplary piece of investigative reporting, Gamasutra contributors Ashley and Elliot talk about access to game industry assets and advertisement as two ways (i.e. the use of "the carrot and the stick") in which game publishers are able to exert considerable control over game journalists [1]. We would argue that the game industry holds power over journalists by being the primary originator of game capital. The "carrot" used to foster greater industry-dependence is exclusive access. In practice it is hard, if not impossible to gain access to original material for a story or (p)review before competitors do, without the support of a game publisher. The "stick", then, is the often used practice of blackballing; i.e. withdrawing, or at least threatening to withdraw, valuable advertisement investment away from game publications.

Referring to the mainstream news journalism, Jason Klein, CEO of Newspaper National Network, suggests: "The core of journalism is unbiased news coverage. (...). There is not a lot of money, unfortunately, in unbiased journalism. Advertisers tend not to like that as an advertising environment" [26]. Here, Klein hits the hammer on the head by linking the political economy of journalism to its content. Unbiased news is a costly commodity. Not only do news organizations have to pay for quality coverage by hiring skilled professionals, critical journalism is more likely to offend advertisers. This is particularly true for game journalism where a critical approach towards the dealings of game publishers, its often middle-of-the-road content, or just the practice of reviewing itself can be seen, by game publishers, as a reason to pull the plug on a big advertisement campaign. Consider, for example, an average working day for a Dutch game journalist. Dennis Mons, game journalist for the Dutch free newspaper Spits, twitters: "Colleague got a phonecall from the PR company of Harry Potter DS game because she gave it 2/5. That shit needs to stop! Shit is SHIT!!" [32].

Let us elaborate here on the use of the stick and explain how audiences are a key commodity for game journalists and game publishers alike. Game journalists are part of a triad linking them to audiences and advertisers who together have a mutually beneficial relationship [33]. Similar to television audiences sold as commodities to advertisers [34], the readers of game magazines, newspaper pages dedicated to games, blogs and dedicated news websites, are turned into a commodity and sold to advertisers, the majority of them being game publishers and game hardware manufacturers. While there are advertisers outside the media industry such as fast food chains, car brands or the military, the majority of advertisements in game magazines are for (upcoming) games and are, obviously, paid for by the industry which journalists cover.3

As Fiske explains, in the political economy of television, programmes are not so much sold to audiences, but revenues are maximized by having specific targetable, and thus sellable, audiences [14]. The television model ensures a certain level of objectivity, or at least a certain level of independence from advertisers, as there is no direct link between an advertised product and the content of a show. For example, a deodorant sponsor might advertise heavily

on popular talent shows. Both parties (advertisers and TV show producers) would never have a conflict of interest such as a jury member continuously talking about a candidate's smelly body odor because of her ineffective deodorant.

In game journalism, publicity is the primary asset game journalists have on their side. As Paul Hirsch explains: "The mass media constitute the institutional subsystem of the cultural industry system. The diffusion of particular fads and fashions is either blocked or facilitated at this strategic checkpoint" [24]. In theory a game magazine should be able to "make or break" a game. Or, in a rare case of investigative reporting, a journalist could reveal pricing strategies, upcoming titles, long term company strategies, or could be an instigator of debates on widely ignored issues in game culture. For long, journalists and critics were said to leverage considerable power in an industry with "marginally differentiated products" . The critic was clearly an actor operating outside industry constraints: "Widely shared social norms mandate the independence of book-review editors, radio-station personnel, film critics, and other arbiters of coverage from the special needs and commercial interests of cultural organizations" [24]. Times have clearly changed as game journalism derives its primary source of revenue from the game industry.

For game journalism, the audience commodity as a source of revenue is growing as users increasingly move to an online environment where a transaction-based model of news consumption is not common. It is not very likely that anyone will pay to get their news online. On the other hand, a Finnish game journalist suggested recently in an interview that a prominent way of financing the online activities of a traditional print game magazine would be bundling the magazine subscription and restricted online access into one package that the readers would pay for -- this way, they would not only pay for the in-depth print material or the early access to news and previews online, but also for the entry to the dedicated gamers' discussion boards and other forums. What makes this competition for advertisement market shares even tighter is the recent rise of free newspapers (e.g. Metro) with their games sections, and free game magazines (e.g. the Northern European Game Reactor published in five languages) which can be picked up at game stores or are (inexpensively) delivered to their subscribers. Both of these (print) formats derive their income solely via advertising.

As said, the potential problem, or conflict of interests that arises here is that advertisements in game media are primarily paid for by game publishers. In addition to proper advertisements, there are other forms of publicity, promotions and PR that figure in the political-economic radar of our research. More subtle examples abound; for instance, some magazines trade their covers for exclusive access to game studios or developers. Negotiations like these involve publishers "asking" for a certain amount of coverage (e.g. four pages instead of two) or a preferred journalist to write the story in question.4 Also, online game magazines frequently host direct links to the products (games) that they are reviewing. Or, external providers advertise their game-related services and products side by side with the content that is supposed to be strictly journalistic. All of the practices listed here are examples of activities that undermine journalistic integrity and neutrality, arguably leading to an attitude of "do not bite the hand that feeds you".

