**LAB University of Applied Sciences**

# How to create a successful video game

## Case: The Last of Us game series

**Abstract**

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Abstract

The primary objective of this thesis was to find out the elements that a successful video game has. The purpose was to understand four elements: gameplay, character development, storytelling, and marketing in the process of making a good product that contributes to developing the quality of a video game. It took The Last of Us game series as a research subject to identify and evaluate the objective.

The content of the thesis included the history of video games and the theory of the game-making process, factors, and the case study. The research approaches used in this thesis were document analysis and literature review.

The analysis demonstrates that the game's success has been sustained by constant communication with its player bases, the implementation of cutting-edge technological innovations, the adoption of the most successful elements from competing titles, and the production of consistently high-quality content. The research highlights the unique perspectives of players as opportunities for game designers.

Keywords

video game, customer experience, marketing, gameplay, storytelling

Contents

# 1   Introduction

## 1.1   Research Background

Currently, computer games are one of the most advanced new media technologies, which has increased societal interest in game development. Games provide an excellent setting for studying cognition as interaction in the social and physical environment, not just merely being a form of entertainment. (Paul & Wendy 2009, 19.) With the emergence of online games and virtual worlds, players are released from the constraints of time, space, and gravity and are able to escape the boredom of daily life (Constance 2006, 97-98). As a result, a rising number of individuals are seeking innovative and unconventional games and gaming systems in order to take advantage of the many benefits that gaming may provide outside of the typical setting (Newzoo 2018).

The gaming business has evolved dramatically over the last few decades, from the heyday of arcade machines to the development of home consoles (Stanton 2015, 43). According to Newzoo, 2021 was a record-breaking year for the gaming industry, with revenues reaching $180,3 billion. In response to the expansion of the market, firms continue to launch and invest in new and more developed games. However, not all users can be able to acquire or experience all newly-launched games. As a result, all game studios must pursue development from a different perspective, in order to thrive. Unquestionably, gamers are devoted consumers who will return to their favorite games, discuss them, and promote their online experiences. Rather than launching a new game, it is preferable to update a current game with a good player base.  With the utilization of data, organizations may now uncover customer trends and comprehend what customers really value and find difficult. (Steinkuehler 2006, 98-100.)

As gamers, they always enjoyed the sensation of being immersed in every new universe they encounter within every video game. Video games offer gamers the opportunity to delve deeper into narratives, scenarios, and characters that have altered and widened their views of the world and altered their perspective on life. Consequently, with they are constantly perplexed and interested in how the game can be so "real" and what factors contribute to its realism. This thesis studies the game series "The Last of Us" to further answer the curiosity. Below are posters of The Last of Us part I and II video game.
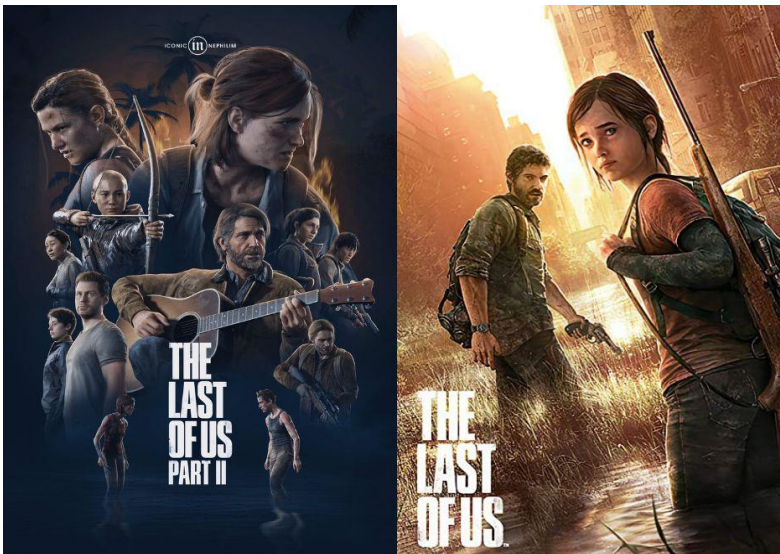
Figure 1 The poster of The Last of Us Game series (Naughty Dog)

## 1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions, and Limitations

Well-formed and clear research objectives can provide indications for the research's project purpose and direction. Research objectives are complementation that allows the writers to operate their questions and contribute steps to implement the research. Research objectives define how the research process should be structured to answer the question and accomplish the research aim. (Saunders et al. 2015, 45-46.)

The primary goal of the thesis study is to discover the elements of a successful video game. The aims are to identify and evaluate these elements in the process of making a good product in the Game industry. In addition, the other purpose is to understand deeper the methods and trends as well as the customer experience (or player-centered) factors that contribute to developing the quality of a video game.

The research question is the central theme of a research project, defining what the research is about. Research questions describe the issue they wish to study and then formulate the answer during the research process and suggestions for future purposes. (Saunders et al. 2015, 42, 45, 60.) The sub-questions answer the narrower aspect of the issue for purpose of gathering information to supply the answers to the main question.

The main research question of this thesis is:

- How to create a successful video game?

The sub-questions of this thesis are:

- What is the function of the gameplay?

- How important is storytelling to player engagement?

It is common to encounter several limitations when conducting research. This thesis aims to identify and evaluate gameplay, character design, storytelling, and marketing elements in the process of making a good product in the Game industry. However, there are other aspects and factors to consider while building a game. The research, therefore, is unlikely to cover all the elements or aspects that appear in the game design process. The research will solely cover the user experience and marketing fields.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as a structure where concepts and theories are summarized to help understand the meaning of research data during analysis and interpretation (Charles 2018, 46-47). It lays out the basis for building and supporting one's study and provides a framework for defining how they will approach the dissertation from a philosophical, epistemological, methodological, and analytic standpoint (Cynthia 2014, 12-14).

Reviewing the existing literature is the next step that comes after having developed a research topic and defining to address the research questions. Literature reviews are undertaken to inform researchers about previous publications and studies in the given issue area. (Godwill 2015, 37.)

The literature review in the thesis is related to the overall research and attempts to determine the role of elements specified inside video games. The theories part is in Chapter 2. The theoretical parts provide the Video Games process and explain the concept of Game Design that is directly connected to the elements of Chapter 3. In addition, the theoretical part will also use research about user experience, and the theory of visual attention as the foundation for the study.

## 1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

Kothari (2013, 1-2) defines research as: *The search for knowledge through objective and systematic method of finding solution to a problem is research. The systematic approach concerning generalization and the formulation of a theory is research.* The goal of this thesis is to evaluate the impact of four elements (gameplay, character design, storytelling, and marketing) on product development and to predict their future.

The primary data collection of the thesis will document analysis and company interviews. Document analysis is the systematic process of evaluating documents that necessitates the examination and interpretation of data in order to comprehend and produce empirical knowledge. As in video games, user interaction plays an important role in developing the concept and flow of the product. Because the video game experience is subjective, the thesis relies on qualitative data. The data concentrates on the social elements of the issue as well as the experiences of those who deal with it. Qualitative data about the issue can be found in the documents, as well as from other secondary sources. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010, 90-105.)

Secondary data provides concepts and descriptions that may be used to explain issues and establish relationships (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010, 37). The creation of video games involves branding, game design, marketing, and customer relationship management. A variety of contexts, including video games, are covered when applying external business and marketing theories. Additionally, secondary data explore studies and publications on the theme, aiding in a detailed understanding of the research problem.

## 1.5    Thesis Structure

The first chapter briefly describes the research background, research objectives questions, and limitations of the thesis. It also outlines the theoretical framework, research methodology, and thesis structure. The thesis structure sets the direction of the parts covered.

The second presents the theoretical part of the thesis research. Chapter 2 introduces the Video games topic: the history of video games and the theory of the conception stage and pre-production stage of making video games. The pre-production stage provides the four main elements that will be studied in the thesis. It includes Gameplay, Character Design, Storytelling, and Marketing. Chapter 3 assists in gaining fundamental understanding of the issue and contributing to the case study of The Last of Us game series in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 goes deeper in identifying and analyzing the four factors in the context of the case of The Last of Us product. It introduces the company of the game series and explains how the idea of the product is made. Come along with it, chapter 4 provides the reason The Last of Us became successful while analyzing the four elements.

