SHOW DON’T TELL:
How new media players change reviewing practices in lifestyle journalism

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Abstract

With the advent of social media platforms such as YouTube which empower amateurs to create content, journalism has been under pressure to justify its existence as an occupation that can only be done by those deemed professionals. News journalism faced this issue, but in the field of lifestyle journalism the problem was larger still. In games journalism the established news outlets were threatened in their business as one of their pillars, the review, was co-opted by many non-professionals. Game Informer and IGN, formerly known as Imagine Games Network, remain two of the most established outlets, but must now compete for revenue and audience with hosts of YouTube channels, or ‘YouTubers’, such as TotalBiscuit and Northernlion, who offers very similar content to the review in the form of game criticism. This thesis aims to analyze how the content produced by ‘traditional’ games journalism outlets and by new YouTubers differs, and suggests this is an example of a broader shift in lifestyle journalism as a whole. A qualitative analysis of reviews by ‘traditional’ outlets Game Informer and IGN and ‘new players’ Northernlion and TotalBiscuit demonstrates that the latter distinguish themselves through a differing occupation ideology, one that drops the idea of grading games and argues that their purpose is to inform. Due to their ability to show rather than tell the information that they want to transfer to the audience, the newest players to the field have what is arguably a more effective means of implying authority. Perhaps surprisingly, they also may be seen to adhere more to the traditional values of news journalism than the legacy outlets as they are less judgmental, despite distancing themselves the most from the concept of journalism and reviews.
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Introduction

As the media landscape changes, so does the media’s approach to delivering news. With the help of technology news has progressed to include audio and audiovisual, and finally the Internet, where all can be combined. These changes have altered the face of journalism, changing the news media’s approach to bringing news to the people based upon the strengths of a certain medium. The primary medium that has been struggling with these changes is the newspaper. Traditionally the newspaper has been the people’s source of quality news intake, yet the newspaper business is rapidly declining. It has been taking heavy losses in readership, which in turn has led to a strong loss in income from not only sales, but also advertising. The reasons for this are various, but can be condensed to two main factors: a declining audience and the rise of other media. The audience was shrinking as people stopped reading the paper, without new readers coming in at the same speed as people were leaving. This can be attributed to the rise of other media that the audience can use to get their news, but it is also in part due to the changing desires of the readers.

These changing desires and the developing technology has allowed for unexpected new players to arise. One such example is the Huffington Post, a fully online only newspaper which tries to keep up with the moving audience by not only existing on the new medium of the internet, but also by integrating itself with the largest social network available, namely FaceBook, by making it the only way to comment on their stories. Thanks to technological advances it is possible for many players to try and fill the gap, and the Huffington Post has managed to use not only the Internet but also FaceBook as a means of attracting readership and enabling interaction.

These changes are an example of how journalism has been changing its approach several times over the years, creating new strategies, fitting with new technology. This has both positive and negative effects on the journalism landscape. It has been credited with “the reduction in the cost of dissemination and the range of new possibilities for researching capturing and presenting material” but also with “the speeding up of news cycles as connected to online news” and “the merging of genres and professional groups” (Philips, Witsche & Wright, 2012, p.xi). In short,
journalism has been changing, and outlets have been forced to change to remain relevant, both politically and economically. For journalists changes were quick and necessary as well, primarily due to technological advances. They had to become multi-skilled, capable of creating content for all media, and changing their styles accordingly.

With the new faster news cycles news has been accused of becoming shallower to fit with the increased pace. Likewise, these increases in speed have also caused worries as it is seen as a reason for news outlets to ‘dumb down’ its content. The journalism landscape has been forced to change, not only because of the changing mediums, but also because of the moving audience. Research has found that “new media technologies are seen as the way to respond (and find their way back to) the changing audience” (Philips et al., p.xiv). Without falling for the trap of technological determinism it is fair to say that technological advances are at the root of the changing journalistic landscape.

Just like news journalism, lifestyle journalism has had to keep up with moving audiences and new media. It went from magazines, to tv-shows, to internet gossip and news websites. Within lifestyle journalism however there have also been important changes. Kristensen and From found that the boundaries between the categories of journalism are blurring (2014). They argue that the fields of lifestyle journalism, cultural journalism and consumer journalism are becoming less and less distinguishable from one another. However, all of the categories are still considered ‘soft news’ and are contrasted with the ‘hard news’ of traditional journalism. Where there has been plenty of research into how ‘hard news’ journalism has been impacted by technological and cultural changes in the field, lifestyle journalism has gone mostly neglected, deemed often negligible to the extent that scholars such as Hanusch (2012) have dedicated papers as to why the soft news journalism also need to be studied as it “has much to offer for scholarly inquiry and is of increasing relevance for society” (p.1). For the purpose of this research all the soft news categories of journalism will be considered lifestyle journalism, primarily for the reason that the fields distinguished by Kristensen and From are usually not mutually exclusive. This is especially the case in the subsection of journalism that will be highlighted in this research, namely games journalism. Based on the definitions for lifestyle, cultural and consumer journalism the articles that are written by games journalists are capable of
adhering to all three categories simultaneously, possibly due to the blurring boundaries in the journalistic field. This consideration to assimilate all of the soft news categories as lifestyle journalism is particularly important for the reviews that are at the essence of games journalism, as they can be considered consumer journalism as it is an advisory body, but is also considered “an adaptation or reinterpretation of the classical genre of cultural journalism” (Kristensen & From, 2014, p.27). Besides the fact that all of the soft news categories can be applied, there is also the problem of the decidedly small amount of research that has taken place into the sub-fields of soft news journalism. By applying all of the research from all categories this lack of information can be slightly supplemented.

