



The Virtual War of Perceptions

An Analysis of Portrayal in Modern Warfare-Themed Video Games

Det Virtuella Perceptionskriget

En Analys av Porträtterande i datorspel med Modernt Krigsföringstema

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Abstract

As the gaming industry grows, so does its audience, and one of the major themes in games today are conflicts in a modern setting with real world nations and armies. Yet research on how the combatants of these nations are portrayed in gaming and what potential real world connections there are to the political motivation behind these conflicts is not widespread. This study focuses upon the portrayal of combatants affiliated with America, Russia and the Middle-East, along with their potential political connection to the real world, and asking questions related to portrayal and stereotypes in three popular video games. The hypothesis in the study argues that these games depict the American combatants in a different, more positive light compared to their Middle-Eastern and Russian counterparts. Through a qualitative content analysis conducted upon the single-player of these games within the first-person shooters genre – consisting of Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 and Medal of Honor 2010 – and incorporating Critical Theory, Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory together with a Literature Review, an analysis was conducted upon the collected material. The conclusion suggests that the combatants in these games are portrayed in a manner that can be considered neutral, and that there are few, very weak, connections to international politics. As such, the hypothesis presented in the study was proven false.

Keywords: Gaming – Portrayal -- War - Politics -- Stereotypes

Sammanfattning

Medan spelindustrin växer, likaså gör dess publik, och en av de största teman i spel idag är konflikter i en modern scensättning med verkliga nationer och arméer. Dock är studier om hur kombattanterna av dessa nationer porträtteras i spel och vilka potentiella verklighetskopplingar till den politiska motivationen som kan finnas bakom konflikterna inte videspredd. Den här studien fokuserar på porträtterandet av kombattanter med kopplingar till Amerika, Ryssland och Mellanöstern, tillsammans med deras potentiella politiska koppling till den riktiga världen, och ställer frågor relaterade till porträtterande och stereotyper i tre populära spel. Hypotesen i studien argumenterar för att dessa spelen framställer de Amerikanska kombattanterna i ett annat, mer positivt ljus än deras Mellanösterska och Ryska motparter. Genom en kvalitativ innehållsanalys utförd på enspelarläget av dessa spelen i genren förstapersonsskjutare – bestående av Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 och Medal of Honor 2010 – och inkluderande Critical Theory, Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory tillsammans med en Literature Review, utfördes en analys av det insamlade materialet. Slutsatsen föreslår att kombattanterna i dessa spel är porträtterade på ett sådant sätt som kan ses som neutralt, och att det fanns få, väldigt svaga, kopplingar till international politik. Därutav var hypotesen som framfördes bevisad falsk.

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Introduction

Gaming has become one of the most widespread hobbies in recent years. People of all ages enjoy a wide range of genres, all with their own unique themes and play styles. As with movies, games themselves has gone through iterations of different style changes during the years, and has more and more come under scrutiny of various institutions, including governments, for a wide range of reasons. The topics they cover, with varying seriousness, varies as much as there are games in circulation.

One of these reasons for scrutiny, among the usual questions regarding topics such as gender issues and the potential effects that violence has on audiences, is a question regarding the potential effects some of these games have on the audience when it comes to their ideas and knowledge of other cultures. In the movie industry, wherein Hollywood is particularly dominant in the western hemisphere, the agenda regarding these matters are set by the powers that be, which serves to potentially influence the image one might have of other cultures and the people belonging to it. The game industry, in contrast, might not be much different, but compared to Hollywood it has a wider spread of developers across several nations. While some have a bigger presence than others, it still is not as large as the movie industry and its importance has been neglected for too long.

Keeping this in mind, the underlying motivation for conducting this study lies within the realm of portrayal and stereotypes, the rationale being that as the industry grows, so must the awareness of other cultures, as to not get stuck in the old ways of viewing things based on bias and views controlled by an agenda, if such a thing exist in the first place. While research has been done within the area, it is still not on a satisfactory level, partly perhaps due to video games' current status – which is changing rapidly – and forms yet another part of the motivation behind this study.

To accomplish the task above, three popular video games within the realm of the Modern War theme will come under the scrutiny of a content analysis, seeking to answer if the portrayals of the combatants are imbalanced in terms of portrayal and if this imbalance can be traced back to real world international politics in the sense that it could have given enough of a foundation for these portrayals to be how they are. The study is conducted, too, while using imperialism as a general theme throughout due to the many connections to the subject.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to, firstly, analyze the portrayal of Middle-Eastern and Russian combatants in comparison to their American counterparts in the single-player campaign in three popular first-person shooters: Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 and Medal of Honor 2010. The hypothesis is that these games depict the American combatants in a different, more positive light compared to their Middle-Eastern and Russian counterparts.

Secondly, the study seeks to find if the conflicts within the virtual worlds has any political connection to real world international politics. The argument, here, is that there are similarities between reality and fiction, and that they aid to strengthen the aforementioned potential portrayals.

Research Questions

To conduct this study, a qualitative content analysis is conducted onto the single-player portion of these games, where two main questions followed by sub-questions, are asked towards the material. They are as follows:

RQ 1: How are the Middle-Eastern and Russian combatants portrayed compared to their American counterparts in a visual and rhetorical context?

RQ 1.1: Are stereotypes applied to the established protagonists and antagonists within the story, and if so, how?

RQ 2: Is there a connection between real world international politics and its fictional counterpart? If so:

RQ 2.1: What, if any, are the motivations behind the conflicts in the virtual worlds?

RQ 2.2: Do they serve to strengthen the portrayal of the combatants?

Definitions, Terms and Abbreviations

American Exceptionalism: A theory which dictates that the US is not like other countries and that their 'mission' is to spread, in essence, freedom.

Antagonist(s): The main opponent of the protagonist(s) (See Protagonist) in a story. Note: An

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antagonist does not need to be a 'bad' person within the story.

Artificial Intelligence (A.I): "Often used to describe the behaviour patterns of computer opponents."
(Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, 2008, p. 250)

CO: Commanding Officer, an officer in command of a military unit.

Coup d'état: Overthrowing a nation's government, replacing it with something else, be it political or military.

Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI): "Special effects (in movies, for instance) created by computer graphics." (Nielse et al, pp250). For games, however, it is important to distinguish between CGI and normal gameplay. Cinematics are made with CGI, making interaction from the player impossible, while gameplay visuals are generated by the game engine.

Cutscenes: According to Nielse et al (x, pp250); "Dramatically important sequence, often displayed without the interactions of the player. The scene is typically shown to motivate a shift in the " plot " of the game and displayed outside of the game engine."

DEVGRU: United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group, a U.S. Military counter-terrorism unit.

Faction: In game terms, it usually refers to 'teams' or nations. In this study, factions refer to the prime subjects: the USA, 'the Middle-East' and Russia.

First-Person Shooter (FPS): According to Mortensen (2009, p. 43); "[...] with a first-person viewpoint... the interface is often constructed so that the player's avatar or representation is invisible, and the player looks out of the eyes of his or her avatar. If the player chooses to use a modern weapon, she might sight the target using the crosshairs of a gun but never see her own representation than the weapons she is holding and possibly the hands holding the weapon."

Gameplay: While Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al (2009, p. 251) refers to gameplay as an "ambiguous term for the total effect of all active game elements," it could be simplified as; gameplay refers to the instances where the player has control, interacting with the game.

However, for the sake of this study, the term 'cutscene' has been expanded beyond this original meaning. As such, in this study a cutscene also implies 'semi-passive gameplay' wherein the player has limited interaction possibilities, much like QTEs. This might, for example, include basic movement of the character, along with interaction with other characters, but that they do not feature any real action on the behalf of the player.

GRU: Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Russia's largest foreign intelligence agency.

Militainment: A sub-genre, fusing the words 'military' and 'entertainment'. It denotes a game, or other form of media with military ambitions of varying degree (recruitment, training, etc.). A similar sub-genre would be 'Edutainment', which is a "label for games with a pronounced educational ambition". (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, p. 250.)

Multiplayer (MP): A game mode, usually online, which features player-versus-player combat.

Protagonist(s): The main character(s) of a story, and is/are usually the one(s) the story focuses upon.
Note: A protagonist does not need to be a 'good' person within the story. In addition, in the context of this study, a protagonist can be generally considered being the character the player controls.

Quick-Time-Events (QTE): A QTE can be said to be a gameplay event where the actions of the player are limited. In FPSes, this could mean having the weapon one's character is holding knocked out of one's hand, forcing the player to engage in hand-to-hand combat. The game, then, prompts the player to press certain buttons to perform specific actions, such as pressing the A button before the time runs out. Failing this action might result in Game Over. QTEs, as such, are usually identified by scripted movements and limited player input.

RPG: Rocket Propelled Grenade, an anti-tank weapon.

Screen time: The amount of time a character is seen on screen.

Single-player (SP): A game mode which features player-versus-AI combat. Also tends to be called the 'Campaign'.

Ultrationalist: Can be seen as an extremist version of a Nationalist.

WMD: Weapon of Mass Destruction, such as nuclear bombs.

Clarifications

For easy use due to the length of their names, the games will be abbreviated throughout the study as: BF3 (Battlefield 3), MW3 (Modern Warfare 3) and MoH (Medal of Honor).

Secondly, it is important to distinguish between MW3 and the prequels leading up to it. While the authors would have wished to include them, as their relevance to the study is high, there was not time or space for it to be possible. As such, compromises had to be made. This is further detailed in the Problems section. Similarly, Medal of Honor refers to the video game released in 2010. The earlier Medal of Honor games uses similar names, but are set in World War II.

Lastly, as will be mentioned in the Method section, the focus of the analysis lies upon cutscenes and QTEs. This is due to the way the material is gathered; through recordings and not entire gameplay sessions, due to time factors. The authors recognize that some parts that could be valid for the analysis will go missed because of this, such as random dialogue by allies or hostiles, player actions, or character actions, taken towards certain characters or other choices, as well as visual cues such as the setting and the countries they are set in. However, by limiting this study to the aforementioned two factors, it could be argued it makes the method easier to replicate as well as limiting unforeseen events caused by interactivity from the player (death, playstyles and more), providing a fairly objective view of the material and further enhancing the analysis corresponding to the thesis itself, as it does not seek to analyze the player. That is to say, if the method is to be applied in another study, the material being analyzed will be the same as it is only that which the developers put into the game that is seen, and not the actions of an individual player.

Limitations

The study limits itself down to the three games mentioned in the purpose due to their popularity, the countries wherein the developers are located, and on-going themes, which were deemed the most relevant. This is further detailed in the Method section.

Secondly, the scope of the upcoming Literature Review has been limited due to its broad subject area. It is the intention of the authors to provide enough barebone information for the reader of this study to understand the background and historical information lying behind the purpose and research questions, as well as pointing in the right direction when it comes to the Analysis section, without making the Review itself the primary focus of the study.