After analyzing and evaluating the role of four factors, chapter 5 and 6 conduct core content, main result, and answers to the research questions. It also comes up with suggestions for further research. It provides the discussion about the future development of Video games.

## 2   Creating Video Games

### 2.1   History of Video games

This thesis will only focus on analyzing four elements that are related to the success of The Last of Us series. This provides a thorough understanding of how these elements affect the player's experiences and its outcome.

The evolution of video games is inextricably related to the progress of the computer. It started with the Tennis for Two game, which was just an invention intended to showcase new technology and computing power at first. It was the first video game created in 1958 solely for entertainment purposes. Then, in the early 1960s, Spacewar! and Pong were popularized when it was adapted to various platforms as "minicomputers". (Stanton 2015, 44-46.) These games then became an influence on the whole arcade video game industry. With time, the industry began to grow, gradually carving out its own niche within the entertainment industry. Although the sector has gained popularity over the years, major expansion has not occurred until the 21st century.



Figure 2 The SpaceWar! and Pong games

Since the first games appeared in the 1970s, video games have come a long way. It is now possible for video games to replicate reality and provide photorealistic graphics to the point of being stupendously magnificent in many circumstances. As a result of technological advancements, video games are now available for a variety of devices, each of which offers a unique experience and characteristics. Thanks to all of that, the video game industry has raised itself to be one of the biggest industries in the entertainment section. (Newzoo 2022.) The picture below demonstrates the revenue of global video games in the year 2021 and the forecast for the year 2026.

**Total global video games revenue, by segment** (US$bn)
- Social/casual gaming
- PC games
- Console games
- Integrated video games advertising

| Year | Total | Integrated advertising | Console games | PC games | Social/casual gaming |
|------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| 2017 | 120.4 | | 23.8 | 25.5 | 67.7 |
| 2018 | 139.2 | | 25.0 | 27.3 | 83.2 |
| 2019 | 162.4 | | 25.6 | 28.9 | 103.9 |
| 2020 | 196.9 | | 28.6 | 31.3 | 132.9 |
| 2021 | 214.2 | 28.3 | 33.7 | 148.0 | |
| 2022 | 235.7 | 29.2 | 35.2 | 167.0 | |
| 2023 | 257.1 | 30.0 | 36.9 | 185.8 | |
| 2024 | 278.4 | 30.6 | 38.6 | 204.7 | |
| 2025 | 299.9 | 31.1 | 40.4 | 223.8 | |
| 2026 | 321.1 | 31.5 | 42.2 | 242.7 | |

Note: 2021 is the latest available data. 2022–2026 values are forecasts.
Source: PwC's Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2022–2026, Omdia
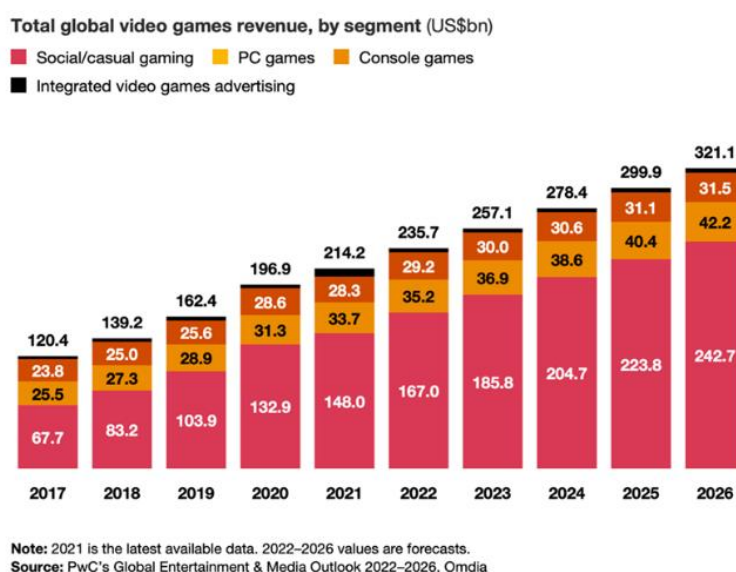
Figure 3 Global video game revenue by segment (PwC Global Entertainment
and Media Outlook)

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 provided enormous opportunities for the game industry. As a result of boredom and isolation, while being locked down, people began playing video games as a means of both entertainment and maintaining social connections. During the period 2019-2021, video game revenue increased by 32%, and by 2026 it is expected to increase by 8.4%, equivalent to $231 billion (PwC's Global Entertainment and Media Outlook). Also, according to Global Games Market, the number of mobile game players will be around 3.1 billion by 2024, while PC and console game players will continue to increase from 871 million people, especially in markets such as China and South Korea.

## 2.2   Conception Stage

User Experience

According to Hodent, the greatest way to explain user experience is as a mindset. The term "user experience" refers to the total experience a user has with a product and its ecosystem (marketing, website, customer service, etc.) As part of the development of a product, UX focuses on approaching the process from the perspective of the target audience, the users. It also takes into account the entire journey people take with a product, system, or service. For instance, it centers on people's expectations, and their interaction when having the product or downloading and installing it.

An excellent user experience is ensured through the design of products that are made with the consumer in mind, including the acquisition, ownership, and even the troubleshooting

process. The goal of UX designers is not only to create products that are easy to use; they also strive to create products that are enjoyable, efficient, and fun for users. (Don 2013, 219.)

**Game User Experience**

In gaming, user experience is defined as evaluating how players will interact with a game. Accordingly, it addresses concerns about how players would perceive and interact with the game, as well as their feelings and engagement as a result of this interaction. Developers need to identify the kind of experience they want to provide and the type of audience they are targeting (users) before they can develop a game (Hodent 2021, 27-29). Because perception is biased, it is important to know who the target audience is because it is possible that they may not be familiar with the same convention based on what games they play. When the developer defines the target audience, he or she can identify the pertinent issue to solve for the game. There is no such thing as a perfect user experience, but games that stay true to the experience they are trying to provide are frequently more fun and fascinating.
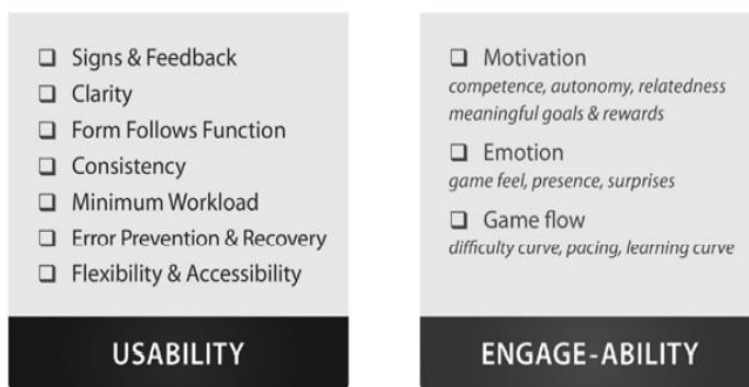


Figure 4 A game UX framework (Hodent 2017)

In addition, according to Hodent, in game user experience, some patterns have to concern about

- **Usability:** For a game to be playable, it must take into account the human brain's limited capacity for perception, attention, and memory. Gameplay can be made easier and more intuitive with rules like these

- **Motivation:** It emphasizes the two most important types of motivation in games—external and internal

- **Emotion:** It is the player's emotional investment in the game, in a sense. The "feel" of a game describes how satisfying it is to play. It shows how genuine and believable a game's physical world is. Emotions can also be affected by the inclusion of new features and plot twists in games. If new content is not added frequently, players will get bored and look elsewhere for entertainment

## 2.3   Pre-production stage

Game Design involves creating systems of meaning through the design of rules sets resulting in play through a complex multilayered design process. The purpose of games is to satisfy a range of needs, desires, pleasures, and uses associated with human culture. The rules of the game are directly designed by the game designer, thereby indirectly shaping the player's experience. (Michael et al. 2007, 185-188.)