Although traditional journalism is often very keen on distinguishing itself from lifestyle journalism, both fields struggle with the same problems in the changing journalistic field. Lifestyle journalism in its position of public advisor, mediator and middle man in fact might have to deal with the changes even more so than the legacy journalism. They too have to deal with the increased speed at which people desire their news to be delivered to them, as well as the speed at which that news can be consumed. This mindset gets promoted with the increased technological capabilities. The smartphone with continuous connection to the internet allows for consumption virtually anywhere. This same technology however also allows for creation anywhere, just like it interrupted the newspaper and allowed for publications like the Huffington Post to become popular. Current equipment makes it possible for almost anyone to consider themselves a journalist, and whereas for legacy journalism there is still at least a sense of journalism as a trained occupation that cannot be done by just anyone, lifestyle journalism does not have that support. As such, the newfound technology allows for the replacing of the old ways. In the particular case of games journalism these ways might not be as old as they are in traditional journalism, considering that game publications themselves are relatively new, but these legacy gaming outlets nonetheless struggle with new style game journalists who use means such as YouTube to publish their works, threatening the position of the older outlets, exemplifying how things might be changing in their particular field of journalism.

This is possible because in the technological era it is par for the course to throw out the old and replace it with the new, the newest iPhone replaces the old, and the next-generation of
consoles phase out their ancestors. But when the technology has really embedded itself into society this changes. Media is an ever changing beast, the latest means of bringing news being updated and upgraded constantly. As such the new medium has to fight with the old established medium as the old has gotten embedded in societal practices. Listening to the radio was once a common way to spend time. This was followed and replaced by watching television, which is now slowly turning into spending time online. This is how technology has enforced changes on all levels of media and journalism.

This thesis attempts to fill part of the gap that is created by scholars preference for the traditional ‘hard’ news topics, over the lifestyle journalism. It will do so by focussing on one particular genre of lifestyle journalism, namely games journalism. As stated, the Internet era allowed for virtually anyone to publish news, and was also the means for many new niche news outlets to come into existence and publish on a large scale. One of those niches was and still is gaming. Gaming news has been on the rise of the last two decades, growing more and more prominent in its overarching field of lifestyle journalism. As a part of lifestyle journalism, games journalism is mocked by traditional journalism for being unworthy of the term journalism. “Criticised for being antithetical to public interest and watchdog notions of journalism, lifestyle journalism is still ridiculed by some as being unworthy of being associated with the term journalism” (Hanusch, 2012, p.1). A good example of this is Jimmy Kimmel’s mockery of gaming and of those who view gaming content, when he said that “watching another person play video games is like going to a restaurant and having someone eat your food for you” (quoted in Makuch, 2015, par. 1). A large portion of his audience would side with him, but his opinion changes nothing for those who have a vested interest in the field. John Bain, better known as one of the biggest gaming critics/reviewers TotalBiscuit (2015), explained:

I didn't wake up to a sudden drop in revenue because Kimmel made some jokes about my profession. My viewer base didn't suddenly desert me because the great talkshow prophet hath spoken from on high. Nothing happened, of course it didn't. The cycle continues where old media mocks the new, eventually we may be the old media, mocking whatever the next big thing happens to be. (para. 5)
This exemplifies how conflict between two fields of media is a phase that the field of journalism goes through every time a new media comes into play, resulting into the established media to try and keep its position as long as possible. This is exemplified by News Corps CEO Robert Thomson (2015) who attacked Google, Twitter and Facebook, three major players of the new medium. He mocked Google’s re-branding to Alphabet and said the following about Facebook and Twitter: “none of them actually create content, and they certainly have little intention of paying for it, but they do redistribute the content created by others — they would argue that such redistribution is a natural extension of their role as social networks. I would argue that much of the redistribution is an unnatural act” (para. 6). But in the Internet era everybody can write content that is arguably news online, and a generation that is accustomed to getting all the news it wants is unlikely to sit down and accept legacy media journalists opinion about their media as the truth. But this discussion does bring to light an important aspect, namely that there must be a reason why people trust certain journalists or certain news outlets. Journalists need their audience to trust them, to have faith in them, for otherwise they have no readers and no revenue. This is especially true for lifestyle journalism, and as such, game journalism. They depend on advertising revenue and advertising online is either counted by views or clicks. This means that the more readers an outlet has, the more money they can make. As such, maintaining a stable audience is essential to game journalism outlets, and one of the reasons an audience will continue to return to a specific outlet is if they perceive the outlet to be relevant. One of the ways for news media to establish themselves as relevant is to have their audience perceive them as correct and having the right to speak on a topic. Because of this gaming news media are a fully audience focused and dependent branch, which is consistent with the logic of Hanuszch (2012) regarding lifestyle journalism, where he states that it is “the part of journalism that primarily focuses on audiences as consumers, providing them with factual information and advice, often in entertaining ways, about goods and services they can use in their daily lives” (p.1).