Thirdly, a note must be made about the characters in MW3. Some of the main characters are from the United Kingdom and its surrounding areas, and since the UK is not an element to be considered in this study, the authors has decided not to include these character in the analysis, bar dialogue and actions towards them, or if they quote another source. In other words, their opinions will not be mentioned. They will, though, be referenced from time to time.

Disposition

Introduction: The motivation for the study, along with the purpose and its Research Questions are introduced. Terms, Abbreviations, Clarifications and Limitations are also included in this section.

Theory: The theory section will, first, feature a Literature Review, separated into three main sections: Earlier Research in Gaming – bringing up conducted research both within the subject of the study, but also other areas – , Studies of Media & Culture – moving further into media and news along with certain theories and studies within culture – , and A Brief Look at International Politics, trying to bring up recent events along with politics that could be applicable to the Analysis. As mentioned above, this Literature Review serve to provide an academic background to earlier research conducted within the primary area of this study, and related areas, as well as providing background information for the upcoming analysis, which is intended to increase the understanding of the subject.

After the Literature Review, the three primary theories will be discussed and motivated: Critical Theory, Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory.

Method: The games used in the study are presented with a small presentation as to what they are about, together with the motivation and reasoning behind choosing these games. After this, the primary method used, Qualitative Content Analysis, is detailed together with its two sub-methods; film analysis and rhetorical analysis, along with the operationalized questions intended to answer the Research Questions, and explaining the process.

Findings: The findings discovered through the methods are presented within the Findings section, categorically split between the Research Questions, incorporating descriptions of the material where needed.

Analysis: A similar structure to the above is used in the Analysis section, though the theories are applied and the Literature Review is referenced according to the findings.

Conclusion: Within this section the Research Questions are answered, and they in turn answer the hypothesis presented in the purpose of the study. Following this, concluding this study, are Future Research, expanding upon both this study and others to provide possible suggestions for studies related to the area, together with the Problems section, detailing the problems encountered during the course of this study.

Theory

Literature Review

Earlier research in Gaming

Games as research subjects has been widely researched in many areas. For this study, which focuses on the portrayal of combatants, earlier research would include works related to demographics, portrayals and gender. Sadly, as will be discussed below, the research is still thin within this specific area, a notion shared by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008, p. 29) though video games as a whole has been given wide academic attention in later years. Juul (2011) is an author that appears several times, with his work related to various subjects in gaming. When it comes to narrative, a subject widely discussed in the business and culture of digital games, he, along with Aarseth among others, supports the notion that what make games worthy of study is; "[...] the fact that they present an alternative mode of discourse" (as cited in Kerr, 2006, p. 27). Indeed, the different modes of narrative is a substantial part when it comes to gaming, and is also a subject of doubt in terms of what makes up gaming. Kücklich notions that (as cited in Kerr, 2003, p. 34) that; "[...] it is widely accepted by game scholars, not just the ludologists, that non-digital game and play theories are fundamental to an understanding of the digital games as texts, they are not without their problems and also require adaptation." In other words, the current theories used for criticising, for example, movies, can be applied to games, yet needs some modification. This subject will be returned to in the Future Research section at the end of this study.

As mentioned above, what is really lacking within this particular area of academia is research related to the subject this study treats, as well as empirical research. While the theories and research has been widely tested in movies for many years, when it comes to games, as is mentioned above, it is severely lacking, together with a problem of relevancy; the gaming industry could be considered a rapidly evolving industry, in some ways faster than what the movie industry once was. As such, most research that has been carried out are already showing signs of age, though some authors, such as Juul mentioned above, along with Salen & Zimmerman (Mortensen, 2009), are much more recent and updated. Indeed, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2009) reinforces this notion with additional factors, especially when it comes to the subject that this study treats, and when it comes to research about video games, some of which incorporate the small amount of research units, as well as an inability to effectively generalize their results (p. 239-240).

Moving onward, establishing what games are could be an important point. In *Perceiving Play*, (2009, p. 9), Mortensen argues that the work of Zimmerman; "[...] is fraught with weaknesses from their

understandable but somewhat ambivalent choices. They have, for instance, decided to combine the meanings "a game" and "gaming" and claim that the game is the same as activity." Mortensen continues this argument in the ensuing chapter as to why this distinction does not work (2009). As might be concluded from this example of difference in opinions, problems arise as to what really constitutes a game. While the definition as such might not as important to this study, it might still be interesting to include it, if only to show that it is not an easy definition to make. What is also included along this line is the term 'magic circle', coined by Huizinga (Huizinga, 2000, as cited in Mortensen, 2009, p. 11). He claims that games creates a magic circle which separates the game world from the outside world. This, he says, has to do with the set rules in games which are very distinct from those of the outside world that we follow; "When you begin a game of chess, for example, you are submitting to a formally defined experience with the rules that are clearly distinct from those we follow outside this special activity" (as cited in Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 24). As such, it could be said that the rules we follow when we play a game are only important in their own context, since they do not exist in the real world outside the game itself. (2008).

However, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) argues that the magic circle comes with its own set of problems. For one, it is tied to an ideological agenda, which results in an overstatement. Indeed, Egenfeldt-Nielsen argues that; "[...] we can apply this definition to a wide array of utterly different activities [such as]: work, family life [or] weddings" (p. 24). This, he says, could mean that games are not that different from the real world. Concluding the topic, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) goes on to say that, despite its shortcomings, the magic circle is still widely used amongst researchers.

Among this perceived lack of research within the area, there are some that has preceded this analysis. One of them deals with Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. Andersen & Kurti (2009) touches upon some of the questions brought up in this study. For one, the combatants are, while not analysed, discussed from the perspective of gamers, while the various military decisions, and rhetorical factors, are analysed. Later, in the Analysis, this article will be touched upon again. It is important to note here that their study includes research involving the audience of the video game itself, which is something this study does not do.

Another study, which will also be brought up later on, handled the matter of the movie Black Hawk Down as well as the game with the same name (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005). Here the analysis that is conducted is very much similar to the article mentioned above, as well as showing important similarities to this study, such as the portrayal of a foreign force. The results, it should be noted, show that the

movie favours the American forces rather than their antagonists. However, the focus of the study seems to lie upon the movie, with the game as a secondary source. Despite this lack of focus, the methods used are very much similar to what this study attempts to do, even though they are not identical.

To complement Machin & van Leeuwen above is an article by Pöttsch (2011) which handles *Black Hawk Down* once again, from a similar audio-visual approach. Pöttsch investigates how the movie portrays the enemy as less than human. He argues that due to the lack of information about the enemy, leaving them in a secluded corner so to speak, the portrayal is strengthened through this, as he refers to it, "epistemological barrier" (2011, p. 1). Indeed, his article holds great value for this study as he goes on to mention the use of these techniques in, not only movies, but in video games as well, going so far as to mention *Call of Duty*, one of the subjects in this paper. He argues that;

“[...] epistemological barriers are erected and kept in place through personalization and individualization of player characters in the initial stages of the game and through the deployment of constant point-of-view shots, where the player-spectator, upon entering the diegetic universe of the game, is made to adopt the perspective of a soldier behind a rifle” (2011, p. 11).

While he applies the same approach to games as he does to movies, Pöttsch points out that the two are not interchangeable – much like Juul (2011) and Kücklich (Kerr, 2003) for factors such as active participation and making choices, some of which were discussed earlier in this section. In the analysis section later on, the work of Pöttsch, together with Machin & Leeuwen's study, will return and be put into context with the findings.

It should be noted that there is a study, quite similar to the ones mentioned, that shares many similarities with the way the material in this work is approached. Cozma and Hamilton (2009, p. 1) “[...] combines content analysis and a close reading of movies to assess the portrayal of foreign correspondents in films during two periods: the golden age of foreign correspondence (the 1930s to World War II) and the years after the Vietnam War” and while movies are treated, and not games, their methods and research questions are eerily similar, at least in terms of portrayal, to what is presented in this study, though they incorporate a character-level analysis instead of a rhetorical one, as well as coding for their method. Still, it is an interesting study that might serve, similar to the studies above, as a predecessor, and an inspiration, to what the authors are trying to do here.

Moving onwards, judging from the amount of research within the areas, the question of gender in video games seems to hold an angle above the others, bar violence. The effect of violence, though not related to this study in particular, is most likely the largest area, as well as the psychological effects in general that games might have on children (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 135; Anderson, et al., 2007). Egenfeldt-Nielsen goes on to say that the video game industry "[...] is stumbling through the same gauntlet of cultural acceptance that all new media has to face, just as governments of all political and ethnic and ideological stripes are trying to react to a mysterious and growing behemoth in their midst" (2008, p. 140). Pötzsch, again, is included here as he mentions that the deaths of the enemies has no consequences, which he says; "[...] add an interesting micro-perspective on the potential discursive impacts of the epistemological barriers" (2011, p.13). However, he is quick to declare that he does not, in fact, argue for a causal connection between violence and video games, but that, he implies, it is important to research due to its implications (2011).

Furthermore, in an article by Klimmit et al., (2009, p. 358) they talk about the identification process that happens between the player and the character they control, such as through visual cues. Indeed, Klimmit et al. argues that if the "[...] outlined understanding of identification is applied to video game players, the gaming experience would induce players to change their self-concept toward the properties of the character [they control]" (2009, p. 358). In other words, Klimmit et al. proposes that players would see themselves sharing some of the attributes the character has. Nevertheless, the authors implies that empirical data is sparse. Worth noting is the potential connection this might have between identity and culture. While it is not mentioned, it might still be possible.

In relation to the above, it is brought up by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008, p. 29) that the notion of the Catharsis Theory, proposed by Feschbach & Singer that "[...] experiencing depictions of violence in media can actually reduce aggressive feelings" (2008, p.228), is not supported by empirical data. They put this in relation to McLuhan's argument that games can serve to relieve tension, arguing that it is not so obvious (2008).

In terms of literary criticism, which Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) also touches upon, it is said that studies regarding video game characters are few, but that; "[...] the language of video games nearly allows for as much sophistication as that of literature and cinema" (p. 179). Following this, a short list of factors is shown wherein analyses can be made. This, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. argues, is an important factor in narrative as a whole, further reinforcing the point of the increasing importance of video game

analysis in relation to characters and, in relevance to this study, their potential connection to different cultures.

Still, to conclude this first part of the literature review, it has to be said once again that while games are researched a lot in other areas, such as their effect on children, violence, health, gender, etcetera., its effects on culture portrayal has gone more unnoticed. That said, there are some research, such as the aforementioned studies dealing with *Black Hawk Down* and *Call of Duty* (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005; Pötzsch, 2011), as well as a study conducted by Blackmon & Terrell (Havisher et al., 2007, p. 203) regarding racial representation, tying in with culture.