Game design entails designing dynamic systems for players to inhabit. There must be spaces in any game that players can explore. This space design serves as the foundation for game design. Game designers create gameplay, envisioning and enforcing rules that result in features that make sense to the player. Due to this, certain principles must be followed during the design process. Players' choices, actions, and outcomes, as well as design, systems, and interactions, are essential. Complexity and appearance, gaming experience, procedural systems, and social game interactions are all combined in these. (Michael et all. 2007, 185-188.) Additionally, they include the strong relationship between a game's rules and the gameplay those rules produce, the interesting games that require them, the philosophies they represent, and the stories they tell. When a game design is done perfectly, it results in the creation of a meaningful game. The link between player actions and system outputs produces meaningful gameplay. It is the process through which a player performs an action within the designed system of the game and the system responds to that action. As the rule in-game and other components to create a game will be explained specifically then.

### 2.3.1   Gameplay

The gameplay is a concept that combines challenges and actions. The essence of the gameplay is the relationship between challenges and actions. These two elements must be developed concurrently while making a game; they cannot be separated. Adam (2010, 298) states that: *It is not enough to invent interesting challenges without the actions that will surmount them, nor is it enough to think of exciting actions without challenges that they are intended to address.* Simply, the gameplay is the primary means by which a game provides entertainment, and focuses on " What can players do", "What is it about ", and "How the

game responds to the player". If the gameplay is boring or frustrating, etc. It can easily detract from the fun of the game. (Schell 2014, 14-20.)

Challenges

It is seen as a task that players must complete. Depending on the game's idea (simple or complex), challenges can take many different forms, such as unique, repeating, or continuous (Adams 2010, 26-28). Unique challenges can be understood as a special mission that players must overcome in order to accomplish to process the next phase of the game. Whereas recurring and ongoing challenges, for example, in the SpaceShooter game, shooting down enemies is recurring, while avoiding attack planes is continuing task.

However, developing challenges must also comply with the rules, even if the rules do not always specify them clearly. In certain cases, the challenge will not be clear and must be solved by analyzing the rules or playing the game several times. Through playing the game, players discover hints and clues that connect directly to the main obstacles they have to deal with. They also sometimes can be spontaneous in deciding to change the rules of the game. Nevertheless, it is important for a challenge not to be trivial, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be difficult. (Adams 2010, 26-28.) The two figures below illustrate three types of challenges that occur when developing a game.



Figure 6 Unique Challenge - Boss Defeating in Elden Ring



Figure 5 Recurring and Continuing Challenges in SpaceShooter
Actions

Action is an action that is guided by game rules that players must understand to overcome obstacles and accomplish the game's goal (Adams 2010, 28). However, the rules of action include not only what is permitted but also what is banned or necessary in certain circumstances. Even yet, some get transformations into optional actions in order to overcome obstacles and provide delight to gamers.

## 2.3.2  Character Design

Video games are more than just compelling storylines, interesting gameplay, and inventive levels. All of this would be meaningless without the game characters. Video games provide extraordinary gaming experiences when all of their features are combined and complement one another. Game characters are more than just visual objects. It is an important object in any game since a character not only connects the players with the overall tale of the game but also addictions to the player through an entertaining gaming experience. (Novak 2011, 127-132.) The game character can be thought of as a bridge between the players and the game. Character interaction makes the game environment more believable and vibrant for players, or it creates a virtual reality for them to immerse themselves in.

When creating characters, the idea is to pique the player's interest or make them think, that they can *believe in*. In order to have an influence on gamers, it is necessary to identify and create well-designed characters. The game is less enjoyable if the characters are not intriguing. Typically, a game character is referred to as an avatar, since it serves as a protagonist controlled by the player. Because of the intimate connection between the player and the avatar, the player may occasionally give a personal identity to the avatar. This is amplified if the avatar has realistic features and motions. (Novak 2011, 127-132.) As a result, in some video games, players may feel as if they are really taking on the character's role or see a reflection of themselves in the character. Due to this, the motion of characters or avatars needs to be alluring, not sloppy (unless it is a part of the game or himself).

*Specific Avatars*

Specific avatars are detailed characters with histories, facts, personalities, and compelling storylines. As a result, the interaction between a specific avatar and its players is more intricate and profound than that of other nonspecific avatars. Players are more like readers reading about the protagonist in a novel when they interact with a specific avatar. Although the reader is not the protagonist, he or she does identify with it. Instead of just reading about the protagonist, the player can help and guide them in the game. (Adams 2010, 62,181-184.) Still, sometimes, avatars have their own minds too. In the Longest Journey, for

example, if the avatar April Ryan is asked to perform anything harmful, she can refuse with statements like "That doesn't sound like a good idea."

*Character Development*

Character development in a story begins with the relationships between characters and progresses through the story (Novak 2011, 127-128). It is necessary to have the development of character as it emphasizes the distinctive and lively of the avatar in which players have taken a role. *Character Arc* is a factor that is crucial for the growth of character relationships and character evolution (Novak 2011, 159). During a game's storyline, the protagonist rarely changes, but his character always grows. Rather than relying on monologues or dialogues, the story arc is illustrated through the behavior of the characters. The core of character development is understanding a character's value system. Below is the *hierarchy of needs* based on Abraham Maslow's model that can be used to map a character arc:
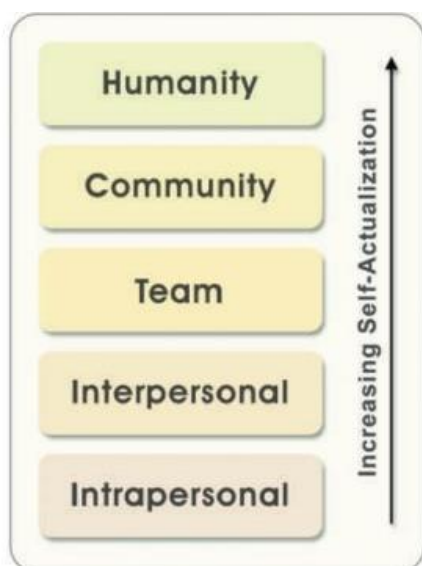


Figure 7 Abraham Maslow's model (Novak 2011)

1. Intrapersonal level: The protagonist is only concerned about his or her own selfish needs

2. Interpersonal level: Relationships between the protagonist and other characters appear at the interpersonal level. In most cases, it is a one-to-one relationship, whether you're dating, dating, or having a relationship with a friend, colleague, or family member. In addition to meeting his own needs, the protagonist is also concerned with another character's well-being

3. Team level: A small group of characters with common interests and situations forms an association with the protagonist. They could be friends, family members,

teammates, or other members of the protagonist's circle of friends. This level fulfills the need to belong

4. Community level: In addition to the smaller team, it becomes part of a larger network of organizations that include neighborhoods, cities, or corporations as well

5. Humanity level: As the protagonist progresses through Maslow's self-actualization - spiritual growth - he or she achieves comfort, love, and acceptance within a larger society

### 2.3.3 Storytelling

In the early age of humankind, the story was formed through stone sketches in caves. It brings out a lot of purposes to meet human demands. Some stories bring out myths, and legends and some are for teaching, warning, or solving the world mysteries, even just for entertainment. Time by time, along with human development and civilization, stories have driven people to explore, sympathize, fight, hope and dream. It also inspires other fields of life such as literature, art, music, and entertainment to "tell" stories. (Novak 2011, 124-126.) Due to that, the world then has many different stories but also makes people become pickier. Thus, if a story isn't well written or the features situations and characters are not suitable, people would rather question why should they spend time reading or watching it.