Journalism and the concept of authority are closely linked to one another. Journalism stands or falls by the authority it projects. After all, why would anyone believe those who bring the news if they did not have some sort of established track record or proof to demonstrate their
relevancy. The outlets need something to demonstrate for their authority to speak on a subject. As a result of this, a variety of studies have been conducted on traditional news outlets in order to analyze the structure and selection of news. Research into a lifestyle journalism, a kind of journalism that possibly depends even more on their authority, has been lacking. Lifestyle journalism is dependent on its consumers as no other form of journalism is. For the purpose of this research I will focus on one specific part of lifestyle journalism, namely game journalism. This thesis aims to clarify how new players in the field of game journalism differ in their approach to lifestyle journalism in comparison to the gaming journalism legacy outlets. This analysis will subsequently attempt to highlight how the face of lifestyle journalism is changing.

A potential problem for this research is the fact that game journalism is a relatively understudied field of journalism. As a part of lifestyle journalism, games journalism is often ridiculed for its non-important coverage. However, lifestyle journalism has been growing where traditional journalism has been struggling to maintain the readership it used to have. Because of this game journalism should be considered relevant for study, particularly with a focus on the ways in which new game journalism players differ in their methods, primarily those concerning their authority.

Means of claiming authority such as eye-witnesses and experiences are methods used in all kinds of areas. In the area of lifestyle journalism, establishing authority is a means of ensuring the reader that they can trust the opinion of the writer. For the traditional gaming outlets this has taken the form of traditional argumentative articles in which a stance is taken and defended. The new players in the field however do not adhere to these forms and instead go with a more objective and open mindset. The type of articles from both the old and the new players in the field of games journalism which can best demonstrate the differences the best between the two parties are reviews. The critiquing of games is a practice done by both the old and the new players in the game journalism field, and although both set out towards a similar goal of convincing and informing the audience, both parties employ different methods. Most of these methods are linked to persuasion and authority, and based on this fact the research will attempt to show how the new players are different from the legacy games journalism outlets.
This topic is interesting to study for several reasons. As previously mentioned, many sectors of lifestyle journalism are doing well in comparison to their traditional counterparts, meaning that despite an academic unwillingness to study the field, it is very much a field that is relevant to the public. Another reason is the importance of a voice of authority in every piece of journalism. Journalism depends on the trust it gets from its readers. If journalism would not instate trust people would disregard them. For the field of gaming journalism this is not much different. One of the prime components of game journalism is the review and when reviews do not convey a certain level of reliability, people will disregard it and perhaps not return to read more from the same outlet. As such, the means of conveying the authority to speak on a subject are critical to game journalism and therefore is an interesting aspect to study. Beyond this, the results can be carried over to different subcategories of lifestyle journalism as well. Any field of journalism that struggles with new players could possibly draw similar conclusions as to what the differences are between the old and the new players and what that means for the field.

The gaps in existing research present another reason for the relevance of this proposed paper. Studies into conveying authority exist, but they concern themselves primarily with the field of traditional journalism, or focus completely outside of the field of journalism itself, as the relevance of authority and how it is implied is relevant to other fields as well. It is however eerily absent from the field of lifestyle journalism. Also, understanding how the new players differ in their methods from the legacy outlets will allow for conclusions to be drawn in other fields of lifestyle journalism as well.

For the purpose of this research I have selected two ‘new’ style Youtube reviewers, namely TotalBiscuit’s *WTF Is* and Northernlion’s *Let’s Look At* and two ‘old’ style written reviewers, Game Informer and IGN. From these reviewers I will draw information through qualitative research with an inductive approach. As such they have already been identified as those who audiences credit with the authority to speak, and the thesis then continues on to analyze what these outlets do to maintain their claim to authority. I have chosen two content producers of two different types of media in order to allow for a comparison between the ‘old’ method and the ‘new’ method that can be relatively certain of its findings. By analyzing these outlets I will attempt to answer the research question: How do reviewing practices differ between
old and new and how does this reflect on the changing dynamics of the games journalism and lifestyle journalism landscape?
1. Theoretical Framework

To have a better understanding of the changing game journalism landscape, it is necessary to borrow theory from the broader field of lifestyle journalism as well as establishing their relation to the game journalism industry and their reviewing practices. This is necessary because there has not been much research conducted into the field of game journalism, while the broader field of lifestyle journalism has received more attention. I will draw parallels between different sub-sets of lifestyle journalism to help further the argument. For example, there will be comparisons to food journalism, among other examples, as finding similarities between the practices of other reviews and the game review will create a better framework to help answer the research question of which methods of constructing, implying and maintaining the authority to speak are used in game journalism outlets IGN, Game Informer, Northernlion and TotalBiscuit and how they contribute.

Hidden in reviews of all kinds is a logic that can be extracted and applied to more than just the sub-type of journalism for which it was originally used. For example, literature based on food journalism found that “the restaurant review can ... be seen as a space within which the boundaries of metropolitan good taste are policed and conveyed to others” (Jones & Taylor, 2013, p.102). This logic can be transferred to game journalism, where game reviews act as the intermediary between the games industry and the consumer and thus convey the values of the gamers to the industry as well as communicate to the gamers the quality of the game being reviewed based on what the reviewer believes are the values and wishes of the player. On top of this, game reviews can be seen as a sphere in which information about games can be checked and spread to the audience.

Similarly, there have been cases where sports journalism has been the subject of research on the authority to speak, such as Banagan’s (2011) research into ESPN and its self-proclaimed title as world leader: “ESPN's title as 'The World Wide Leader in Sports' was not achieved through any democratic process, nor granted from a governing authority. ESPN's tag-line is a self-construct, devised from within” (p.159). Because of this, the case can be made that ESPN might lose the trust of its audience and lose authority due to self-proclaimed authority. These
instances contain lessons that are important in different fields of lifestyle journalism such as game journalism, not only as a point of research but also as a warning as to how not to present oneself.