Studies of Media & Culture

One of the most prominent and important events of the 21st century is 9/11, and it is of vital importance to review how this event shaped views and media to come. Indeed, after 9/11, American exceptionalism become more apparent. As noted by Pintak (2006, p. 88), the policies by the Bush administration was "wrapped in the flag of American exceptionalism". He goes on further to mention that, to some critics, it was nothing more than a "cynical exploitation of the nation's emotions" (2006, p. 88). The notion of American exceptionalism mentioned above is resounded by Straw (2008, p. 130) as he points out that, "[while it] came under scrutiny in the wake of the Vietnam war, it is a concept which has undergone successive revisions in order to secure the pre-eminence of US foreign policy in the field of International relations." Additionally, he mentions that, by using the term "hate our freedoms" (p. 130), the then-President Bush; "[invokes] [...] American exceptionalism rewritten through the ideologies embodied in [PNAC], which espouses the necessity of a strong and dynamic foreign policy." He also mentions, citing Marita Sturken (2008), that American culture is built upon masculinity, which ties into American exceptionalism, though this will be covered in the last part of this section.

Regarding the "Us and them dichotomy" (Pintak, 2006, p. 83), that seem to be a vital part in this area, Pintak goes on to say that:

"Bush would expand on the theme during a televised address on the evening of September 11. In less than 600 words, he laid the touchstones of America's post-9/11 worldview: 'A great people... saw evil' and 'responded with the best of America,' the president said, setting the stage for what, in later speeches, he would call the 'war between good and evil'. The nation 'was targeted for attack because we 're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the

world,' he told 84 million Americans watching on television, firmly shutting the door on any attempt to understand the motives of the hijackers and creating the first of many enduring myths to emerge from the Bush Administration" (p. 83).

Summarizing up to this point, American exceptionalism seems to thrive within some of the rhetoric and is generally quite adamant about freedom. This is an important factor to remember once the study reaches the Analysis section.

In relation to the above, it is important to point out the link between stereotypes and imperialism for further discussion. It is often theorized that, as will also be touched upon regarding studies of Islam later, due to the fact that the US holds a prime position in television broadcasting, globally speaking, where the "[...] conceptions and estimations" might be internalized (as cited in Hetsroni et al., 2007, p.182). An example would be *Beverly Hills* wherein a study was conducted and concluded that certain views might transfer over (2007), and which was almost outright stated at the start of television (Bourdon, 2008, p.95). This effect, it could be said, is enforced when the viewer knows little about the subject, as they more easily accept it (Adoni & Mane, 1984, as cited in Hetsroni et al., 2007, p.183) It is here that the term 'cultural imperialism' comes into play, which combines imperialism and culture, in other words spreading it 'forcefully', as well as, in some regards, 'Americanization' (Bourdon, 2008, p. 105), which it is said to be about imperialism in its foundation. Similarly, this is related to the 'media priming model' (Zhong et al., 2011, p. 36) which suggests that viewers do not want to spend too much time understanding the information presented, and instead opt for choosing an image they are more familiar with. When combined, it could be said that these factors promote stereotypes through the spread of a culture which is considered stronger than others (such as in terms of spread and technology), thus having a much deeper impact. It is important to keep this connection in mind as the Literature Review continues.

Moving on, one article authored by Barker (2012) analyses the portrayal of the Iraq War in Swedish media compared to the US media. This is quite heavy in relevance to this study's portrayal aspect as it provides a comparative perspective with the US compared to another nation, detailing the differences within. As for its results, Barker's study found a notable difference in the media. On the US side, the war was talked about "in a masculine sense" (2012, p. 7). In contrast, Sweden's reporting was much more "feminine" (2012). What the two terms mean in relation to nations are, Barker says, citing

Hofstede (2012, p. 6) that a masculine nation favours, for example; assertiveness, success, prevalence of money and things, excelling as well as male domination. Feminine nations, on the other hand, values caring, people, quality of life, service and sympathy, among others. This difference, Kagan argues (as cited in Barker, 2012, p. 7), results in Europe, in simple words, valuing a more diplomatic approach than the US that prefers; "policies of coercion rather than persuasion [...] They want problems solved, threats eliminated" (2012). For the nation as a whole when subjects such as military intervention and foreign policy's are taken into account, this statement holds a great deal of weight from the perspective of the next section that follows after this one. Of course, a nation's media does not reflect its inhabitants to a tee, but there might be some influences, or demand, that shapes the media. On a larger scale, the study holds vital significance as far as the differences are concerned and how it can be put into practice within this study. Indeed, Barker mentions Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory (2012, p. 5), which will appear again further down. Published in 1973, the theory details how a message is encoded by the sender, to fit the market they aim for, and how the receiver is decoding the message it received (Hall, 2009). Therefore, it is very important that the sender carefully decide how to encode the message and that they need to be very specific to make it easier for the receiver to encode it. Indeed, if it is encoded in a good way it will be easy to decode the message in the proper way that it was meant to be. Of course, there has been criticism against this thinking. One of them is due to the theory's linearity (2009). It is argued that it cannot be so simple, as there are many things that is needed to take into consideration when forming a message, rather than just sending a message without carefully thinking it through.

Regardless, Barker (2012, p. 5) puts Hall's theory into his theoretical framework, arguing that it is of importance for international news, and that he will put it into practice when it comes to the decoding process of aforementioned news.

Next, studies of Islam, too, were included here, and then mostly of how the US media portrays them and put them in comparison with religious fanatics. Indeed, several authors (Trevino et al., 2010; Anderson et al., 2009) studies how Muslims are portrayed in the media and how they are perceived by the public due to the aforementioned media. There are similarities, here, to the way that Russians, or Russia in general, were portrayed during the Cold War. In relation to more news and 9/11, a study conducted by Ettinger & Udris (2009, p. 59) regarding Muslims in Switzerland points to a correlation between pre- and post 9/11 when it came to news reporting. When Islam as a whole, naturally, came under more scrutiny internationally, Muslims in Switzerland also came under scrutiny. Indeed, in a study by Ibrahim (as cited in Cagle et al., 2011, p. 4), fact of the matter was that; "[Throughout] the

United States and the rest of the world, the objective coverage of Islam does not exist." This conclusion comes again and again as Cagle et al. continues to cite studies conducted after the events of 9/11. However, it should be noted that while the media lacked objectiveness, he points out that President Obama publicly displayed positive support regarding the mosque debacle in the following years (2011, p. 11), which the authors argue; "[...] shows he tried to make people favour the building of the mosque because he said it is a constitutional right guaranteed to all Americans", though, of course, he found much opposition on the other side of the political spectrum (2011).

On a different yet related subject, something that lies closer to video games than news are movies. Haddad et al. (2005) analyzed the portrayal of Muslims, and in particular Muslim women, in popular cinema. The consensus seems to be that by showing Muslim women as a result of radical Islam, portraying it as a default state, they put Islam in a bad light that usually do not correspond with the real world. Indeed, Muslims are often portrayed as deceptive and treacherous, if only to justify the action of Western protagonists, especially after the events of 9/11, which saw an increase in the image of Muslim men as perpetrators of violence. (2005, p. 29) The result, Haddad et al. argues, is that the public, due to the sheer frequency of these movies, cannot differentiate between fiction and reality. This is supported, in relation to news, by Parek et al., (as cited in McAuliffe, 2008, p. 39);

"Any one news story is interpreted by the reader or viewer within the context of a larger narrative, acting as a kind of filter or template. If the larger narrative is racist ... then the story is more likely to be interpreted in a racist or majority-based way, regardless of the conscious intentions of reporters, journalists and headline-writers. "

The results of these studies are staggering, as the consensus seems to be that the more of it there is, the harder it is to remove the stamp, so to speak. Here, Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory would be an interesting side-note to incorporate once again. It is not hard to suspect it is an intentional method used in movies, or games, that treats this subject, or, as Hall (2009) goes on to say, that it might be a result of the different background of those who are producing this sort of media that the result has the effect it has.

On the matter of Russia, the medial situation between them and the US is less of a current issue when compared to the Middle-East, but not less important in the big picture. Currently, dating back a few years, Feklyunina (2008, p. 606) argues that; "[...] the ever-increasing role of the PR element in Russia's relations with the West has some implications for Russian foreign policy, as Russian elites are limited in

their policies both at home and in the international arena." She goes on to say that, while Russia is 'constructing' an image they seek to export to the West, the events that took place under Putin's presidency, such as shutting off gas in Ukraine, clashed with this image. On the perspective of the West, Feklyunina says that the criticism often displayed towards Russia is interpreted as a " [...] coordinated campaign against Russia" (p. 612). She goes on to suggest that what she calls the "siege mentality", a remnant of the Cold War, "[...] made Russian political elites especially sensitive to any attempt to infringe on Russia's interests" (p. 612). The result is a vision, she argues, with contributions from the rebuilding of Russia in the 90s, wherein the West is seen as trying to stop Russia's recovery (2008).

A Brief Look at International Politics

The real world, as it is now, is interconnected and complicatedly mixed, but most of the readings has held true to a few theories; that a war between the United States and Russia is exceedingly unlikely, and that an exchange of Weapons of Mass Destruction between them would not be the cause. Indeed, Feklyunina (2008, p. 616), on one part implies that, instead, gas would be a potential conflict subject. In other words, one might say that as natural resources dwindle, so does the likelihood for international conflicts. Parallels can also be drawn, here, to the argument of the US intentions to control oil in the Middle-East, and the subsequent war that developed through the 80s into the 21st century (Kull, 2011, p. 46).

That said, the prospect of a war involving nuclear or chemical weapons is not that far-fetched. Instead, it is merely the country that changes. Here, Iraq comes into focus again, as does several other countries, whose military forces are not that large. As argued by Betts (2003, p. 91), and which will be touched upon further in the Analysis section of this study, WMDs has become a tool for smaller nations that can not summon the same military strength as the US or Russia. These smaller countries are using WMDs as a response to the threat of large armies amassing within other nations.

On the topic of the Middle-East, it is important to note that during and after the Cold War, Moscow was not able to "shape the course of events" as much as first thought (Halliday, 2005, p. 138). If anything, in the years that followed, Britain and France held much more important relations with the Middle-East than Russia (p. 139). Indeed, the dissolution of the USSR opened for new diplomatic and economic relations between the Middle-East and the US as well. Adding to this fact is that after the Iraq War started, Russia became more hesitant to US presence in the region (Trenin, 2007, p. 102). Their fear, Trenin points out, lies in the possibility that the US will fail at their task and Russia will

inherit the aftermath.