Regulating access

On the basis of the advertising dilemma it is arguable that the game industry is in every way the dominant party in the industry-media relationship. Publishers wield considerable power by strategically deploying valuable assets: in addition to the advertising revenue question dealt with previously, there is another way of exerting control -- supervising the access to limited information, such as game preview materials, release dates, or behind-closed-doors sessions at trade shows such as E3 or the Tokyo Game Show. Because of the game industry's tight grip on the most valuable source of game capital, i.e. (early) access to games and restricted insider information, the job of a game journalist consists in many ways of balancing acts between a perceived loyalty to the reading public and a strong dependency on industry material.

In the age of abundance, for a game journalist to be an arbiter of game capital means having unique knowledge and effective means of dissemination only a limited number of people are allowed to possess. Ironically, while there may be growing diversity in terms of output - the rise of blogs, websites, podcasts et cetera -, the number of outlets writing about games with outstanding game capital are scarce. To become a successful game journalist is a constant struggle to get access to restricted information about upcoming games before anyone else does. Furthermore, in order to gain access to the artificially scarce resources, a journalist has to willfully subject to the industry's rules of engagement; there are, for example, embargoes, questions that are not allowed during press briefings or junkets, and unwritten rules of not slamming games in previews.

The promise of a democratic, critical and vibrant online culture of game journalism which is an equal partner in the audience-advertiser-journalist triad, is clearly not meant to be. Game journalism is an extension, a mouthpiece if you will, of game publishers who are able to exert various form of direct and indirect control through regulating access and

advertising. While game journalists have the role of cultural mediators, their primary imperative is staying in business. By accepting and using industry-provided game capital, journalists make themselves more relevant to its audience and become gatekeepers, rather than the more communal, open and heterarchichal practice of citizen journalism [4].

All this occurs against the background of the rise of online content production platforms. Today, “we” are the media [19] and “You” are the Person of the year [20]. The rise of the information economy has been coinciding with the democratization of the means of cultural production; the physical capital (i.e. a networked PC) which is needed to write and distribute a piece of text is widely available throughout the developed world [3]. The rebalancing of power in the information economy at large has been widely regarded by scholars, journalists and pundits alike as an inherently "good thing". Or, at least a moment of opportunity to provide for an economic ecology which bends towards "more individual freedom, a more genuinely participatory political system, a critical culture, and social justice" [3]. If we look at the thousands of online community clusters which discuss, analyse and critique upcoming games, new features for a game console or an upcoming sequel, the problem of being able to voice one's opinion is clearly solved. Every gamer who wants to, can have a voice. At least online.

Even so, the rise of the information economy brings with it a set of challenges. You can put the "you" on Youtube, but you will inevitably find yourself doing so within the legal and economic techno-complex whose users may indeed be massively creative, but not solely for their own benefit or in their own terms. In the end, the notion of mass creativity is as much a business model in itself as it is a cultural signifier of a supposedly "liberated" group of users formerly known as consumers [36]. It seems to us that instead of facilitating a vibrant networked public sphere operating in its own right, game journalists (are forced to) trade in their access to game capital on the cheap. Even though there are lavish press trips and exquisite goodie bags (at best), they merely act as the non-monetary compensation for the occupational duties they are expected to perform. In this sense the work of a game journalist conforms to the "hacker" work ethic [23] according to which every job should internally motivated, resembling a joyful fulfillment of one's own potential more than conventional daywork. The paradox of the rise of the information economy is therefore that although content and the means of its distribution, as well as eager audiences are more voluminous than ever, the logic of generating income and sustaining business operations (online) are proving to be very difficult.

Added to that is the political economy of game journalism which remunerates the concentration of ownership. Game publishers prefer to work with a small set of dedicated partners, rather than thousands of individual partners. This tendency mimics wider trends in digital culture: "Indeed, to a certain extent it seems the Internet encourages the monopolistic impulse in capitalism as much as the competitive one. In industry after industry - e.g., Amazon and Google - the network effects combine with the market economics to point more toward monopoly" [29]. Game journalism today, then, is highly concentrated in terms of ownership. Leading specialty magazines in the Benelux, for example, are either published by the Dutch publisher HUB, the Finnish Sanoma or the Belgian publisher De Vrije Pers. Ownership of popular online game portals is equally concentrated. The publishing mogul Sanoma owns well frequented websites Gamer.nl and Insidegamer.nl, which both started out as the fans' labour of love and have been built on the work of enthusiastic volunteers.5

TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE OCCUPATIONAL IDEOLOGY

We hope to have established so far that game journalism makes a particularly interesting case through which to study the complex and multilayered relationship between production and consumption of media in late capitalism. As we argued in the beginning, the position of a game journalist vis-à-vis the game industry and their reading public is in principle at odds with the values of traditional journalism. The traditional "elements of journalism" include aspects like writing verifiably, independently, and truthfully about the powers that be, while adhering to swift and ethically sustainable methods of analysis [28]. These "discursively constructed ideal type elements" are internalized by journalists up to a point where traditional journalism is more of an occupational ideology – a self-selected professional identity – than obedience to a fixed set of rules [10]. The occupational ideology of game journalism, on the other hand, comprises of a very different set of elements.