1.1 Newcomers vs. The Establishment

Thanks to relatively new technological options it is possible to combine several media in order to tell a story, or to tell the same story across several media. This technique is called convergence and is the cause for several changes within the media landscape as it not only changes the way content is consumed, but also forces changes in the creation of the content. Convergence also incentivizes cross-media storytelling, as well as the training of journalists who are capable of creating content for multiple forms of media. This is because “information-gathering convergence takes place at the reporting level, and media companies have increasingly required reporters to have multiple skills. In the United States, this represents a controversial form of convergence as people debate whether one person can successfully produce quality content in different forms of media” (Şuṭu, 2011, p.51). The traditional media outlets however have always been notoriously slow in the adoption of new styles and methods. This has left an opening for newcomers to establish themselves in positions of prominence. An example of this is the Huffington Post, a fully online newspaper outlet which became popular due to the rise social media and the increasing popularity of the internet as a means of both creating and reading content. The website hosts a variety of bloglike articles, written by over 9000 contributors, and “well-known authors, celebrities and politicians are invited to blog and use the website as a podium for their opinions” (Bakker, 2012, p.634). The online outlet used the new technology to its fullest by not only publishing to a large audience through a new medium, but also gathering writers for their outlet through the same method, as technology allowed for virtually anyone to create content. Later other traditional websites would adopt a method of including audience content, such as the Guardian’s ‘Comment is Free’ section, but not before alternative outlets such as the Huffington Post had their chance to take a place of significant prominence.
Convergence and the rise of the internet as a means of content publishing have also influenced lifestyle journalism. Just as the Huffington Post started to employ the power of the audience to also create content for them, a similar phenomenon occurred in the field of celebrity news. In celebrity news the most prominent thing are new topical pictures of celebrities. In today’s internet culture however the majority of these pictures are posted online, because “print news can’t keep up with the rapid turnover of the paparazzi’s digital images” (McNamara, 2011, p.516). This has also led to the field now being “dominated by multinational agencies with their own brand of mostly web-based entertainment news” (McNamara, p.516). These agencies in the old system sold their content to the traditional celebrity news outlets, but in the new system they have their own websites on which they publish their pictures. It also allows for freelancers to publish their work themselves, instead of selling their work to publish, and makes it possible to reach a wider audience than can be achieved when selling to a single magazine.

Although game journalism differs in what is important to it, it was also affected by the changes in the field. Traditional online outlets were mostly hit by the development of easy-to-create and affordable means of creating content, which allowed individuals to produce similar work to theirs. Where celebrity pictures started to get published on the original owner’s site, game journalists struck out for themselves by creating content on YouTube, which was possible as long as the person had the necessary knowledge.

This knowledge, in the case of game journalism, originally came from its start as an extension of fan culture. Game journalism is a field that has always included a lot of fandom as it grew “from a geeky subculture to the exponentially growing, mass-market video game industry we know today” (Nieborg & Sihvonen, 2009, p.1). Fan culture originated with the concept of fandom, in which a group of people would appreciate something or someone so much that they would consider themselves fanatics of it. To this end authority can be claimed and granted based on extensive knowledge of a field, which in gaming terms usually refers to a genre or a specific game.

Gaming journalism started as content created by fans, rather than by those now considered to be professionals. This is inherent to the evolution from a subculture based on fandom to an established form of lifestyle journalism, although certainly it still has ties to its
origin. By employing the language used by the players, in essence speaking the jargon, knowledge, and thus authority, is implied. After all, if the journalists know the genre well enough to speak its language they are likely to know what they are talking about.

But in the current era of open internet access and the ability for anyone to create content on websites such as YouTube this position of the professional game journalism outlets is threatened, much like new media outlets have turned into serious competition for the legacy journalism media such as newspapers. In 2014 Gamasutra published an article titled “Is YouTube killing the traditional games press?” which contained interviews with several game developers and prominent Youtubers, trying to answer its title question. It argues that “it's the rise of the ‘YouTuber … while the written word continues to trundle along, looking more and more quaint with each passing day” (Rose, 2014, para. 2). One of the arguments it puts forwards for this claim is that of increased game sales due to Youtube coverage. Developer of indie game Race the Sun told the author of the article, Mike Rose, that “for sure, the biggest Youtubers have had a much bigger impact on our traffic and sales compared to the biggest sites we've been covered on” (quoted in Rose, para. 6). This, however, does not mean that traditional game journalism should be dismissed. “YouTubers regularly choose to play games that are already in the spotlight … and as such traditional press is important in getting the attention of YouTubers in the first place” (quoted in Rose, para. 23). This level of developer confidence in both traditional as well as Youtube game journalism can be helpful to the outlet or channel’s authority, because if the developer of the game entrusts the reviewer to have the right to speak on the game that can instill a similar feeling of trustworthiness in the audience. Furthermore, this supposed increase in game sales presents a means to study the effects of the authority to speak. Large game channel coverage and reviews can increase the sales figures of the covered game, showing that their audience trusts their judgment. The Youtube revolution changed news values, creating a place for alternative journalism with a more easy going approach, yet being all the more popular for it in both traditional as well as lifestyle journalism.