The goal of storytelling is to elicit emotions, engage the audience, and clarify something. Players feel engaged in video games when they are told a story and are motivated to figure out what they should do next (Klug & Lebowitz 2011, ). During the game, the player plays a character and is immersed in the story. With the help of films or animations, video games can tell stories that are accompanied by player actions and dialogue. In role-playing games, the story is crucial, and the player must progress as the story unfolds. According to Adams (2010, 205), there are 4 reasons that video games should have a story:

- **Stories may greatly boost the entertainment value of a game:** Gameplay is merely a competition, which is fun but not real. The narrative provides a context for the competition and makes it easier to play and feel, which is essential to all games. When a story depicts progress toward a meaningful goal rather than an abstract one, it is more emotionally satisfying to the reader

- **Stories reach a larger audience:** The increased entertainment value of a game will attract more players. Many gamers require a narrative to keep them playing; if the game only offers challenges and no narrative, they will not purchase it

- **Long games are more interesting when there are stories involved:** In a lengthy game, lasting many hours or even days, scoring points is insufficient to keep most players engaged. Additionally, stories add variety. A lengthy game requires variety to avoid becoming monotonous; a compelling plot provides this variety

- **Stories aid in the sale of the game:** It can be difficult to explain gameplay in words or with static images on a poster or website since it is an active process. Also game designers, however, illustrate people and settings from their game narrative, and even put a portion of it in promotional materials

There are also factors that need to be considered when creating a story in a video game. In order to create a game, designers must decide if a story is required and detailed and what the length of that tale should be; A plot can connect the diverse events of a longer game and hold the player's attention. A narrative can certainly help a game that focuses on individuals or at least human or nonhuman characters to who the player can relate). If the game concentrates on a huge number of relatively faceless persons, adding a plot will be difficult. Moreover, gameplay in single-player mode rarely elicits more than a few emotions, such as joy at attainment, frustration at failure, and determination. In a well-written story, the player can identify with the characters and their issues, which leads to deeper emotions. Using a story will enable the game to evoke more emotions. (Adams 2010, 205-210.)

## 2.3.4  Marketing

Marketing is a crucial aspect of a company's operations. It involves branding, public relation involvement, advertising, and consumer communication. It can be thought of as the key to creating and delivering a company's message to its target audience. Messages can be of various types. For example, a new product description. A marketing message may be intended to increase awareness of products or brands among target audiences, promote sales, etc. Working with the development group in the product management function is one of the most essential marketing components in the game business. In other words, video game marketing is inextricably linked to the game production process. (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012.)

As part of game production and marketing, platforms such as PC, mobile, handheld, console, etc. must also be considered. Each of these platforms targets different types of gamers, and each has unique qualities. Also, viral marketing plays an important role in the process of promoting the game of the company. According to Wilson (2005): *Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence*. The company uses it for the purpose of making "buzz"; An intentional spread of rumors about a company or its products (Rosen 2009). In marketing, Peter emphasizes the importance of fans and communities. Below is an example of using a viral marketing method
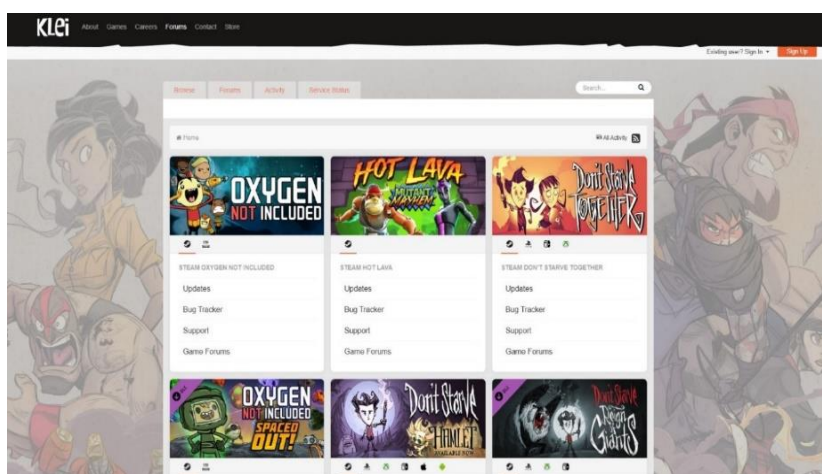


Figure 8 The KLei community forum site (KLei 2022)

Creating or opening online platforms related to the game has succeeded in engaging them. The site allows people to express their opinions about topics, which provokes discussion. The game generated a lot of discussions internationally because people enjoyed it so much. This opens up the possibility of using them to send messages as well as input on features. By doing so, the company is able to build and maintain buzz around the game.

### 3    Factors that make up a successful video game

### 3.1    Identifying other video game products

### 3.1.1    The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is a video game developed by CD Projekt. It was released in 2015. Set in a mythical world that is influenced by Slavic mythology, the game features a third-person perspective. In it, the player takes on the role of Geralt, a monster slayer. He is tasked with searching for his adopted daughter, who is escaping from the world of Wild Hunt. The game's various perils can be fought using magic and weapons, and players can interact with other characters to improve Geralt's skills (The Witcher). The Witcher was regarded as one of the best video games of all time, and it has sold over 40 million copies (IGN)



Figure 9 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (CD Projekt Red 2022)

The Witcher 3 has a great feeling of place for players to immerse themselves in. The game's stories and playability have won recognition (Polygon). The way primary quests weave into flashbacks and character dialogue is compelling and prevents side quests. The plot is excellent, but CD Projekt Red's cinematic style brings these to life. Each dialogue has over-the-shoulder shots that are carefully timed to make it look like the viewer is watching and interacting with a movie. In a typical RPG quest, the main character meets with the person giving the task and gets all the information they need. It is a simple story that is told in a simple way. According to IGN, in most quests in The Witcher 3, the story is easy to follow. For example, a grave hag has been digging up bones in a local cemetery and has killed a local boy because of it, so the main character is hired to kill the killer. But the plot turns out to be a mystery. The first things that are found out are that something is trashing the graveyard and a child has gone missing. When the players go to the cemetery, they find

some ghosts who might have caused the problem. After getting rid of them, players check the graves and find that the bodies were dug up with a tool, which shows that the real problem is somewhere else. It entices and encourages players to follow the issue to discover the truth and fully grasp the story.

In addition, Polygon (2016)  indicates that despite the fact that all of The Witcher's characters have glaring flaws, players can relate to or at least empathize with them. CD Projekt Red is an expert at creating morally ambiguous, neither good nor evil characters, and in The Witcher 3, they were at their best. And not just the characters themselves who are intricate. Consequently, they add complexity to the stories they're a part of, as well as the decisions players like Geralt are forced to make within those stories. Choice-based video games are shifting away from black-and-white binary player decisions and toward nuanced branching moments that actually provoke thought and enrich the story.

### 3.1.2  God of Wars (2018)

The game was developed by Santa Monica Studio and distributed by Sony Interactive Entertainment. In the God of War franchise, it is the eighth installment. Atreus, the son of Kratos, remains the only playable protagonist in this installment, which is the first in the series to feature two protagonists. To scatter the ashes of Kratos' second wife and Atreus' mother, Kratos and Atreus travel to the highest peak of the nine realms. God of War's story, world design, art direction, music, graphics, and combat system are considered to be inspired by the relationship between Kratos and Atreus. (IGN.) Several media outlets, award organizations, and critics have called it the best video game ever created. According to Polygon, the game sold over 19.5 million copies by August 2021, making it the best-selling PlayStation 4 game of all time.

Despite not being quite as complex or versatile as the original combat system, the narratives and puzzles were much more coherent and challenging. Compared to its predecessors, the storyline was significantly more nuanced, which contributed to player engagement. According to the story, he has largely neglected his son Atreus, with whom he has difficulty connecting now that he is ashamed of his previous life. As Kratos struggles to connect with his child despite his trauma, God of War encourages players to reflect on their own emotions. Kratos and his son are propelled forward by its compassionate and familial narrative. The development of the dynamic is fascinating to watch, and it is supported by clever environmental puzzles and exciting combat sequences.