If one were to push further into the Cold War, and with a focus upon the US and the, then, Soviet Union, (Davis, 1947, p. 179), some of the tensions would become apparent. What makes this relevant is that some of these tensions, relating to social and economic structures, all can, to a degree, be applied to the modern day (1947). This provides a, albeit small and potential, resource to further understand what lies beneath the constant power struggle between US and Russia. In addition, in *Culture of Military Innovation*, Adamsky expands on this when he mentions the differencing ideologies between Russians and Americans, and applies them to military strategy (2010, p. 42). While there is no real connection or explanation as to what this could mean in actual combat, Adamsky points out that, due to Russians being used to a harsher climate and conditions than Americans, Russians; "[...] places an overwhelming emphasis on *endurance* and *tolerance* in the face of hardship as the core characteristic of [their] approach to life" (p. 42). This is, indeed, a great part of combat for Russian military doctrine as Adamsky continues on a similar line, detailing Russian military traditions and its emphasis on 'man' as central to war, not technology or machines. This emphasis was criticized as technology moved on, but is something that holds true to this day (2010).

On the small topic of identities, there has been much research on the subject. Here, the topic of Russian nationalists comes into focus, which is not that rare compared to other countries, but as with many political parties, rifts between them exist (Pavleeva, 2011, p. 7). Because of this, this area is extremely complicated and will not be covered here to a large extent. Instead, it should be noted that it is a source of national disruption which serves to create the potential conflicts seen later in the Analysis section.

As will be expanded upon in the Theory section after the Literature Review, Social Identity Theory is an important part of the study, and one study in particular will be mentioned here; Franke (2000) conducted a study on West Point Cadets to analyse their identity in groups, in a military context, and the results indicated, interestingly, that the experience; "[...] did not enhance the potency of their national identity images, [but that] military reference groups became significantly more potent with the length of exposure from military socialization" (2000, p. 195). Similarly, the Self-Categorization Theory, which is also treated in the next section, is used in a study by Landis & Tallagiro (2012, p. 443), looking at the representation of minorities within the U.S. Military in the context of mishaps and court martials among other factors. The results points towards an over-representation of said minorities (2012).

Lastly, concluding this part and the literature review, 9/11 is once again a topic. While it has been mentioned earlier, in the Media & Culture part, it also signifies an important change to international relations between certain nations when it comes to attitudes between the United States and the Middle-East, further deepening a rift between the East and the West. Peek argues that the aftermath of the event has resulted in (as cited in Hopkins et al., 2008, p. 190); "[...] discrimination, harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault" for people of Muslim faith. In Hopkin's own study of young Muslim men in Scotland, he agrees with this assertion (2008), though notes that the harassment was stronger the months following the event, asking the question if the harassment is still keeping up. He concludes by saying that the bombings in London in 2005, along with the Iraq War, keeps these sentiments alive.

It is interesting to note that the attack resulted a willingness by President Putin to establish a cooperation when it came to combating Islamic terrorism (Mankoff, 2007). This, Mankoff says, was a decision made by a small group around Putin despite; "[...] much opposition from the broader foreign policy elite" (2007, p. 132). Though, it must be said, the cooperation also resulted in an escalation in the Chechnyan War, along with other matters, which produced discontent in Washington. As Mankoff says, Russia's cooperation in the matter; "[...] was only one element in a broader strategy of asserting Russia's role of a pivotal state" (2007).

Theories

Critical Theory

Critical theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, with roots within the Culture Industry and sharing three critical theorists; Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse (Thussu, 2006). Critical Theory think of mass culture as a problem, criticizing the culture industry because; [...] the development of the 'culture industry and its ability to ideologically inoculate the masses against socialist ideas benefited the ruling classes" (p. 54). It sees mass culture as an obstacle for human emancipation and freedom because it considers mass culture to have social domination. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse borrowed the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and merged it with the Marxian economic. They argued "[...] that in a capitalist economy cultural products are produced and sold in media markets as commodities, and the consumers buy them not just because of their intrinsic worth but in exchange for entertainment or to fulfil their psychological needs" (p. 54). One can, perhaps, say that mass culture shrinks the world. Everyone is doing the same things, watching the same movies and buying the same records., or buying things even if we do not have a use for it.

"The desire for distraction reflects the needs to escape from the responsibilities and drudgery of everyday life. The lack of meaning and control people experience registers accurately a truth about their lives – they are not masters of their own destiny" (Held, 1980, p. 93).

As such, it is argued that due to mass culture we do not have that much of a free time any longer, nor individuality.

As we are going to analyse cutscenes and QTEs in the games, film analysis, which is part of Critical Theory to a degree, will be of assistance in this study. Cutscene, similarly to movies, are built up by several smaller pieces, such as music, characters, settings, etcetera. And the film-analysis part would help with that. Semiotics is another area capable of fitting into Critical Theory and film-analysis, which could help bringing forth the meaning behind certain scenes or images (Green & LeBihan, 1995, p. 77-81). Of course, this also ties into the literary side of things, such as the meaning of certain words and what connotations they might have. Of course, it also ties in with narrative and how the material is structured, such as with characters and whatnot (1995).

It should also be noted that games nowadays, while still being shunned by many, belong to mainstream mass culture, which Critical Theory goes against. As games begin to attract a bigger audience than before,

we buy, like in the case of movies, the same games as everyone else. However, this does not mean it solely depends on, say, one's friends to buy them. Mostly, we buy the same games because we like them or because we have played the previous games in a game series, like for example, the Call of Duty: Modern Warfare franchise.

Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed at the start of the 1970's in Britain, by Henri Tajfel (Hogg, 2006, p. 111). He argues that a group exists (as cited in Hogg, 2006, p. 111); “[...] psychologically if three or more people construe and evaluate themselves in terms of shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people.”

Further, every group that is created is unique to its kind. A group share their resources and attributes which make the group unique compared to other groups. So every group is not just a group, it is one of a kind. This applies to games, too, in both single-player and multiplayer. For example, in our application of this theory for this study, we can potentially see how the group identifies itself towards other groups, in this case, for example, a US Marine squad versus Taliban fighters. This ties in with the real world in a sense, as the theory has been used in one of many studies related to military personnel (Franke, 2000), which was further explained in the previous section.

Another thing that the theory brings to the table are the various phenomena that exist within groups. “Social identity theory addresses phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, intergroup conflict, conformity, normative behaviour, group polarization, crowd behaviour, organizational behaviour, leadership, deviance, and group cohesiveness” (Hogg, 2006, p. 111)

However, there are some criticism against this theory. In an article authored by Brown (2000, p. 753), he details these problems, though they will only be summarized here;

"[...] the relationship between group identification and ingroup bias; the self-esteem hypothesis; the phenomenon of positive-negative asymmetry in inter-group discrimination; the effects of intergroup similarity; and the choice of identity maintenance strategies by low-status groups."

In other words, several factors play along within this thought of criticism.

In our case this is a relevant theory since it is about group membership. In the games this study treats, the characters belongs to groups of various importance and different backgrounds. Applying SIT to these groups, and individuals, could provoke interesting result when it comes to answering RQ1 and 2, as well as corresponding to the purpose.

Self-categorization theory

Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) is about the categorization of the self as a key feature. Not self as the heart of cognition but rather that the self should be seen as a product of cognitive system at work. SCT was developed by John Turner and colleagues, and is interlocked with SIT, looking at how humans take the roles of different social identities. Tajfel (1981, as cited in Scales, 2007, p. 8-9) notes;

"[...] self-categorization theory places its emphasis on an individual's social identity. Social identity is defined as the part of the individual's self-concept that is derived from their knowledge of their membership in a social group, along with the value and significance they attach to that membership. Thus, SCT deals with the perception of the self in respect to certain social groups and other individuals."

One example of this that Scales brings up includes an adolescent and a group, in that the group's identity takes precedence over his or her own, affecting behaviour (2007).

SCT also includes the notion that, in general; "[...] in-group members will perceive their group as more favourable than the out-group, particularly if the in-group is deemed of higher social status than the out-group" (Scales, 2007, p. 9). In other words, for the purpose of this study, SCT is useful in a combination with SIT when it comes to groups and the individuals within them, as the games being treated has a wide arrange of groups. This, additionally, carries some extra weight as these groups has distinct roles divided between the character, which is something SCT and SIT also touches upon, as well as an important note regarding groups; they do not, necessarily, need to be formed on the basis of a relationship between those involved. Instead, they identify themselves with the group and they define themselves as group members, and while in that group the group members will make choices and decisions that benefits the whole group and its members only (Kuwasaki, 2008).

Method

Brief Introduction to the Games

Plot and Playable Characters

Battlefield 3

The story in BF3 revolves around a character named Blackburn, a U.S. Marine. Throughout the course of the game, the plot is told through flashbacks, as Blackburn is interrogated by CIA agents, in the belief that he is aiding terrorists. Recalling previous events, he talks about how they discovered missing Russian portable nuclear warheads, and the ensuing chase, and his interaction with another character named Dimitri, a Russian GRU operative.

Playable Characters

BF3 features Henry 'Black' Blackburn as the main playable protagonist, and Dimitri 'Dima' Mayakovsky as a secondary playable protagonist. The player also takes control of two minor characters named Jennifer Coleby 'Wedge' Hawkins, a U.S. Jet Fighter Gunner, and Jonathan 'Jono' Miller, a U.S. Tank Commander.

Modern Warfare 3

Picking up where the second game left off, the now-disavowed Task Force 141 extract from Afghanistan. In other parts of the world, World War III that was brought into motion in previous games continues, with Makarov, the Ultranationist leader, still at large. As the Russian President declares he will attempt to seek peace with the U.S., Makarov kidnaps him in search of the launch codes for Russia nuclear arsenal. This bring Task Force 141 and the U.S. Delta Force to pursue them.

Playable Characters

MW3 features many playable characters throughout the game. As was mentioned in the Limitation section, the perspectives of the UK-related characters, such as John Price, will not be included in the analysis. Disregarding Price, the player controls one American and two Russians; Delta Force operator Derek 'Frost' Westbrook, Task Force 141 affiliated, Russian soldier Yuri and Russian Agent Andrei Harkov.

Medal of Honor

The game follows Rabbit and Deuce, two Tier 1 and Delta Force operators, on their mission to acquire intelligence on the Taliban. Throughout the game, the perspective changes between them and their

interaction with the rest of the U.S. military and the Taliban in several moments of conflicts in Afghanistan.

Playable Characters

MoH lets the player control DEVGRU operator 'Rabbit' and Delta Force operator 'Deuce', along with U.S. Ranger Dante Adams, and Brad "Hawk" Hawkins, a helicopter pilot in a minor role.

Motivation and Reasoning

The reasoning behind choosing the three video games this study has decided to analyse are the following:

1. Popularity

MW3 and BF3 are two of the most prolific and popular modern combat FPS games in the current video game industry. Individual game sales, taking into account the PC, XBOX360 and PS3 platforms, rounds up to roughly 16 million (VGChartz.com), and 12.9 million (VGChartz) respectively at the time of writing. Medal of Honor 2010 is the exception, in that it is not as popular. It has so far sold five million copies (VGChartz). However, a small disclaimer needs to be made about these numbers; they do not, in some cases, factor in digital purchases, which makes the actual number a bit larger.