So just like traditional journalism, game journalism is faced with a changing dynamic. The legacy media have a whole new group of actors to consider their competition in the field of gaming journalism. According to the theory of fields by Bourdieu (1984) a field is “an
autonomous field of artistic production, that is, a field capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products” (p.xxvi). When considering game journalism as a field of journalism, it is important to take into account that it is largely dependent on both its relations to the industry and the relation to its audience. Game journalism is a very specific field that focuses on a singular topic and outlets from the field pose themselves as authorities on that field. To maintain this position of authority, however, games journalism needs both continued cooperation from the industry, as well as the loyalty of their audience, two things that are intertwined. When the audience leaves, the industry loses interest, and when the industry moves elsewhere the audience may follow. Game journalism as such has a unique position between the industry and the gamer: its existence often dependent on both parties games journalism works with, but it itself is also the only party that offers services which both the industry and the audience desire. As such the field of game journalism is capable of imposing its own norms on both production and consumption of its articles. These norms often differ from outlet to outlet, but do go to show how game journalism is an autonomous field both in spite of and because of its unique position in gaming culture. Part of the journalists’ authority is based on an independence that it tries to achieve through its position as an intermediary, while another part comes from the journalists established superior knowledge over the reader in the field. After all, a reader is very unlikely to believe a journalist who cannot add information that the reader himself would not already be aware of.

Bourdieu’s (1983) field theory extends beyond just the autonomy of a field however. He explains:

The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions (i.e. their position-takings), strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations (rapports de force). (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312-313)
In Bourdieu’s theory every field consists of agents which have a power relation to one another. In game journalism these agents are the game developers, the game journalists and the audience, each holding a certain power position, each being its own force. However, as Bourdieu points out, it is also a field of struggles, as journalists, developers and the audience struggle to improve or maintain their power position. One of the ways game journalism tries to maintain its power position is by convincing the other agents of its necessity, for example by means of implying authority to the audience. Game journalism is its own semi-autonomous field, riddled with internal and external power struggles in relation to traditional journalism which has a different occupational ideology regarding journalism.

In addition to using Bourdieu’s field theory to understand competition between games journalists and how this profession relates to the larger field of journalism, one can also analyze game journalism as what Bourdieu (1984) called a ‘cultural intermediary’ in the field of gaming. As an intermediary game journalism takes on another aspect of Bourdieu’s field theory. According to him “cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education” as “surveys establish that all cultural practices … and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level … and secondarily to social origin” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.1). In other terms: taste is a social construct, which is acquired through the process of socialization, yet is experienced as if it is personal and natural (Maguire and Matthews, 2014). Cultural intermediaries according to Bourdieu try to gently manipulate and try to influence the audience’s taste (1984). As such the cultural intermediary of game journalism can perform the task of manipulating the audience’s taste and establishing its own authority once again.

In what is called the new public sphere however this task can be performed by far more parties than the actors who are considered professional game journalists. Castells (2008) defines the public sphere as “the space of communication of ideas and projects that emerge from society and are addressed to the decision makers in the institutions of society” (p.78). In this public sphere, the media that publish the reviews are part of one of the four institutions that make up the public sphere, as the media is the transmitter of information in the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1995). In the traditional public sphere, these capabilities were proximity bound, but the digital era changed this. Thanks to the new public sphere the media can be a transmitter of information
worldwide thanks to the internet, because of this outlets such as those focused on game journalism rose in prominence. Game journalism outlets are considered single-subject online news outlets, a niche that grew dramatically between 2008 and 2013 as a response “to a consumer desire for in-depth coverage of a particular topic” (Nolan & Setrakian, 2013, para. 4). As a result of the digital age’s new-found accessibility and the people’s new power to select their own news intake, even more niche outlets such as those focused on gaming journalism got to quickly rise to prominence. Reviews by outlets such as Game Informer and IGN were now available worldwide. This, however, also meant an extreme increase in competition as the digital era allowed for virtually anyone to publish their work, a prime example of this being YouTube, which has extended the field of game journalism, allowing for those previously considered part of the audience of the field to change their role.

On YouTube, online news videos extended their reach and grew their audience, partially at the expense of more traditional outlets. Research done by Peer and Ksiazek (2011) on the effect of YouTube on news and news videos shows that in the Youtube dominated system “many news organizations are struggling to remain relevant to their audiences” (p.47). Their research found that, based on the difference between Youtube and conventional news standards, “more relaxed content practices are rewarded with a higher number of views, while adherence to traditional production practices does not predict popularity. Interestingly, online videos that are repurposed from broadcast platforms experience the greatest spike in viewership when breaking from those standards, suggesting that such deviations in traditional television news are especially valued by audiences” (Ksiazek & Peer, p.45). These repurposed videos were considered less fair, less professional and overall lower in quality, but despite this they were more popular (Ksiazek & Peer, p.53). It is likely that some of the findings regarding news videos can be applied to game reviews, as it is possible that game reviews on Youtube can be rewarded with a higher number of views due to their more relaxed content practices compared to traditional game reviews. Simultaneously, the research shows that even on Youtube “we can expect a set of practices to govern the way news content is produced” (Ksiazek & Peer, p.47). This could mean that even though the content might be more free form and less traditional, it likely still adheres to a set of practices.
In addition to what Bourdieu (1984) calls the competitive nature of the field, one may interpret the different approach of new players, in this case the YouTubers, in terms of a different occupational ideology. The term occupational ideology is one used in journalism studies to describe the task of journalism. Because of the difficulty perceived when trying to describe the field of journalism as for example a profession or a literary genre, journalism studies required a clearer means of defining the field. “Conceptualizing journalism as an ideology primarily means understanding journalism in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork” (Deuze, 2005, p.444). This entails that rather than there being a strict set of occupational rules there is a professional identity with which journalists can identify. “In decades of journalism studies, scholars refer to the journalists’ professionalization process as a distinctly ideological development,” as they try and refine the consensus definition of what is real journalism (Deuze, p.448-449). Central to the ideology of traditional journalism are the things that journalists believes journalism should be, such as “neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible” but also enjoying “editorial autonomy, freedom and independence” as well as having “a sense of immediacy … ethics and legitimacy” (Deuze, p.448-449). To be a journalist one would have to be able to identify with all these aspects in order to fit in with the ideology held up by the occupation. In short, occupational ideology is a term used to describe the key aspects of an occupation, so as to allow for identification with those aspects without the formal definition or enforcement of them in any way outside of its own commonly accepted practices.