Figure 10 Kratos and his son Atreus (Santa Monica Studio 2018)

The narrative of God of War is not only about what it means to be a god – traveling between realms, defeating fantastical beasts, wielding power – but also about what it means to be a man. It is not just the gameplay that has evolved but also the character Kratos himself. Kratos's desire to shield his son from the harsh realities of power and masculinity is an unexpectedly moving display of emotion (IGN). In addition to his reserved and stoic manner, Kratos prefers to solve his problems with brute force. He grapples with his guilt and the far-reaching consequences of his violent past as he travels with his son. In an attempt to explain his bloody past and reveal his true divine nature, he struggles to explain it to his son, Atreus. Having discovered his divine parentage, Atreus seeks to determine his fate, like his predecessors. In response to requests from NPC (Non-player character) players for his godlike strength, he struggles between the desire to do good and the need to follow his own desires and plans. This multifaceted narrative appeals to players from a variety of backgrounds, as they can each find a part of the narrative that resonates with them. This is a vast improvement over the previous storylines, which merely directed players to kill another enemy. The game is most impressive, and unexpected, for turning Kratos into a compelling and engaging character (Polygon).

## 3.2   The common of successful video games

It is noticeable that the two successful products in the video game industry share characteristics that determine the quality or potential to become the best products of the year and, eventually, of all time. Although, in addition to conditions such as concept art,

game environment, game effects, and so on, are required to assist in the completion of a game. However, the aspects of gameplay, storytelling, and character development that contribute most to a game's overall quality are the ones that receive the most attention as they are the element that players focus on and experience.

Therefore, this thesis studies another product- The Last of Us which is also listed as the best game of all time in order to understand these aspects in depth and to evaluate how it affects players in their playing experience. The case of The Last of Us series will be examined in chapter 4 in order to evaluate these aspects in greater depth.

## 4   The Last of Us game series

### 4.1   Naughty Dog

Naughty Dog, a first-party studio within PlayStation Studios, is widely considered one of the most successful and productive game development studios in the world. It was founded in 1984 by Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin as an American video game development company. In the beginning, the firm was known as JAM, and its first game was Ski Crazed on the Apple II, which was developed by Andy and Jason when they were only 16 years old. A new name - Naughty Dog had been adopted by the studio by the 1990s, and the team was developing a 3DO game called Way of the Warrior. The Crash Bandicoot series began when Sonic The Hedgehog 2 developer Mark Cerny suggested the firm focus on the newly released Playstation system with a character-based platform game. (Naughty Dog 2022.)

Naughty Dog is responsible for some of Sony's PlayStation platforms' most critically acclaimed and commercially successful titles. Naughty Dog has received countless awards from the gaming industry and the media for its innovative technology and character-driven narratives. This has assisted the company in establishing a global fan base of millions of players. Naughty Dog's most recent games are Uncharted 4: A Thief's End, which was released in 2016 and won a lot of Game of the Year awards, and Uncharted: The Lost Legacy, which was released in 2017 and is a new installment in the Uncharted series. By December 2017, over 41,7 million Uncharted games had been sold worldwide. (Naughty Dog 2022.)



Figure 11 Naughty Dog  (VGC 2022)

## 4.2   Case The Last of Us

The Last of Us is a survival horror third-person action-adventure video game exclusive to the PlayStation 3. Later, it was remastered for PlayStation 4. A team of Naughty Dog employees developed the video game. The Last of Us Part II was announced at the PlayStation Experience event in December 2016 and was released in 2020. (The Last of Us.)

As stated previously, this thesis focuses on studying and evaluating The Last of Us, one of the most popular video games of the 21st century, in order to present and go deeper into all the components that contribute to a video game's popularity. The game is evaluated based on the following subjects studied:

- Gameplay

- Character Development

- Storytelling

- Marketing

### 4.2.1   Gameplay

What the gameplay needs to do is immerse players in the world, and give them as many interesting actions to survive in this world and overcome obstacles. The gameplay philosophy of The Last of Us is putting players in the shoes of Joel or Ellie and everything that means. (Druckmann & Straley 2012.) It means giving players a threat constantly as this world has. Because this game takes place in such a hostile universe and the characters are pushed to do really difficult things, Naughty Dog's team developers want to put players in alignment with those choices. They want players to understand how hard certain decisions were for these characters because those are also hard for them.

The ammo distribution system in The Last of Us is dynamically and explicitly adjusted for things like ammo drops and required crafting materials. All of these will change dynamically based on the selected difficulty level, the items in the player's inventory, and his current location in the game. The game utilizes an encounter system, which essentially means that at certain points in the game, depending on the player's difficulty level, the game may have provided him with a certain amount of ammunition. (Playstation 2011.) Therefore, if a gamer searches everywhere and anywhere, he will have precisely the right amount of

ammunition for the upcoming encounter (based on what the developer believed to be an adequate amount of ammunition and materials for that encounter). Depending on the selected level of difficulty, it must become much more scarce and difficult to find as the difficulty level increases. Players cannot indiscriminately fire there when having a pistol as the ammo will be limited; they must carefully aim their shots. In many circumstances, stealth can be more effective than using a firearm. It can be said that players should start approaching the game as real survivors, which means that if they can get through an encounter without killing anyone, it may be more advantageous in the long run because they will have saved ammo.

Time resource shifts include such items that players may need for an upcoming event. This difficulty setting specifically in The Last of Us is called grounded (Druckmann 2012). It is meant to ground gamers in the world of The Last of Us when they are going through the world and they only have five bullets in their gun but then see 20 zombies in front of them. That moment of panic asks themselves how to get through. This is exactly what the developers of Naughty Dogs want gamers to feel. According to Druckmann (2012), through gameplay, they want to communicate similar emotions and feelings to the player as the ones that are being expressed by Joel and Ellie within the game. This means that obviously in a zombie apocalypse there is going to be a scarcity of resources and players are going to have trouble getting through and surviving and it is not supposed to be easy in The Last of Us.

Moreover, the inventory menu system is particularly noticeable. It relates to how players switch between weapons; how they equip a bow; or how they equip their melee weapon after using a pistol. All of this is present in numerous games and shooters. Players can quickly switch between their rifle and sidearm by pressing a triangle or Y (on consoles) or a specific key on their keyboard when they want to switch weapons. Typically, if gamers are playing an RPG and the game pauses, they can select the weapon they want to equip and swap to it, and then they can jump back into the action with no problems. However, The Last of Us attempts to make players feel grounded once more. This is the consistent world they purposely made up. The concept is that the world would not pause when a player removes an item from his backpack for Joel and Ellie. (Straley 2012.) As a result, for instance, it is impossible to freeze time in order to craft a medical kit. He must first sit down and open his backpack before proceeding. To apply this medical kit, players must crouch down and wrap it around their arm. The game never pauses when gamers enter these situations. This engages the feeling of players with the game and also has an impact on combat gameplay. Instead of immediately rushing into combat knowing that they can pause

to heal before continuing the fight, players will constantly find themselves checking their health bar and inventory, or even thinking about the tactic for the combat, etc.

In the interview of Last of Us Part II, Neil Druckmann (2017) explains how they enhance some features in the gameplay. He brings out a question when the player can be in a state where he or she is very low to the ground, how can their developers use this other than for hiding in vegetation? Consequently, they opt to leverage the game's surroundings. Numerous constructed objects or structures have fallen, leaving just enough space for players to crawl beneath, allowing them to now hide by crawling under things as opponents seek them. And this is yet another way for Ellie to assess her environment and use it to her advantage. However, because it is possible to hide under objects, the developers also have made the enemies smarter and given them the ability to look under things. So, while players might be able to hide somewhere and remain safe for a while, the enemies will eventually begin searching under objects. And if they spot players hiding under a truck, they will pull players out and then attempt to kill them. This indicates that the game pays close attention to the user experience, particularly how to engage with the motivation and emotions of players while they play.