2. Demographic Relevance

MW3 features two 'main factions' as combatants; Russia and the USA, with the UK having a brief appearance along with France. This spread in demographics, along with the variety of locations within the games, and their focus within the story, provide a good foundation to conduct an analysis and answer the research questions proposed in this study. Similarly, BF3 features combatants from Russia, the USA and the Middle-East, and, as such, the arguments for its relevance are very similar.

For Medal of Honor, it differs in that it does not feature Russia as a major faction, but, instead, has a bigger focus on the Middle-East than the previous two. This is due to the fact that MoH is grounded more, to a degree, in reality, and through that provides another relevance factor for the study.

3. Country of Origin

What provides an extra point of interest are the countries these games have been developed in. BF3, and the franchise as a whole, was developed by DICE, a Swedish developer situated in Stockholm. In contrast, MW3 and MoH (the single-player portion of the game) were developed in the United States,

by Infinity Ward, in cooperation with Sledgehammer Games, and Danger Close respectively.

Interesting to note in the case of BF3 is that it was published by Electronic Arts, as was MoH. This puts a twist on the fact that the developers are Swedish, yet their publisher is American. Meanwhile, MW3 was published by Activision, also an American publisher.

As for why the origin of the games are interesting, it relates to the international relations part of the study. By analysing, briefly, the relationships, and perhaps comparing a game to a movie produced in Hollywood, assumptions can be made about the potential connections between the game and reality. A game developed in the US, whose media are generally considered negative in its portrayal of the Iraq War, compared to Sweden's media (Barker, 2012), might share its media sentiments, and the portrayal in the games reflects it. Granted, this argument becomes somewhat complex and null due to the fact that the publishers for all of the games are based in the US. This problem will be further discussed in the Problems section at the end of this study.

Qualitative content analysis

Behind the decision to use a qualitative content analysis lies the argument that, as with movies, games can be analysed in a similar way with a similar theoretical framework. With the incorporation of film- and rhetorical analysis, it provides a strong way to analyse the games to a deeper degree. The study opted for this above a quantitative content analysis, due to the fact that these games have a lot of varying factors, and trying to establish a set of simple coded questions would probably not function as intended. For example, meanings would become lost among rhetoric, and the analysis would rely upon a basic, underlying understanding of the plot and the games themselves. Additionally, the small size of the research sample would not provide an ample enough quantity, and generalization regarding games in these genres would as such not be possible due to a too low validity. The chosen method was therefore deemed the most optimal to answer the thesis.

The content analysis is concocted, as mentioned, into two primary analysis methods: Film- and rhetorical-analysis. Additionally, questions has been created, found further down, corresponding to answering the Research Questions, which are detailed in the next section.

Film-analysis

First, film analysis is for the purpose of analysing the cutscenes in the games, along with certain Quick-

Time-Events (QTEs), where it is deemed relevant. It is important to distinguish, here, that the study differentiates between normal gameplay and QTEs, if only for the sake of isolating relevant situations. For the definition of QTEs, see the Definition section.

As for the different parts included into film-analysis, it consists of many, ranging from the setting, the interaction of characters, actions, appearance and the use of music.

Rhetorical-analysis

Rhetorical analysis, in contrast, will treat the dialogues, and monologues, of certain characters. Mostly, for the sake of relevance and to establish a focus, this analysis will focus, as with the film analysis, upon cutscenes and QTEs. A relevant QTE in this respect would be, for example, a hand-to-hand combat situation wherein dialogue, and as a result the story is further told, along with potential portrayals related to the purpose, during the actions of the player.

Method Concerns

Of course, the qualitative method comes with its own set of problems. For one, the performance of the analysis relies upon the authors' varying understanding and knowledge of the subject and the related theories, as opposed to a quantitative analysis, wherein the questions are detailed and formulated based on pre-determined factors. Indeed, in the study by Cozma and Hamilton (2009, p. 6-7), they, too, point out that a qualitative analysis “[...] deals with latent, beyond-the-surface content, such as the context of a message, which is not easy to observe, unless one is trained or happens to share the same meaning for certain symbols as the source of the message.”

Operationalization

First are the Research Questions. They have been designed in mind, of course, to answer the purpose and ensure validity, coupled with the questions that follow them, detailed further below.

RQ 1: How are the Middle-Eastern and Russian combatants portrayed compared to their American counterparts in a visual and rhetorical context?

RQ 1.1: Are stereotypes applied to the established protagonists and antagonists within the story, and if so, how?

This question, and its sub-questions, seeks to investigate the portrayals of the different sides within the game in terms of visuals and rhetorical dialogue or monologue. By identifying common visual cues or certain terms used towards combatants, conclusions can be made about their possible meaning and if they correspond to certain stereotypes, aim to project a certain message or serve to portray one side in a different way compared to the rest, in other words, seeing how the combatants and characters are balanced towards one another.

RQ 2: Is there a connection between real world international politics and its fictional counterpart?

RQ 2.1: What, if any, are the motivations behind the conflicts in the virtual worlds?

RQ 2.2: Do they serve to strengthen the portrayal of the combatants?

To answer the second part of the purpose, RQ2 looks at the relationship between the political agenda that might serve as the motivation for the conflicts

RQ2 and its sub-questions focuses upon the possible political links. As with RQ1, while visuals might not be as relevant, rhetorical dialogue or monologue is, together with the locations of the conflicts. Depending on the results of RQ1, some of its answers might also tie into RQ2. In reverse, the answers for RQ2 might help reinforce that of RQ1, which is part of the purpose.

To help answer these Research Questions, several smaller questions has been composed that will be asked towards the material. The answers to these questions will then be found in the Findings section, together with descriptions of scenes where the relevance is high.

RQ1 (including its sub-questions)

Film-analysis questions

- What appearance does the characters have? Factors include: Clothing (kevlar, helmets, robber masks, different military gradings, etcetera.), facial hair, equipment.
- Types of weapons, what origin do they have?
- Where are the locations and how are they shown?
- Is music used in certain scenes?
- Is slow-motion used in certain scenes?
- How are death scenes handled depending on the character?

Rhetorical-analysis questions

- Are certain terms, slang or racial slurs used that refer to nationality, religion or military association? If so, what are these terms and who said them to who? Terms include: Taliban, Muslim, Christian, Russkies, Russian, American, Yank/Yankee etc.
- Where relevant, what is said about the locations the conflicts are conducted in?
- Are generalized terms such as 'the West' or 'the East', in military contexts, mentioned? If so, by who?
- Is the superiority of one country, be it technical, culturally or otherwise, in a military context, touched upon?
- Are their native language used? i.e do they talk Russian in English but with an accent?

RQ2 (including its sub-questions)

Rhetorical-analysis questions

- Are the political motivations behind the decisions in these games mentioned and if so what are they?
- Is there a tension between the countries involved that could correspond to the real world?
- Are generalized terms such as 'the West' or 'the East', in political contexts, mentioned? If so, by who?
- Is the superiority of one country, be it technical, culturally or otherwise, in a political context, touched upon?
- Are there references to real world events?
- Is 9/11 especially referenced?

Process

The process with which the study is conducted is detailed below and refers to how the material was approached and then included in the findings. Part of the process is to see that the reliability factor stays on a satisfactory level.

1. Observation: The games are observed by both authors. The authors observe the same material, but individually.
2. Isolation: Important cutscenes and QTEs are identified.

3. Questioning: The questions detailed above are asked towards the chosen material and the findings are recorded.
4. Comparison: The authors compare their answers and integrate their choices with each other as needed, to double-check that no parts has been missed, or if some parts are irrelevant.
5. Findings: The answers are composed into the Findings section with additional information regarding the scenes, such as description, if needed.

Findings

RQ1 and Sub-Questions

Film-analysis

In Battlefield 3 most of the combatants of Russian and Middle-Eastern affiliation wear a robber mask/ski mask, and, in some cases, helmet in combination with the mask. They also wear normal clothing in some cases, depending on what context the scene is set in depending on the environmental context. For example, in one scene set on a subway train they use civilian clothing which are defined as regular shirt and pants, together with the mask. In a later scene, set in Iran, they use military outfits with bulletproof kevlar vests. The U.S. Marines, on the other hand, are usually seen without masks, though with a standard helmet. An interesting observation made in a couple of scenes involving terrorists of a Middle-Eastern affiliation is that they wear a scarf, with only a few colours differentiating them, identifying them all as one single group. These scarfs are not seen on other characters.

In Modern Warfare 3, the combatants are the U.S., the Russian Army and Russian Ultrationalists. In general, the Russian soldiers are unmasked and clothed, much like in BF3, in normal military outfits. Some exceptions exist, one of which being in the first act of the game when the Delta Force members infiltrate a Russian submarine. The officers in the Command Center are wearing different, though official, military clothes, whilst also being unmasked. As for the aforementioned Delta Force soldiers, their outfits are almost identical to that of BF3. Compared to the Russian Army's soldier, though, the Russian Ultrationalists wear a lighter variant of their outfits, again unmasked.

In Medal of Honor, meanwhile, the Middle-Eastern insurgents wear, what authors assume are, traditional Arabic headwear, including beards, while some others are using robber masks. However, the majority are unmasked, opting for the the customary Middle-Eastern headwear, such as a turban. Their gear changes depending on the environment, if it is cold, warm, etcetera.

The US soldiers are using their military outfits, just like in BF3 and MW3, with the exception at some parts of the game when the Tier 1 Operators acts undercover. Then, they wear the similar customary clothes as the region they are in.

It might be worth nothing that for all three games, the weapons used are usually dependant on their affiliation. U.S. Soldiers often wields American-made weapons, such as the M4 Carbine, while those

with Middle-Eastern affiliations wields RPGs and AKs. Russian weapons vary, though the AK, being inherent to the country, is commonly used, along with other Russian-made weaponry.

There are several instances of interest regarding death scenes. BF3 contains four, while MW3 and MoH varies between one or two. Nevertheless, in Battlefield 3, these three scenes involves four protagonists (of varying importance) and an antagonist. The first scene takes place in Paris, as the player's character Dima and his allies Vladimir and Kiril chases down one of Solomon's henchmen carrying a nuclear device. During this chase scene, a cutscene plays wherein the player dodges an RPG and detonates a bus. Vladimir is caught by the blast and, while a low tune of music starts to play and slow-motion sets in, he is impaled, landing on the ground a few meters away. Dima rushes to his aid, grabbing his clothes and drags him to a wall, while Vladimir urges him to leave as he is dying. Kiril keeps an eye out and Dima places a hand on Vladimir's shoulder, seeming to have a hard time taking his eyes off him, until both Dima and Kiril continues the chase. The second scenes involves two of Blackburn's friends during a Russian air-to-ground attack by a jet which causes both of them to die. The distress is evident in the way that Blackburn and his other friend Montes bends down, lost for words, while their CO, Cole, stands by the side seemingly uncaring.