In research done by Nieborg and Sihvonen (2009) they “situate game journalism in the scope of other journalism and public discourses, and analyse the basic operating principles that make game journalism indispensable to gamers, but possibly ridden with deep ethical problems in the wider context of the media industry” (p.1). Because of game journalism’s unique position between the industry and gamers their economic position is dependent on both of them and so is their occupational ideology. Whereas in traditional journalism “traditional ‘elements of journalism’ include aspects like writing verifiably, independently, and truthfully about the powers that be, while adhering to swift and ethically sustainable methods of analysis,” in game journalism this is quite different (Nieborg & Sihvonen, p.6). Due to their extreme economic dependence on both the game industry and their audience “the practices of game journalism are
informal and adaptable, and due to the precariousness of the work conditions in the field they may also appear as rather unprofessional” (Nieborg & Sihvonen, p.7). Because of this, their occupational ideology is wildly different from that of traditional journalism. Due to their position between the industry and gamers journalists in the field of game journalism “do not aim to work as watchdogs of the establishment, but rather as mediators of the value statements that deliver game capital” (Nieborg & Sihvonen, p.7). With its own occupational ideology game journalism clearly distinguishes itself as a separate field of journalism.

But as mentioned before, there is also the possibility that the newcomers envision a different occupational ideology than the legacy outlets do. This difference could explain the reason behind the apparent differences in the reviews conducted by the two different parties. For example, if the more traditional outlets envision themselves being a mediator that not only grants information, but also interprets it, that could be a significant difference from the YouTube actors who possibly only desire to give as much information and content as possible. Such a different mindset could be what is behind many of the differences found in the game critiquing articles by the parties at hand.

1.2 Introduction to Reviews

To understand the game review, one must think both of how it must justify its existence as well as how it deals with the issue of medium specificity. The latter is due to reviews being a tool in multiple genres of lifestyle journalism, but the matter goes beyond that. Reviews have been used to critique books, films, music and more before it even came to play in game journalism.

The practice of reviewing and critiquing is therefore older and more widely applied than merely the field of journalism. It is a practice found in a large variety of academic fields, but also in the field of literature, with book reviews being common and plenty. According to Oines and Leppälä (2013) nowadays “writing a book review is more like a ‘community service’ activity” (p.1785). The purpose of the review has gone from merely informative, to also be evaluative and even reflective (2013). As such the task of the reviewer has gone beyond giving a short
description of the author’s book, to also include the evaluation of the arguments and expertise of the author, while also placing the book in a wider topical context.

Many guides and guidelines have been written to help structure reviews in the fields of literature, film and music. A quick Google search regarding any of the three will grant an abundance of sources of varying quality with advice on what to do and not to do. For example the field of film studies has featured various pieces of research regarding the film review. In 2012 Kersten and Bielby (2012) did research regarding reviewing practices in both the United States and the United Kingdom to uncover what methods reviewers employed. They believe the role of the critic to be extremely important as “critics function as cultural intermediaries between artistic goods and their audiences not only because of their central role as cultural authorities who enact aesthetic standards but also because of their ability to transform those standards and contribute to elevating (or lowering) entire fields of cultural goods” (p.184). The influence of the film critics allowed for film to turn into a field as it became a profession requiring a certain skill, following with Bourdieu’s notion of fields. Kersten and Bielby’s research “found that reviews consist of four essential components, Auteurism, Experience, Processes, and Context” (p. 196).

Auteurism was something that came to prominence in film as certain directors rose in standing. As a result film reviews of movies featuring a prominent director, such as Stanley Kubrick, were considerably more likely to make frequent mention of the director and his involvement (Kersten & Bielby, 2012). A similar effect occurs in video game reviews, where games that are developed by certain studios such as Platinum, or even individuals such as Hideo Kojima, are reviewed with frequent mentions to their creators as those set a certain expectation (Juba, 2015).