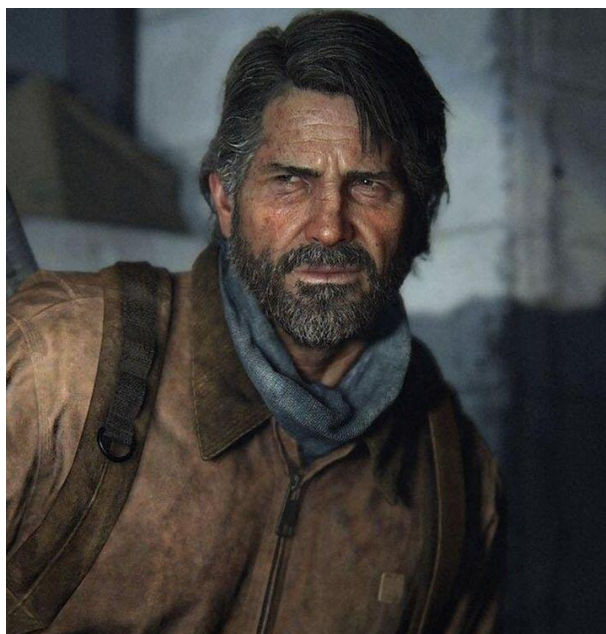### 4.2.2  Character Development

*Joel Miller*



Figure 12 Design of character Joel (The Last of Us)

Biography

A brutal and immoral survivor. The fungal pandemic that wiped out civilization has hardened Joel, who is in his late 40s. He has lost all of his family, friends, and values. In one of the few remaining military-controlled quarantine zones, he engages in contraband smuggling on the black market. As he adjusts to his new life, Joel's conscience fades away as he represses his emotions (Naughty Dog 2022.)

Personality

Joel is a man who was born before the pandemic and has witnessed the destruction of the world. Not only in his personal life but also the world he has grown up in. He experienced a great deal of loss. He was also a devoted father who put in a lot of effort to bring up Sarah all by himself. Joel's character got worse after the death of his beloved daughter, and he became more morose, broken, emotionless, and cruel. (Straley 2012.)

In the intervening 20 years between the outbreak and the beginning of the story, things have changed a lot. When he teams up with a new child who is not his daughter, many aspects of his humanity that he thought were long gone begin to emerge. As he invests more of himself in Ellie, his personality begins to gradually emerge. She becomes an increasingly independent survivor as a result of what she learns from spending time with Joel. According to Druckmann (2012), throughout the entirety of the game, he wants players to continue making difficult decisions. Players have to make difficult decisions in terms of resource management, stealth, and combat every time they play. So when the characters make these extremely difficult decisions, they understand better and know what it is like to make a decision under duress. Druckmann initially focused on a key aspect of Joel's character: a line from his audition tape showing that he had few moral conscience points left. This became the character's foundation. Druckmann and Straley (2012) believe that if the game can make players feel like they are actually with these characters on their journey and if players are invested in stories and characters, then they should, in theory, feel the same way the characters do.

After first coming into contact with Ellie, he did not get along very well with her at first. However, Joel eventually developed a trusting relationship with her and discovered that she was reliable in most situations, such as Ellie covering for Joel or providing support. Over the course of time, Joel developed a father-daughter relationship with Ellie, who, like his cherished daughter Sarah, reminded him of his own daughter. (Baker 2014.) Throughout their journey, these two discover that they need one another physically and emotionally to survive in this world. He ultimately chose to save Ellie and start a new life, either out of selfishness or to avoid losing another "daughter" to someone else. (The Last of Us.) To protect Ellie from future threats, he killed Marlene at the Fireflies facility. Unlike Marlene, he

did not want to sacrifice Ellie to save humanity. Joel's choice reflects the hardships he and Ellie have suffered at the hands of humanity itself, particularly David, during their journey to find a cure. This led him to decide that what is left of humanity might not be worth saving, especially at the cost of Ellie's life.

*Ellie Williams*



Figure 13 Design of character Ellie (The Last of Us)

Biography

Ellie, a 14-year-old courageous girl, has lived her entire life in this cruel world, and she has never known any other. She was raised in a military-operated boarding school situated within the quarantine zone. She has no parents. She may be innocent and interested in the outside world, but she is very mature for her age and can care for herself and others. She knows a lot about a world that no longer exists through she enjoys comic books, CDs, and other forms of popular culture. (The Last of Us.)

During stealth sections of the game, Ellie was programmed to rush to Joel for cover, while Joel will naturally place his arm over her as a protective measure. This animation serves to strengthen the bond between the two characters. Other small animations or actions that occurred outside of cutscenes also contributed to Ellie's development. (Polygon 2014.) Ellie will independently explore various game areas. As players wander, she will whistle, fidget, and make offhand comments. She is a representation of the player in some ways.

"Ellie is the main character in The Last of Us," said Dyckhoff. She is not as world-weary as the protagonist, Joel. Like the player, she is experiencing everything outside the city for the first time on her own. She has a fear of frightening things, much like the players. The

violence they witness disgusts her. Ellie is loyal to Joel because the developer does not want players to ever blame Ellie. The original plan for the game by Naughty Dog was for the player to save Ellie even if she was off-screen. This mechanic was drastically altered so that Ellie would not be a burden. (Polygon 2014.)

Personality

Ellie was raised in an environment where contemporary standards and values have declined, so she is rash, foul-mouthed, impulsive, and moody. She has no misgivings about using violence to get what she wants or swearing to express her emotions. However, she maintains her innocence because she had not yet witnessed the worst in people, and she still has a great deal of trust in them. This is the opposite of Joel's cautious, depressed, and cynical outlook on life following the pandemic. (The Last of Us.)

Ellie is also evidently intelligent and smart, and she will do whatever to keep Joel and herself alive. She has a strong survival instinct and is resourceful. She follows Joel's instructions but makes it apparent that she does not need babysitting. Ellie is eager about the outside world due to her childhood seclusion in a quarantine zone. (Johnson 2014.) As seen by her passion for music, films, literature, and video games, she is obsessed with collecting other people's possessions. She frequently expresses amusement upon discovering unique artifacts during her journey, which frequently clashes with Joel's physical apathy.

In addition to suffering from monophobia, or the fear of being alone, Ellie also confessed to Sam that she is afraid of the prospect of losing loved ones like Joel. (Johnson 2014). She reveals to Sam that her greatest fear is "ending up alone." Her phobia is shown by her tendency to rub her nose and wring her hands, particularly in tense situations. This demonstrates Ellie's capacity to be a "human" rather than a mere video game character. When game characters are identical to those in real life, players appear to be convinced by the realism of the game. They are even more eager to continue the journey now that they are living a different life.

During a game's storyline, the protagonist rarely changes, but his or her character always grows. Rather than relying on monologues or dialogues, the story arc is illustrated through the behavior of the characters. The core of character development is understanding a character's value system. Relationships between the protagonist and other characters appear at the interpersonal level. In most cases, it is a one-to-one relationship, whether dating, or having a relationship with a friend, colleague, or family member. In addition to meeting his own needs, the protagonist is also concerned with another character's well-being

### 4.2.3 Storytelling

*Plot*

The Last of Us I and II tell a heartbreaking tale of hope and despair, love and hatred, and wrath and forgiveness. It is a story spanning 26 years. The game follows Joel, a middle-aged man, and Ellie, a fourteen-year-old girl, twenty years after a global fungal pandemic known as CBI (Cordyceps Brain Infection) turned many humans into aggressive fungus mutants. Joel is instructed to take Ellie to a paramilitary organization that intends to use her to find a vaccine for the Cordyceps fungus, as she appears immune to it. Joel goes with her to find a person who can determine whether or not this method exists and can be used. As they travel, Joel, a former harsh cynic, becomes close to Ellie and views her as a new family member. This causes old wounds to reopen, and at various points in the game, he attempts to avoid these feelings by abandoning Ellie or pushing her away so that his old wounds remain locked. As is typical in life, he is forced to confront his emotions repeatedly. Over time, he comes to accept her role in his life and develops a close relationship with her. This narrative is divided into distinct sections. Summer comes first, followed by Autumn, Winter, and then Spring. The seasons mirror the chapter's emotional tone. (Game Developer.)

*Prologues*

The prologue of The Last of Us provides not only establishes a post-apocalyptic world following an outbreak but also sets up the emotional arc of Joel's loss of his daughter. The game clearly expresses its central narrative element upon character creation. Naughty Dog always introduces the character, who is the core of their experiences, and what drives the plot forward. According to Tim Hickson (2020), he emphasized that: *This game has possibly the best opening to a story I have ever experienced. Within 20 to 25 minutes we not only understand the world the protagonists and the characters were attached to them they achieved so much in such a short space of time and it is masterful but the reason it works is due to the little things.* Following is a pictorial representation describing the emotional plot of the game.