The second to last scene, involving Blackburn, Montes and secondary antagonist Al-Bashir, shows their struggle to keep Al-Bashir alive as they extract information. Al-Bashir's screen time is quite high as he rags on about how Solomon betraying him, while Montes shouts at him to stay with them. He gives them the information before succumbing to his wounds. The words uttered during these two last sequences can be found in the next section. Then, lastly, Montes dies at the end at the hands of Solomon as music plays and slow-motion activates.

MoH features one scene, at the end, where the player's character, Rabbit, dies after being wounded by the Taliban, as he waits for extraction. He is constantly comforted and reassured by his comrades, both by Tier 1 Operators and Ranger soldiers, as he lapses in and out of consciousness with music lurking in the background. This is followed by a sombre scene on the plane, with Rabbit's body lying by the soldiers' feet, as bombs explode on a mountain in the distance.

For MW3, two scenes stand out (disregarding the UK characters.) First, the Delta Force soldiers, a squad with which the player has been a part of, extracts the Russian President. Towards the end, the player is dragged towards the extraction chopper, wounded, while music plays and slow-motion takes over. The Delta Force squad is left behind as they cover the President's extraction. Secondly, the death

of Yuri, the Russian player protagonist, much in the likeness of BF3's Vladimir, dies in slow-motion as he tries to fight Makarov, though focus on him does not stay for long as it transpires during the final battle with Makarov.

As for locations, MoH is based solely in Iraq, featuring the typical landscape one might imagine, including mountains laden with snow, deserts and scrap towns. BF3 moves the action back and forth, basing out of Iran, but also New York and Paris. New York is portrayed as it is in reality, with no real modification, and the case is the same with Paris until a nuclear device detonates. No images are shown after the deed, leaving the devastation to speculation. Iran, on its part, features no distinct features, though the locations vary from modern cities to nature and deserts. MW3 features many more locations, stretching from Germany, to Russia and New York. There are too many to mention here, though what is evident from observation is that they all feature their typical styles.

Rhetorical-analysis

There are some instances of note where important dialogue is spoken. MoH does not feature much of it, but BF3 and MW3 has their share. In the earlier, Al-Bashir makes an interesting comment during the execution of Miller; "You come here, yet we are the terrorists?". Prior to this Solomon is shown talking to Miller about Miller's son and his toy dinosaur. Later on, when the U.S. Forces are forced into combat against Russian paratroops, one soldier comments about the situation; "We're just gonna finish one war by starting another, that is out-fucking-standing!" The implication of this comment will be brought up in the Analysis section as it holds quite a deal of value. Similarly, Dima comments about various things later in the game, both about the events and when speaking to Blackburn.

In MW3, Makarov stands for most of the relevant dialogue. Lines such as "All warfare based on perception" and "For years the West's hypocrisy has made the world a battlefield" provides ample ground for a further analysis in the next section.

As for the languages being spoken, they vary between English, Russian and Arabic (it is assumed). It is important to note that those with Russian or Middle-Eastern origin only talk English, with a notable accent, when they talk to a character of English origins. Otherwise, they speak in their own language, even if the player is controlling them, as seen with, for example, Dima and his comrades. For the likes of Al-Bashir, the same applies. Solomon is an exception as in the few instances he is seen he is talking with an English audience. One additional exception is towards the very end, as Dima in a final cutscene talks in English towards the player. MoH shares this tradition, and even subverts it, as the American

operators speak Arabic in some instance.

MW3, however, does not do this. It varies between a few spoken Russian lines without any real importance, and instead uses English with a Russian accent for most of the dialogue and monologue

As for the different terms or slang words used in the games as a whole, a wide range of professional military terms are used, though only on the American side where it is the easiest to recognize. Terms in Russian and Arabic might be spoken, but apart from the Russian Spetsnaz in BF3, it is not often heard. Nevertheless, there is a seeming lack of straight-out insults. The most obvious insults are hurled in MoH, involving terms such as 'All-you-can-eat Taliban' or similar. 'We're hunting big game today' uttered in BF3 might also be included in this category. Beyond that, 'motherfucker' and its ilk tends to be uttered at some instances. As for terms, MoH once again stands at the forefront due to its heavy usage of 'Taliban'. 'Russians' and 'Americans' with no variations are said in both BF3 and MW3 as well at many occasions, though less than MoH. There are also no mention or referral to religion in either of the games.

Regarding locations, related to what was said in the previous section, there are not many comments about them. One American soldier in BF3 comments how, while standing on the streets of a city in Iraq; "this part of the world get's fucked up all the time," but beyond this there are no relevant comments. The comments about weapons are similar, in that they are rare. In MoH, the operators comment about a weapon stash; "Red hair. Checken. Tactical vest. He ain't getting that shit in Kabul. These are serious dudes" but nevertheless they are rare.

Lastly, as mentioned in the section above, the dialogue spoken in the death scenes in BF3 holds some value. In BF3, Montes, after Cole comments about how they need to move on, says; "There is no us. There is only we." Vladimir, meanwhile, urges Dima on, stating he will hold the enemies off. In the scene with Al-Bashir, he calls Solomon a "dog", and tells the Americans before dying to "burn in hell."

RQ2 and Sub-questions

In both BF3 and MW3 there is no mention about 9/11 and there are no factors that can be associated with the event. However, the case is difference for Medal of Honor as they mention not only 9/11 in the beginning of the game, but also Al-Qaeda. This information is heard in the form of news reporting and military chatter as the camera pans the globe.

However, there are hints, within dialogue and in general, in both BF3 and MW3 as to what politics works behind the scene. In BF3, this makes itself known by comments from soldiers, such as Montes's; "We suppose to be in Iran, not Iraq", along with the comment mentioned earlier about the Russian armed forces. MW3, on the other hand, is a bit more obvious. The Russian President expects wishes to seek peace with the West, though some do not agree with this assertion. Meanwhile, Makarov continues his fight as a Ultranationalist, commenting about, as mentioned earlier, the hypocrisy of the West among other things.

Analysis

RQ1 & Sub-Questions

It should be pointed out that, as mentioned in the article by Andersen and Kurti in the literature review, (2009), where college students recount their experiences with Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, there are many similarities shown of what they say when compared to this study (disregarding that Modern Warfare 1 is a prequel to MW3). At one instance, a student says; "“war is undertaken against unidentified Arabs who fit nearly every stereotype used to portray Arabs since September 11th” (p. 53), which echoes findings in these three games, with some minor exceptions. It is, indeed, a common trick in games, sometimes due to factors such as technology and time, as it saves on character modelling, but it comes with this aforementioned side-effect of de-personalization (2009). In other words, as Machin and van Leeuwen touches upon (2005, p. 135) as they say; "[...] in the game, the enemy, still individualised in the introduction, becomes anonymous, de-personalised, and part of a collective." Applying SIT here might point towards a reinforcement the distinction between the two groups, the Americans and the hostiles

In this regard, BF3 takes the brunt of these visuals. Loyalists of Solomon, with origins in the Middle-East (it is assumed), utilizes this to a great degree, while Americans and Russians remain unmasked. In contrast, MoH, which will be discussed later in this analysis, does not, as it roots itself in realism. In general, fighters in MoH are depicted wearing turbans or other headwear, along with traditional clothes and, often, beards. These factors comes into focus for the main protagonists, as they share much of the appearance as their antagonists at certain intervals. This, said by a Special Forces soldier, is because; "[...] wearing native garb and beards helped them better assimilate with the locals" ('SpecOps soldiers chafe at grooming order', n.d.), further reinforcing the realism factor. To conclude this point, though the authors could not find a reliable source for the following claim, the treatment of beards depends on the different variations within Islam, and, as such, it could be considered a stereotype in itself, as they are categorized into a single religious denomination.

MoH suffers the most from only showing the Americans, leaving little room to personify the opposing forces, apart from a single character in the beginning of the game. This, again, could be a result of the game's attempt at realism from one perspective. This would not leave much room for additional viewpoints. Indeed, it seems that the “special operations discourse”, that Machin and van Leeuwen discusses (2005) is applicable upon MoH as a special case compared to the other two games. This

discourse's key point, they argue;

"[...] is its stress on the qualities of the elite forces: high combat skills, superior technology and team work, the absolute priority of looking after wounded members of the team, and a stress on the speed, the meticulous timing, of the operation and the quick and efficient 'insertion' and 'extraction' of the force. The enemy, meanwhile, is represented differently, as under the sway of a despotic warlord, tyrant or super-terrorist, and as ill-disciplined and ill-equipped by comparison to the US soldiers." (p. 138)

One character comments, at one point, about the quality of the hardware used by the Checkens, noting it is far above what they usually use, the implication being it was something not available in the intelligence, and that it could be said to assert the technological superiority the U.S. holds. In comparison to BF3 and MW3, comments about the quality of weapons or other forms of hardware, beyond what they are, are never made.

Finishing up on this point, many parallels can be made between the movie Black Hawk Down and MoH, in that the Americans are heavily personalized, while the enemy is not (Machin & Leeuwen, 2005). This shows through even more towards the end of MoH, where the dying Rabbit is comforted by his brethren, despite the fact that several others, including both Americans and hostiles, had died in the same mission. The point about narrative has to be made as the story is about Rabbit and his comrades, and not anyone else, yet this contrast in perspective and lack of personalization compared to BF3 and MW3 is especially glaring in this sequence. This will be touched upon once again later on.

Similarly to what has been discussed above, it seems that MW3 has opted for what Wright calls the 'professional Western' schema (as cited in Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 136), which features; "[...] a band of hardened men 'doing a job' to protect a weak 'society', relying on superior 'professional' skills and motivated, more by their loyalty towards each other than by concern for those they are protecting." This schema comes into effect when the Russian army invades Europe, and the only ones that seem to have an important role are the American forces. While some French and British forces does appear, their role, it appears to the player, are as mere supporters to the Americans in their own countries.

Moving on, terms and slang are a large part of all three games, but outright insults, as the findings show, are rare. MoH, again probably due to its realism, features the most insults, though it is still much more minor than expected. In one scene (see Findings, p. 31), the sentence 'All-you-can-eat Taliban' is

uttered, which carries with it heavily negative connotations, in a sense de-humanizing the Taliban. Compared to BF3's and MW3's often repeated common terms, such as 'motherfucker', they seem to lack in effect as they do not focus upon the affiliation of the enemy and are merely used as neutral insults.

There is an interesting tidbit here regarding how the American soldiers views the Russians in BF3. In one of the later missions featured in BF3 one of the characters comments about the perceived craziness in attacking the Russians as the reasons for why they are hostile has not yet been revealed to the soldiers (see Findings, p. 30), showing what could be perceived as an uncertainty about the whole situation. This brief dialogue, it could be argued, humanizes them further, as well as portraying the Russian troops as humans. Though, it could be said the unwillingness is less about the soldiers themselves, and more about the possibility of World War III. This is put to its edge later when, as shall be discussed in the next part, two of Blackburn's friends die from a Russian jet. The focus of their anger would be assumed to lie with the Russians. It does not. Instead, they direct their anger at their officer, Cole, due to the decisions he has made throughout the game leading up to, and including, this point. The Russians are never referred to in a hostile manner, even though it would be plausibly natural to do so.