Besides auteurism there is the component of the experience, which “consists of critical appraisal of the quality of the emotional engagement of a film” and as such is not to be confused with the experience that the reviewer might have in the field or with the film (Kersten & Bielby, 2012, p.195). This concept is not as prominent in every case of game reviewing. Some games however get high praise for their emotional engagements, games like The Beginner’s Guide have had their reviews focus on the level of emotional engagement of the reviewer (Jeff Marchiafava, 2015; O’Brien, 2015).
The aspect of processes mainly considers the “creative processes that went into making a film and the manner in which the storylines, characters, or look of the movie came about” (Kersten & Bielby, 2012, p.194). In reference to games journalism and games in general the aspects of storylines and characters are of importance. Storytelling and the development of characters has become a more important part of videogames throughout the last decade. Story-driven games and good writing have been praised more of late, with games whose primary focus is not the story such as Dragon Age: Inquisition still being applauded for its character development (Ingenito, 2015; Juba, 2015). At the same time the aspect of processes can be stretched out to also include game specific processes that would not be applicable to movies, such as graphics. The process of how a game should look is one in which the developers have to decide what style will fit their game best, and as such their choice can range from pixel art to lifelike graphics. For the reviewer there is then the possibility to decide if the choice that was made was the right one to convey whatever the developer wanted to convey with the game.

Context is the last factor Kersten and Bielby identify. “This factor points to considerations that link a film to contexts both within and beyond the film world, either as a commodity or insofar as the film’s content is concerned” (Kersten & Bielby, 2012, p.194). This includes movies that tell a self-contained story with a message that can be applied outside of its own content as well. Movies such as ‘Enough’ and ‘Bordertown’ tell messages about domestic abuse and drug wars that are relatable beyond their self-contained movie context. Games have done the same, such as This War of Mine being a game about surviving in a warzone and at the same time telling the story of surviving war in a context beyond its own game setting. In the reviews covering the game this story and how it is told is sometimes the primary aspect of the review and sometimes just a side note to the more traditional values such as gameplay (Zacny, 2014; Tack, 2014).

The importance of these four components differed between movies and reviews based on “the kind of recognition a film ultimately receives” (Kersten & Bielby, 2012, p.196). This is similar to the way that lifestyle journalism conducts its reviews. It is also comparable to a method of game critique offered by Konzack (2002), who suggests a seven layer model for game critique. The method was not intended for game journalism and reviews, but regardless it can be
used as such due to game journalism’s larger role in critiquing games. The field of game studies has been the subject of several studies conducted in the use of criticism reflecting on video games. Criticism in this sense is not the exact same as used in reviews as in game studies criticism over a game expands further than the quality of the game itself on a player's level, but also in matters such as coding and resource management. An example of this is an article by Konzack (2002) in which he describes a method of analyzing computer games. He claimed to offer a method “based on computer games in particular and not some kind of transfer from other field or studies – even though of course it is inspired from other kinds of analysis methods from varying fields of studies” (Konzack, p.89). His research led him to identify the seven major components on which a critique should focus, which he called the seven layers. The layers consist of: hardware, program code, functionality, gameplay, meaning, referentiality and socio-culture. According to Konzack, a perfect piece of criticism would have to mention those seven factors. How each of these factors come to play in reviews and critiques over a decade later is uncertain, but it does go to show that the field of game studies took into account game critique as a serious field. Despite the research not referencing critique as any form of journalism, game reviews are based on criticism, or lack thereof, and as such, the seven layers can prove relevant to modern game review practices.

Each of the seven components that Konzack identified might in fact be even more relevant today than it was in 2002. Hardware, the physical attributes which together make a computer or other device, serves as a good example. Where in 2002 hardware options were limited, in 2015 there are more video cards, processors and other components on the market than ever before. Games require certain hardware to work, possibly due to be released exclusively for a certain brand of pc or console, or simple because it needs a certain amount of processing power. Regardless of the reason, hardware is more important than ever.

Another factor of importance is functionality. Functionality is defined as how well the program code works with the specific hardware. “The functionality depends on the code and the physical nature of the computer” (Konzack, 2002, p.92). The basic premise here is whether or not the game works as intended. Today, every game has its minimum and recommended system requirements to function properly on the back of the box on or its webpage on digital outlets.
such as Steam, yet despite this it is often possible for there to be issues with the game. How well a game functions is not only harder to determine these days due to large differences in different game set-ups, but glitches and bugs have become more prominent to the audience awareness than ever before, with the bugs from Assassin’s Creed: Unity reaching the BBC news site for example.

Another aspect from Konzack’s article that has seen changes over the last years is the socio-cultural aspect. This aspect focuses less on the game itself and more on its players and the culture built around a game. It analyzes not only the interaction “between computer game and player but the interrelationship between all participants of the game” (Konzack, 2002, p.98). Today, game conventions are huge, cosplay, dressing to resemble a character, is featured in gaming culture and popular culture, and mass multiplayer is one of the most popular genres in the field. Gaming culture is blooming and is more relevant than ever. Whether or not it is as relevant to game criticism, however, is open for interpretation.

Konzack’s model is just one of several within the field of game studies, however. In 2014 Brendan Keogh published an article in which he argued that game criticizing was lacking the correct tools to give individual games the correct treatment. He argues a need for “a descriptive, bottom-up conceptual toolkit that understands particular videogames in the moment of play when videogame and player come together” (Keogh, p.1). His research claims to lay “a groundwork for academic roads into videogame criticism that is primarily concerned with understanding videogames as videogames to complement those adhoc methods already being developed by a nascent scene of online critics and bloggers” (Keogh, p.3). In essence, he argues that game studies has been trapped in a normative ideal as they compare each game to what it could and should be, rather than what the game actually is (2014). Although his advised method is one that is specific to game studies and the practice of critiquing within that field, Keogh does note how the online sphere is already doing what he believes game studies should do as well, namely analyzing video games’ own cultural form by using criticism that “does not conflate and does not purify” (Keogh, p.18). As such, it shows how game studies and game journalism grow closer and illustrates that the methods suggested for game studies are relevant in its journalism as well, especially for articles like reviews.
Reviews are an important part of game journalism, but are also prominent in the overarching section of lifestyle journalism. Several fields within lifestyle journalism use it, such as food and travel journalism oftentimes employing reviews to give their opinion on a product. In other words, this demonstrates that food reviews have a purpose beyond grading. They are also important to ensure that a certain standard is being upheld, as well as the importance of sharing the reviewer’s opinion about the quality of the restaurant to the audience. The standard however is dictated by the reviewer of the product in that specific time-space.