The practices of game journalism are informal and adaptable, and due to the precariousness of the work conditions in the field they may also appear as rather unprofessional. It is customary for the game media (especially the free zines and websites) to employ fans and enthusiasts who are willing to submit game (p)review texts without any other compensation than perhaps the inspection copy of the title they were reviewing. As we have suggested, game journalists often need to balance their act and keep on an even keel with the pressures coming from both the game industry and their readers. The proposed preliminary outline of the occupational ideology of the modern day game journalist is therefore based on a new

conception of journalism: journalists do not aim to work as watchdogs of the establishment, but rather as mediators of the value statements that deliver game capital.

While it is easy for us to make such theoretical claims, there is still a lot we do not know about the distribution of game capital. Lacking empirical evidence on the actual effects of game reviews on their readers' purchasing preferences, we can not say much about the practical ways in which gamers actually attach value (judgements) to the work of game journalists. There is, however, a point of comparison to the work done on the impact of film reviews and how they relate to box office receipts. A distinction can be made between an influence effect of critics and a predictor effect -- the latter effect means that a critic's high praise is a prediction of higher audience attendance as opposed an instigator of audiences visiting a cinema. Analysing the Dutch film industry and film reviews in Dutch newspapers, it was found that reviews of art house movies do have an influence effect [16]. This effect is due mainly because of Dutch art house movies lacking significant marketing budgets as well as having "poor signaling properties" (e.g. forgoing famous movie stars). On the other hand, it was found that film critics writing about mainstream movies acted as predictors of box office revenue, rather than influencing consumer behavior as was the case for art house movies.

Again, as of yet it is unclear to what extent game reviews in general do have an influence effect on game sales. Following the line of reasoning by Gemser et al., the marketing budgets of game publishers in Europe are relatively small and big marketing campaigns in mainstream media outlets (TV, newspapers, online portals), are beholden to a small selection of blockbuster titles. Favourable game reviews, then, might have a influence effect for smaller indie games and less marketed titles. As the majority of games hitting the shelves are sequels to often well known franchises (e.g. FIFA 10, Grand Theft Auto 4, Call of Duty: World At War) and thus have strong signaling properties, reviews are taste validations and arguably have predictor effects rather than persuasive effects.

Again, despite the lack of evidence concerning the value of game journalism to its readers, from what we have seen it is clear that there is a continuing demand for news, assessment and critique concerning games among gamers. The excitement surrounding games-related texts is sometimes so overwhelming that one might wonder if being in the know, having access to the latest news, and being able to discuss game-related matters with peers is something as enjoyable and revered as gameplay itself. What we do know, on the other hand, is that the occupational ideology of the game journalist has not evolved beyond gatekeeping. The success of the Nintendo Wii and DS and the advent of casual gaming are likely to challenge the strong-held beliefs of gamers being 20-30-year-old males who are fanatically interested in games, but this stereotype still seems to prevail in game journalism. It is still boys writing stuff for other boys, largely paid for by the game industry and uncritically dealing with information and material that is directly provided by the industry.

ENDNOTES

1. Since there is a lack of critical writing concerning these practices, we have considered it essential to build our analysis upon the insider knowledge we have gathered from working in the field. Not many game journalists would publicly discuss the perceived (ethical) conflicts and problems with revenue models we have set out to investigate in this text.

2. New Games Journalism (NGJ) is a derivative of “New Journalism” applied to game journalism, and its focus is not on the critical review of games but rather on the reflection on the subjective experiences of the person playing the game. In NGJ, contextual information, references to other media, creative writing, and personal anecdotes are used to explore game design and play. The term was coined by Gillen in 2004 in a NGJ manifesto that was first published on the state website. (Video Game Journalism, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_game_journalism).

3. Gamers hold power over game magazines by voting with their purchasing preferences. If they do not provide the necessary "eyeballs" to be sold to advertisers (or do not take a subscription to a print magazine), there will be no audiences to be sold.

4. This is not to say that game journalists are powerless. While major publishers are able to "shop around" with access to a highly anticipated game (e.g. a Call of Duty sequel or a Starcraft 2), smaller publishers or less anticipated titles might be harder to "sell".

5. Both websites were sold at an undisclosed sum by their respective owners and up until today rely on their content for unpaid volunteers overseen by a very small group of paid professionals and a much larger group of media professionals.

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