Surprisingly, the findings in regards to RQ 1.1 points towards a, while not quite neutral view, a somewhat balanced one. This comes to its edge in BF3, which, as mentioned in the findings, features several deaths of side characters. While the argument could be made that more American side-characters are shown dying than Russian or Middle-Eastern ones, those of the latter affiliations receive somewhat more development. The death of Dima's friend Vladimir and the deaths of Blackburn's friends in the scene involving a Russian air attack mentioned earlier, share similarities in so far that the emotions and anger, as well as revenge, factors are high. It is notable, too, that Vladimir's death is accompanied by a low and dark tone of music, probably meant to instil a tragic state of mind, while the deaths of Blackburn's friends receive less of it, along with a lingering focus upon the fallen, which could be a way by the game to amplify the event. In MoH, on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the only one receiving a similar response is the player's character, Rabbit, as he succumbs to his wounds. While the accompanying music is noticeable sad, he is comforted by his brothers in arms, involving many of the characters shown through the game, bar the officers. Again, perhaps, an example of SIT and SCT in progress as Rabbit is taken care of and seen by his group, valuing him over anyone else.

Interestingly, Al-Bashir, the secondary antagonist in BF3, receives a lot of screen time and development

during his death scene, as Blackburn and Montes try to keep him alive since he has vital information. However, while the motive for them keeping him alive might be perceived as cruel, the tone of Montes voice and fervent attempts to resuscitate him, has a great deal of emotion. Be it of loss of life or loss of information, or simple frustration, remains ambiguous, though it is most likely a combination of the latter two.

MW3 does have a similar component, but not to the same degree. The two Russians that dies, Yuri and Harkov, have significantly different value throughout the game, though they are executed by the same character. Harkov could be considered to suffer the most brutal one, as he is shot once in the chest and then in the head. Yuri's death is, however, accompanied by music and slow-motion trying to complement the event, much like Vladimir. The effect, however, is diminished as the action quickly cuts back to the fight between Price and Makarov. In other words, Yuri is not focused upon and is not mentioned afterwards.

As for more straight-up stereotypes, they are strangely absent. Branston and Stafford (2006, p. 142) defines stereotypes as; “[...] widely circulated ideas or assumptions about particular groups” and that they have certain characteristics such as;

“[...] [involving] both a categorising and an evaluation of the group being stereotyped [and] usually emphasise some easily grasped features of the group in question and suggest that these are the cause of the group's position. [Additionally,] the evaluation of the group is often, though not always, a negative one [and] stereotypes often try to insist on absolute differences and boundaries where the idea of a spectrum of difference is more appropriate.”
(p. 142)

With this in mind, while the American troops are usually portrayed with their familiar terms, such as 'oora', and brotherly camaraderie, stereotypes, or at least amplified versions of them, seem to sit in the backseat. The CIA agents part of the BF3 narrative might hold up the standard image one might have of CIA agents depicted in movies. They are rough, hard to convince and generally considered part of the antagonists due to this, as well as being depicted with a suit and tie. A typical Secret Agent archetype, perhaps. It does, however, come more into view in the acts of the antagonists, which are often brutal, but in the case of BF3, this is nullified due to the actions of protagonist Blackburn, which includes knocking out CIA agents, as well as killing his CO. Granted, these actions are considered means to an end in the game, which means they might be considered to receive a pass in the greater

whole. The Russian's unit in BF3, with Dima and Vladimir, are, mostly, portrayed neutrally, but does have their share of brutal tactics, which could play into the 'Russian Ruthlessness' stereotype, which, yet again, using the same argument as Blackburn, becomes a bit moot. Then again, as Mastro and Kopacz notions through their study, (2006 p. 306), all stereotypes do not need to be negative, and this might be one of those case.

Nevertheless, Solomon, the main antagonist in BF3, along with the secondary antagonist Al-Bashir, shares these brutal traits, and does linger on the edge of the traditional 'ruthless terrorist' in the case of Solomon. However, Solomon is shown as being both intelligent and somewhat philosophical, while their national origins are never made a point of, apart from areas where it is needed. This provides his character with some additional depth, though it could still be argued he fits the stereotype mentioned as his goal is quite grand and horrible, and that he is portrayed without any sort of compassion, or for that matter 'humanity', which could play into the hands of the stereotype of a terrorist so prevalent in the media.

In the case of MW3, it is quite similar to BF3. Makarov, the main Russian antagonist, receives a similar treatment as Solomon, what with being shown as brutal with no conscience, but with an obvious high intelligence. As for Yuri, he is similar to the likes of Vladimir and Dima, but is somewhat unique in that he betrays Makarov and tries to stop his actions. If one were to apply SCT (Hogg, 2006), it could be said that Yuri compares himself to the group that tries to stop Makarov, with that of the ones he belongs to, the Ultrationalists, and comes to a different conclusion, resulting in his exclusion due to the actions he decide to take. This same method could be applied in BF3 to some degree to Blackburn's CO Cole. As mentioned earlier, Montes comments that, "There is no we, just us and you", effectively freezing Cole out of their group due to his actions. This tendency can be seen leading up to this point throughout the game. Later, in the final part of the game when Montes and Blackburn flee from the CIA, Montes shows he trusts Blackburn by helping him escape. This would, theoretically, also be an example of the theory, as well as SIT, at work as they form a new group based on their decisions and judgement of those around them, if it was not for the fact that Hogg (2006, p. 111) for a group to define as a group it has three or more people in them. As such, it is uncertain whether it applies or not, yet the implication is interesting.

In MoH, SIT and SCT can be applied to much deeper degree once again than the other two games due to MoH's focus on a single faction. It is obvious, from the way that the Americans act towards the native people, that they prioritise the group to which they belong first. A natural thing, one would say,

when it comes to military camaraderie. It is here that Branston and Stafford's (2006) categories can be used, as the Taliban are always viewed negatively, with “easily grasped features”, in comparison to the Americans. However, it is important to distinguish between the Taliban and normal natives. In one of the earlier missions a man named Tariq is freed from the Taliban, as he holds vital information. His motivation for working with the Americans against the Taliban is due to his daughter, which he wants to 'have a life'. Tariq shares many of the identifiers, visually, with the Taliban, but does not belong to them. But, and this is a factor that plays through the entirety of MoH, this is the only instance where they stand on a common ground. The rest of the game, sympathies towards anyone but the Americans are absent.

On the subject of technology, as can be seen in the findings it is somewhat absent. The exception would be MoH wherein the American forces utilize highly advanced equipment and that it is sometimes focused upon for no real reason. MW3 might be considered to have elements of it as well, but no character ever comments upon it, apart from in MoH. In other words, the implications are somewhat irrelevant.

Finally, concluding this part, there was also a common theme noticed throughout the findings when it came to language. BF3 and MoH shares the distinction that, as mentioned earlier in the Findings section, those with another ethnicity than American, be it Russian, Chechen or otherwise, talk in their native tongue, only switching to English when talking to an American character (there is an exception, here, in the epilogue of BF3, wherein Dima talks in English with a Russian accent, along with other minor terms), creating a little more of a national identity. This is not, however, the case in MW3, which, as mentioned, seems to alternate between the two, using English with Russian accents for the majority of dialogue. This is the most blatantly obvious in a scene between the Russian President and other Russian elites, as they all talk English in a whole-Russian environment while Harkov, the Russian agent the player controls, observes. Usually this also happens with scenes involving Makarov, even if his audience is Russian. As to why this might be the authors are uncertain, though it does share similarities with many Hollywood movies that opt for all-American actors. In the Future Research section later in this study, this topic returns.

RQ2 & Sub-Questions

BF3 and MW3 shares a common trait in this regard: Terrorism. Makarov is an Ultranationalist terrorist, with, to a start, aid from the Russian government due to events in the prequels. For BF3, the

motivation for the US to intervene is due to a coup d'état in Iran, and they invade to overthrow Al-Bashir. As such, the similarities between MW3 and the real world are extremely vague at best, aspiring, perhaps, to the tension between Russia and the US in the Cold War (Davis, 1947; Feklyunina, 2008), there are no such tendencies in BF3. Instead, the motivation for the US to be in Iraq, where the game starts off in the first place are unknown, but after the coup d'état they invade Iran. Though the similarities are slim, due to the combination of the setting, characters and the general situation, parallels to Operation Desert Storm could possibly be made, though not on a deeper level. The motivations for Russia to engage the U.S. in combat later on in BF3 are connected to WMDs, which in some sense could be said to be political, but is more likely a military matter, even if the two are usually interconnected due to foreign policy and the like (Betts, 2003).

One important note is that, in the case of MW3, international politics does play a role in so far as the fictional world is concerned, as the Russian President seeks peace with the West (see Findings, p. 32). However, this is one, if not the only, case where politics are referred to in an active, direct sense. Politics as a whole, apart from what has been mentioned above, remains absent, which most likely is due to the general narrative of the games as they are largely character-driven on a small scale.

Lastly, in the findings, it is evident that BF3 and MW3 does not refer to 9/11 or any events regarding it at all. Their plot, and setting to a certain point, does not seem to hold any relevant or realistic connections and seem to be stand-alone, bar BF3's depiction of the Middle-East as, yet again, a scene of conflict for, as mentioned earlier, unknown reasons. For MoH, though, it is different. The news and military chatter mentioned earlier referencing 9/11 carries with it strong implications that the game is set at the invasion of Iraq. As EA, the game's publisher, claims they go for realism, it is not surprising this would be included, as it also serves as an argument, or perhaps excuse, for the game to take place in the first place. However, references to this event becomes extremely scarce after the first initial minutes, instead leaving room for the game's own plot. Even in the interaction between some of the high-ranking officers, politics is not a factor. As such, the political connection in MoH exist and serve as the motivation for the conflict in the game, but nothing much beyond it.

Concluding this Analysis, it might be worth mentioning that, according to a claim on MoH's wiki page (*Medal of Honor wiki*, 2012), though the game seems to be based on Operation Anaconda in 2002, as mentioned earlier, the focus lies heavily upon the American Tier 1 Operators, excluding the actions of both the British SBS and the Australian SASR that acted in critical roles during the operation in reality. This claim is based upon a news article, and is strengthened by a journalistic book detailing the SASR's

activities in Operation Anaconda. (Smith, 2001; Lee, 2006). This points out the potential focus that the developers has put on the U.S. troops, leaving out other nationalities, as well as hinting at possible connections to the politics behind it, even if it is a far-fetched idea.