Figure 14 Scene when Joey witnessed his daughter died ( The Last Of Us)

In an interview with PlayStation in 2012, Neil Drunckmann also emphasizes the purpose and content of the prologue's effects on the whole game then. He declares that the first ten minutes are extremely memorable and the game does not have much time to get players emotionally invested in those characters before pulling the narrative rug out from under them in the way that it does. For that moment to be as impactful as it is, it has to make players feel for these characters immediately. The prologue provides players from the opening scene with the relationship between a father and his daughter Joel and Sarah. As Joel and Sarah keep running away from the outbreak of CBI, they come across a lone soldier who has been given orders to fire on them. When he does, Joel and Sarah tumble down a hill, only a few feet apart from one another. However, while Joel escapes with only minor wounds, Sarah was killed and passes away in his arms. The prologue of The Last of Us ensures that the player already understands the emotional weight behind Joel being asked to care for another young freckled girl - Ellie. (Druckmann & Straley 2012.) It is crucial to understand the cynical survivalist state that Joel is in at the start and just what Ellie represents to him his past failure and trauma. It so far gets the player to witness his journey of starting to have another chance at fatherhood.

*Storyline*

In contrast to other games, Naughty Dog "describes" or "tells" Joel's traumatic past by giving players a hidden meaning for almost every line of dialogue and every action (IGN). It is a setting that makes the main story feel more real to the player, and it is most effectively conveyed by having the player experience it in real-time rather than being told or shown in a cutscene. The objective is to make the player feel more vulnerable in this dangerous and dark world. The game makes the line between characters and cutscenes hard to tell apart.

The Last of Us appears to excel at both character and gameplay (Polygon 2013); there is no disconnect between what the player does and what the characters do in the cutscenes. Also, the death of the child (Sarah) makes it easier to switch to playing as Joel. This is because the players give Joel their feelings about being a father figure, and when Sarah dies, they feel the same sad emotions as Joel.

The story really begins with the ambush. Ellie urges them to help the injured man, but Joel quickly realizes that this is a trap. This emphasizes Joel's bleak experience and Ellie's innocence and naivety. However, the ambush culminates in her shooting someone, indicating the decline of Ellie's innocence and naivety, as well as her maturing and becoming more independent. But Joel is changing as well. He begins to exhibit more fatherly tendencies, a return to his more optimistic and hopeful mindset that he appears to have lost after his daughter's death. Killing someone to save Joel is part of her entering his violent and grim world. (Druckmann 2012). This is also another plot that connects the various events in order to keep the player's attention as they try to figure out what will happen behind these events.

In addition, the designers employ a small amount of coded imagery, which is the use of commonly recognizable images, descriptions, or archetypes that people will already be familiar with and have feelings about, allowing the writer to tap into the emotions that they naturally project. For instance is the scene of Joel and Ellie driving along, reading a stolen comic, and sort of looking at some indecency while Joel listens to old dad music. This image is entirely indicative of a father-daughter relationship. Especially as he listens to her whine about not being able to finish a book and Joel tells her not to view indecent things like a father. The memories of long road trips cause players to recognize themselves in Ellie, their parents, and possibly in Joel. This effectively fosters sympathy for the characters and makes players easier to accept the developing relationship between them.

In each chapter or act of The Last of Us, the unresolved problem is always hinted at and the obstacles on Joel and Ellie's journey are explained. The darkest hour contains two components. Ellie initially states that she wants to discuss Sam's death, but Joel avoids the subject. This scene depicts two parallel journeys: Joel's struggle to forgive himself for the death of his daughter, and Ellie's struggle to resist Joel's grim cynicism and willingness to move on. They are parallel because the conflict between these two characters stems from their struggles and reaches its climax when Joel's worldview triumphs in the darkest hour (Druckmann 2012). In the second section, Joel rejects the photograph of Sarah and tells Ellie, "I am not your father!" with some anger. Joel still believes he is responsible for his daughter Sarah's death 20 years ago, and he cannot forgive himself for it. As a result, Joel

insists he wants to move on without discussing the loss, and he cannot allow himself to view ally as a daughter figure again. With conflict and mystery unfolding in the past of these two characters, The Last of Us encourages players to seek the truth as one of their motivations for playing.

The Last of Us is not a zombie story, but rather a story about humanity losing its humanity.



Figure 16 Joel tries to avoid his problem (In game)



Figure 15 Ellie and Joel altercate about their traumas (In game)

This is why the antagonists of the inciting incident at the conclusion of the first, second, and third acts are not zombies but rather humans. (Druckmann 2012.) Joel's action parallels an earlier scene involving Henry and Sam in which Henry instigated the violence and nearly killed the guy. Ellie, as a character, initially is challenged by this lack of humanity and trustworthiness. However, for a considerable amount of time afterward, the player can see how Ellie's lack of trust harms the relationship. It also makes players think about the good and the bad of the world: "Is there a place for goodwill in the world anymore, or are all good people, dead people?" As the game provides not only pure entertainment but also emotional reflections of all people in the real world, it is not merely a source of pure entertainment (IGN).

### 4.2.4  Marketing

The marketing campaign for The Last of Us heavily featured the use of video trailers. In addition to the full announcement of the game, the first trailer for The Last of Us part I was also released, showcasing the game's concept and character types. On May 15, 2012, the first cinematic for the game was unveiled, depicting Joel and Ellie being surprised by a group of hunters. This was followed on May 16 by the release of a second trailer titled "The Sky Has Turned Grey." The teaser depicted Ellie receiving a makeover (Naughty Dog). Naughty Dog displayed gameplay footage at PAX Prime 2012. Following this, a story trailer for the game was displayed.

Naughty Dog introduced The Last of Us part II in a video that played at the end of Sony's annual PlayStation Experience (PSX) event on December 3, 2016. Ellie, who "plays differently" from Joel in the original game, has been announced as the main playable character. And, as Druckmann put it, "most ambitious game to date" for Naughty Dog. Then, they revealed four new survivors—Lev, Yara, Emily, and a player character named Abby—in a new trailer at Paris Games Week on October 30, 2017. As of April 2021, the trailer had over 6,300,000 views on PlayStation's official YouTube channel.

Naughty Dog demonstrated new gameplay to fans on June 11th, 2018. Part II's gameplay demo was presented by Shawn Layden. Ellie, the player character, is 19 years old, and the demo showed off some of the locations she'll go to, along with new melee fighting and stealth mechanics and in-game graphics. Intercut with the action, a cutscene introduced Ellie's partner Dina and Tommy's community member Jesse, both of whom were shown dancing (PlayStation).

As stated previously, working with the development team in the product management function is one of the most important marketing aspects in the video game industry. This suggests that the company's marketing is linked to the game development process. From the very beginning of The Last of Us game series development. This enables the gaming community to approach the game's concept and idea. In addition, it amplifies the audience's or players' interest in the game and generates viral discussions about it.

## 5    Conclusion

## 5.1    Answers to Research Questions

This study aimed to investigate and comprehend the factors that contribute to a successful and popular video game. In addition, the thesis investigates the impact of gameplay and narrative on the enjoyment and dislike of a game, as well as what causes players to lose interest and stop playing. According to the findings of chapter 4's case study of the game, the conclusion is presented.

**Sub questions**

*What is the function of the gameplay?*

Gameplay is an overview of the tasks and features of a game so that players enjoy the best experience possible. Gameplay is an optional component of a game's release, but it is a determining factor in the game's appeal to gamers and has a direct impact on whether or not players will remain loyal to the game's product beyond its initial release. It is a method for gamers to interact with the game, and the interactive game is delivered to each participant.

All gameplay elements are similar to puzzles: the more straightforward the solution, the less appealing the puzzle is to the player. As we become more familiar with patterns, however, they become more predictable and unappealing. The enjoyment lies in the tension between learning to recognize new patterns and mastering them to the point where they become tedious.