Conclusion

The first part of the purpose of this study was to analyse the portrayal of Middle-Eastern and Russian combatants in comparison to their American counterparts in the single-player campaign in three popular video games: Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 and Medal of Honor 2010. The second part of the purpose concerned itself with the motivation behind the virtual conflicts and if there existed a link between the real world and the virtual worlds in this matter. The hypothesis was put forward that American combatants are often portrayed in a more positive light than their Russian and Middle-Eastern counterparts in these specific video games and that the political connections aid to strengthen these portrayals.

After conducting the analysis, the conclusion is that the hypothesis presented does not hold true in a general sense. While there are some instances of this hypothesis holding its ground it, in the whole, does not hold up. Instead, it seems that the opposite is true to a certain degree.

In a sense, the three games seems to align themselves along a line. To the left, MW3 stands with its portrayal of Americans, coupled with some playable characters on the Russian side that serve to portray them. On the right side of the line, MoH stands with its sole portrayal of Americans, and its abysmal focus upon the Middle-Eastern combatants. Meanwhile, BF3 stands in the middle, not only giving some personality to the Russian side of the conflict, but also the Middle-Eastern side, performing a balance act between all sides. With balance, here, it is referred to the fact that BF3 has the most even 'presentation' of the factions, in terms of the way they are portrayed and screen time. However, it should be noted that BF3 masks its combatants a degree more than the other two.

Nevertheless, as for the exposition of certain characters of differing nationalities, BF3, again, proves to be in the middle. While MoH only features American player protagonists, and where MW3 features Americans and Russians, BF3 utilizes an American protagonist, and a Russian protagonist with scenes divided between them. This puts a spin on the traditional 'Western perspective' so very prevalent in Western-made culture, especially when one considers this Russian character, and his companions, are allowed to show, while not as much as the American character, emotion and caring towards comrades.

As for the second part of the purpose, whether there is a connection with politics, the first answer would be that the link is weak, but that there is an underlying motivation behind the conflicts themselves that might or might not correspond to certain political events or serve to motivate the portrayals. In MoH, where the connection is the strongest, it is due to 9/11 and the events that

followed it, providing the Taliban as the main hostile force. For BF3, vague links to Operation Desert Storm could potentially be made, but it would be a very weak argument. MW3 is in a category of its own, inspired to a degree, perhaps, of the Cold War and the old rivalry between the USA and Russia. However, as mentioned, the hypothesis regarding this does not hold.

In summary, it might be proposed that the portrayal of combatants seem to vary depending on the realism in these games. More realism, such as in MoH, compared to the more fictional state of the other two, seems to imply a more hostile, or derogatory, view of the hostiles, with a greater focus upon the American side of the conflict, along with a stronger political connection and motivation. If this is due to reality being used as a reference in the development of the game in question remains uncertain as more games would need to be researched, but it is an interesting thought. Indeed, the authors acknowledge that it was a surprise to find that not many stereotypes or false portrayals were found, or that the techniques often seen in other media to project an enemy in a certain way, such as in movies (Machin & Leeuwen 2005; Pötzsch, 2011) were not used, even if the same could not be said about other factors.

On a final note, the significance of the different nations behind the development of these games, and BF3 in particular, is an interesting one. As could be seen in the study regarding the US and Swedish coverage of the Iraq War (Barker, 2012), different lenses are provided through which the conflict is seen. In this study, BF3, as has been mentioned, comes across as the most fair between the three games and the implications are that the cooperation between its Swedish developer and American publisher might have had an impact. This is also an area of future research and will be looked upon again in the next section.

Judging from this study, it could be said that the development moves in the right direction, at least in the games that has been studied, but that it has a long way ahead as the results are far from perfect. Hopefully, the industry as a whole will continue in this direction, balancing the portrayals and involvement of characters to come.

Future Research

Gaming is still a young medium and is still fighting for a position within the media that it deserves. Future research in this subject would be, for example, a study with a much wider span in demographics, as well as conducting surveys of how those who plays games, self-identified as gamers, about these

subjects. Further, the theoretical framework used on other media, such as movies, could, potentially, be modified to easily be applied to games as well, taking into account factors such as gameplay or general interactivity. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. touches upon this point once again;

"[...] it should also be clear that we cannot apply literary theories wholesale to the study or design of video games without considering their specific properties. A variety of authors have begun to move beyond the quagmire of narrative, and instead have focused on what kinds of fictions video games are, and how we could delimit their fictional properties" (2008, p. 203).

Indeed, there might even be a need to reform, or perhaps modernize, parts of the framework that is used within academia, as some of it could be considered outdated where video games, and future technology, are concerned, a notion shared by ludologists, who were referred to in the first part of the Literature Review. The area itself is far from shaping a set of theoretical tools revolving around itself.

Further, in the relevance to this study, larger studies could potentially be conducted, with more games and more nations, fictionally or otherwise. For example, there are games showcasing conflicts in South America and Asia, among others, that holds great relevance to further research. This study, it can be said, is merely a small part of a potential bigger area. An additional point here would be to include the matter of language. In this study, language was analysed as so far if they used it in their native tongue or in English with an obvious accent. The fact that MW3, where this was the most frequent (see Findings, p. 30), was developed by American developers, is an interesting note, as it is widely known that the usage of subtitles within the American culture industry does not work as well as it does in, say, Europe. In other words, could there be a connection, here, between the expectations of the American market and the choice of language (excluding potential localizations)?

Another interesting approach to accompany this would be to conduct studies focusing upon the audience. This relates, loosely, to studies already conducted about violence, gender, etc., but the thought here is to focus more upon the decision and morality of the player rather than the effect (which there are bound to be studies of, but has of this study not been included). A scene mentioned in the Analysis section gives interest to this proposition: the chase level in BF3 involving the Russian Spetsnaz. In this scenario, though it make it much harder, it is up to the player how to act. He/She may choose to shoot the French police, or they can choose not to. The result is the same as the story is linear. A very similar, though much more controversial as it also featured in news media, level can be found in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, involving Russian terrorists disguised as US CIA agents murdering Russian civilians

in an airport. Here, too, the player has a choice to shoot or not. This is where a potential study could fit in and further expand the area.

To add, one factor that was noticed in this analysis, and which was not brought up to a greater extent, was that of gender. As mentioned in the Literature Review, gender has been researched extensively within gaming, but in the perspective of female contribution in war games such as these, women are extremely rare. In the case of this study, mentioned within the Analysis section, the only female characters (employed within military) consists of a playable Jet Fighter pilot – who lacks a voice and only acts as the Jet's Gunner - in BF3's fourth mission 'Going Hunting', and a minor non-playable character, Gunfighter 11 in MoH, a helicopter pilot, with a few lines of dialogues. In MW3, the only female characters are civilians. Here, there is a lot of potential for questions to be asked in relations to gender and how women would be/are portrayed in these games. While realism could have a part in it (seeing how women in today's military are, usually, put into other roles than direct combat though with some exceptions and with increasing frequency)(Carreiras, 2006, p. 1), if one also considers how much realism is bent anyway, women as major characters, or even playable characters, could have a substantial impact.

Mentioned in the conclusion was also the implied connection between the Swedish developer DICE and its American publisher EA regarding BF3 and if national values had played into the portrayal found within the game. This also puts into question if it's even possible to determine a game's origin and the potential influences it might have had. For example, an American developer might have a majority of its programmers to be American, but some are working from other nations or the like. For Sweden, they might be in tight cooperation with other companies under the flag of EA. Nevertheless, this lends itself for an interesting area to research, asking the question of a game's nation of origin has been influencing the game itself with its values and 'lenses', through which the experience is portrayed, and if it matters how diverse the people who work on it has. Perhaps, which also seems likely, it isn't up to them, but instead up those higher up in the corporate chain.

Lastly, the original purpose of this study was initially focused more upon the real world and the developers of the games, in the way of how their respective home countries affected the games themselves, due to factors such as culture and societal class. This was dropped for this study due to generalization and definition problems, but still might signify an important research question, perhaps in line with the potential questions revolving around the arguments for American cultural hegemony.

Problems

The first, and the most major, perceived problem with the conducted study is its size. Three games, though one of them is one of the biggest franchises in the industry, is still a small sample. As a generalization of games in general, it is obviously not enough, though that in itself is not a problem due to the study utilizing a qualitative content analysis. For this thesis, therefore, it is less of a problem, though it should still be clarified. Still, as mentioned in the previous section, with more resources and time, an analysis on a larger scale could be conducted and more conclusions drawn. In fact, this problem is an active criticism against qualitative research from the Active User perspective, if one recalls Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) in the Literature Review section, regarding generalization (p. 239). Additionally, it would have been ideal to use games developed in an Eastern country as well, as to expand the perspective one could look at. The problem, there, lies in the exposition of said games, as they are quite rare in terms of this theme.

Further, the analysis itself could have problems with the questions asked towards the material. They could, for example, lack relevance or some question could have been missed. Seeing, also, how the research was conducted by two authors, there is a risk of, despite thorough comparison of notes and fact-checking, dissonance between them. Included here, it must be mentioned that the purpose of this study was, perhaps, too large and spread out. While attempts were made to narrow it, it was a question of either too little or too much. To add to this problem, the authors were forced to exclude MW1 and MW2 due to time and size factors. MW3, as a result, becomes a bit more complex, as much of the motivations found within has been established in the previous games, along with many events that would have served the purpose. Still, removing them also allowed the authors to focus a bit more and make a fairer comparison between the three games that remained.

As for the theoretical groundwork regarding the international relations section, it must be said that it is much deeper and complex than what this study portrays. As the Limitation section gives insight into, the decision was made to limit the range as to which research would be made, as the risk of complications lay in wait. Again, what was included was what was deemed the most bareboned, relevant facts and theories necessary to understand the motivations behind the study and its research questions. What lies beyond is a matter of choosing from a vast amount of material, which was improbable due to the time and scope of this study.

To conclude, it must also be pointed out that generalizing combatants down to belonging to nations do not, as this study might have made a point about, work as intended. To some degree, though, which is

something the authors have done in this study, is to generalize down to an affiliate level, denoting their respective armies or organizations related to the purpose (US military, Russian military, America etcetera.) instead of focusing on each individual's possible nationality which could also be hard to narrow down.

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Attachments

Attachment 1

Author Contribution

Abstract: Kristian Johansson

Summary: Kristian Johansson

Introduction: Kristian Johansson

Lit review: Mattias Bergqvist & Kristian Johansson (10%/90%)

Theories: Mattias Bergqvist & Kristian Johansson (80%/20%)

Methods: Mattias Bergqvist & Kristian Johansson (20%/80%)

Findings: Mattias Bergqvist & Kristian Johansson (40%/60%)

Analysis: Kristian Johansson

Conclusion: Kristian Johansson

Future Research: Kristian Johansson

Problems: Kristian Johansson

The observation of the material itself was conducted synchronously between the authors.