Gameplay brings out the playability that gamers can play in a game. In gameplay, features include information that describes the player's experience through the use of a game system, bringing the player back to a state of enjoyment and entertainment, and satisfying the desire to play the game alone or with others. The playabilities can be:

- Satisfaction: When a player completes a video game or implements the game's mechanics for graphics, interface, story, etc. the player's level of satisfaction and joy will be expressed. Player satisfaction is a measurement of each individual's interest and enjoyment in game elements like virtual worlds, challenges, quests, and characters, among others.

- Efficiency: Players' entertainment and enjoyment when completing missions, especially the game's final mission, are heavily influenced by time and resources.

Effective gameplay will immediately capture the player's attention and encourage him or her to continue playing until the game's conclusion.

- Charm: Infatuation is a player's level of immersion in video games or virtual world role-playing. Role-playing games help players feel enthusiastic about participating in the game and comprehend its rules and characteristics. A role-playing game will be appreciated if it strikes a balance between the proposed tasks and obstacles and the manner in which the player overcomes them.

*How important is storytelling to player engagement?*

Apart from the story of the main character, what matters most to gamers is what happens next. This question always piques players' interest and keeps them exploring the game, whether it's an open-world title or a linear one that simply moves from point A to point B. The experience of playing the game will be greatly diminished by weak scenarios. The creation of characters and the organization of the plot must be carefully planned in order to convey such information to players. For instance, the protagonist frequently needs to demonstrate three elements: what the protagonist wants, and what the protagonist needs and the protagonist must express an intention that the protagonist is striving for in the story. It could be a real-life story, a grand epic, or a message for humanity. In physics, putting words together to create a letter, which is the end result, is the process of connecting numerous small stories into one larger story. However, this is only a small portion of the process. Players prefer to watch the story unfold in a visual format rather than reading it, so writers must think that way.
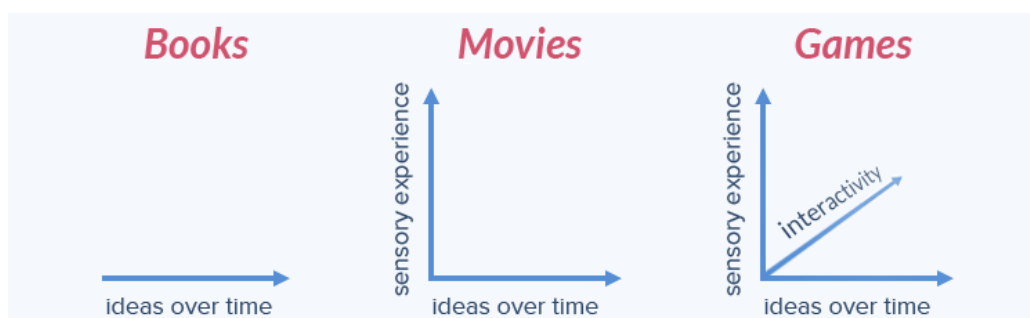


Figure 17 Different types of storytelling (Spiderum)

With literature, words will be arranged in a manner that is appealing to the reader in order to convey the writer's narrative. They will employ descriptive language to engage all of the senses. They will construct conversations between characters that reflect their own characteristics. From there, they organize sentences, paragraphs, and chapters so as to preserve the story's rhythm and flow.

Whereas literature only needs to express what it wants to say in terms that translate over time, cinema adds a second dimension to the graph, namely information for the other senses. Experience the sound of a film as if it were a whole new world brimming with artistic potential. On the screen, it is possible to describe an entire page of text in a matter of seconds. A dialogue now incorporates body language, character tones, and the shot's visual design. Visuals and sound are not an afterthought when it comes to a film's narrative. The level of "beautiful" must be maintained throughout the entire story-telling process; the image cannot be separated from the narrative.

However, literature is unidimensional, the film is bi-dimensional, and games are three-dimensional, with interaction constituting the third dimension. In books, depth is created by words, whereas in films, it is created by what the audience hears and sees in the frame. In the game, the third dimension can be explored by interacting with the environment. With interactivity, they can directly experience the story. As protagonists, they have the opportunity to experience the character's motivations and emotions as they progress through the game's plot. The player sees and hears what he discovers, rather than through the linear lens of the cinematographer. It can be said that games convey narrative depth through experience, whereas movies rely on images. Therefore, immersion can be considered a factor in player engagement. The immersion gives the player a very real experience of the story.

Therefore, the narrative provides a context for the game and makes it easier to play and feel, which is essential to all games. Emotionally, a story is more satisfying when it depicts progress toward a meaningful objective rather than an abstract one. Furthermore, a game's increased entertainment value will attract more players. Many gamers require a narrative to motivate them to play.

**Main question**

*How to make a successful video game?*

As stated above, this thesis will only focus on analyzing four elements that are related to the success of The Last of Us series. This provides a thorough understanding of how these factors affect the player's experiences.

Each game has distinctive characteristics that set it apart from others. However, according to research, there are factors that play a significant role in determining whether a game is good or ultimately successful. Both gameplay and story are essential to the development of a video game. Games are interactive by design. They allow users to immerse themselves in a new environment or world. Unlike a movie, where they simply watch, a game gives

players complete control. The game will not be enjoyable if the controls are difficult or unpleasant to use. The controls and player feedback of a game should be straightforward. However, the narrative is also crucial to the success of the game. A compelling narrative can always help players feel more connected to the world the developer has crafted. Building in-game worlds and crafting enticing story scenarios are not the only ways to meet the plot requirements of players. The elements must be incorporated into each game via visual images, evoking emotions in the players and transforming each individual's story into their own.

As stated previously, video games have evolved into a means of providing entertainment and instilling emotional values. In addition to being a form of entertainment, games provide an excellent setting for studying cognition as an interaction with the social and physical environment. Therefore, a good video game is not only about the gameplay or narrative but also about the player's experience. Consequently, it addresses concerns regarding how players will perceive and interact with the game, as well as their feelings and level of engagement as a result of this interaction. There is no such thing as a perfect user experience, but games that stay true to the experience they are attempting to provide are often more entertaining and engaging.

## 5.2   Validity and Reliability

This research is validated by the existence of the case study video game The Last of Us on the market. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate what elements are vital for a video game to be successful. This analysis is supported by relevant literature and interviews with game designers and company representatives. Using the findings of the research, the questions were precisely answered.

In this study, the author has referenced analyses from multiple sources by employing a qualitative research approach. These references have been published within the past few years. Therefore, there are no obsolete references. Successful video game products have great characteristics that determine their quality or potential to become the best products of the year and, eventually, of all time, not only the four elements that have been analyzed. Thus, this study should serve as a theoretical resource.

## 5.3   Suggestion for Further Research

Although this research can be used as a reference when designing a game, it focuses primarily on the relevance of gameplay and narrative in engaging players. The fact is video games require numerous types of elements, including concept art, game environment, and

game effects, in order to be successful. To complete this type of research in the future, the study and research must be broader and more specific regarding other production-stage perspectives.

# 6    Summary

The objective was to comprehend the role of gameplay, character development, narrative, and marketing in the creation of a quality video game product. How to create a successful video game was the principal research question. The purpose of the sub-questions was to aid in answering the primary question. What is the purpose of gameplay and how crucial is storytelling to player engagement? To answer all of these research questions, the thesis utilized a qualitative research approach, including a literature review, document analysis, and company interviews.

An overview of the research background, thesis objectives, and research questions was provided in the first chapter. The next part discussed the limitations and theoretical framework. It continued with the literature review, research methodology, and thesis structure.

The second chapter introduced the history of video games as well as the theory behind the conception and pre-production phases of video game development. It provided the four elements of Gameplay, Character Design, Storytelling, and Marketing.

Explaining the common components that contributed to the success of video games was the goal of the third chapter. It was also intended to explain the significance of these studied factors in the game development process.

The fourth chapter went deeper into introducing the company of the game series and explains how the idea of the product is made. Come along with it, chapter 4 provided the reason The Last of Us became successful while analyzing the four elements.

The fifth and final chapter of the thesis was the conclusion. It addressed both the primary and secondary research questions. In addition, recommendations for future research were presented.

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