Game journalism reviewing practices are much the same, as the reviewer is tasked with analyzing if a game is good enough, while simultaneously deciding what constitutes good enough. But their position does not allow them to claim anything they want, as the gaming audience can become vocal when their opinions on quality are not shared with the standards of the reviewer. An example of this is evident in the differences of opinion between players and reviewers regarding the 2015 game Mad Max. The score given by the players on Steam were 94% positive, whereas the average reviewer score of the game was 70 (Steam, 2015 / MetaCritic, 2015). This shows that, despite game journalism’s function as reviewer of games for the public, they can be ignored and disagreed with when there is a difference in opinion between the judgment of the reviewers and the opinion of the gamers. This can be problematic for the reviewer’s authority as ultimately, reviews depend on audience reliance on them. Fürsich explained this by showing the difference between news and lifestyle journalism: “news journalism is characterized by collective problem definition and solutions, [whereas] advice journalism focuses on problems on a personal level that can be solved by individuals” (Fürsich, 2011, p.14). If game journalism fails to solve the problem on the personal level, then it holds no journalistic authority as the audience will reject their reviews.

The journalistic authority a journalist or an outlet holds is essential to their authority to speak. For game journalism, this entails that without their journalistic authority their reviews hold no power and can be easily disregarded by the very audience they want to convince. Journalistic authority in the field of reviewing and lifestyle journalism has not been studied in detail, but the concept has been researched in the cases of traditional and conventional journalism. One of the arguments traditional journalism has in support of its authority is its drive
for objective reporting. However, it is important to recognize that “we should not approach journalism as a descriptive but as a performative discourse designed to persuade readers that what is describes is real, which, by successfully doing so, transforms an interpretations in to truth – into a reality the public can act upon” (Broersma, 2010, p.21). The impossibility of reaching complete objectivity has driven journalism into a version of itself that, instead of doing the impossible, tries to convince the audience of their truthfulness. With this, journalism has grounded its authority in its own conventions, which accept the impossibility of true objectivity and instead try to reflect to their readers that what they write is the truth by other means.

There are many ways in which journalism has established its authority to speak. In the 1960s and 70s, Walter Cronkite was an immensely successful news anchor in the United States, and one of the biggest examples of journalistic authority that news journalism has. This was because he was both popular and commonly believed to be truthful, and as such he had the right to speak according to his audience. When he died in 2009 there was a large discussion within journalism on the place of journalistic authority and what had changed in journalism since the height of Cronkite’s career. According to Carlson (2012), part of Cronkite’s journalistic authority was based on ritual. “During this era, nightly Cronkite viewing became a ritual for millions of Americans, which suggests the need to include attributes of ritual within an understanding of journalistic authority” (p.483). This illustrates that the ways of conveying the authority to speak go beyond the pieces themselves and are also to be found in their meta-data such as frequency, with meta-data being aspects surrounding an item, show or concept, such as duration and scheduling. Although the topic of game journalism is wildly different, this notion of ritual and meta-data can prove relevant regardless.

When journalists fail to establish and convey their authority a problem arises. This is what happened in the previously mentioned case of the game Mad Max. The reason for this disagreement between gamers and reviewers was their differences in expectations of the game. The average gamer wants different things from a game than a critic does, but such a disagreement can lead to a loss in authority for the critic as those who disagree with the review will go elsewhere. The lowest score the game was given was on The Jimquisition, who gave it a 4 out of 10, and the comment section is filled with those who disagree vehemently, grudgingly
agree and those who mediate between the groups (Sterling, 2015). Based on these examples, it seems that disagreement with the general reader opinion is both a negative in terms of authority as well as a positive, depending on the group that is reached out to.

These disagreements between the reviewer and the gamer show that authority can be based on aspects such as transparency and clarity. When disagreeing with the audience, it is possible for a critic to keep their respect and their authority to speak, even when the audiences disagrees, as long as they understand the critic’s reasoning. Clear exemplification of the reasons why the score on the Jimquisition was so low allowed for some of the readers in the comments to accept and even defend the low score based on those reasons. Without a grade, there might have been no discussion at all, as none of the things mentioned in the review are untrue (Bain, 2015). As such, authority is a concept that heavily depends on the reviewer’s ability to argue their opinion. Respect and authority as such seem to be closely linked. Cronkite had gained a lot of respect from the audience over the years as he became the face of the news. This gave him a lot of journalistic authority. He was the face of the news, an example of the journalistic values of objectivity and truthfulness. Possible means of authority such as meta-data do not come into play in the research conducted in the field of game studies when considering game critiquing. Because of this research into the methods used in game reviewing requires the combination of the elements of the modes of persuasion, critique, and the importance of journalistic authority. Combining these will grant a better framework in which to understand the particular branch of journalism that is studied in this thesis.

1.3 Establishing Authority in Journalism

To establish authority journalists have a plethora of methods of available to them. One of these methods is the use of form and style. These are more traditional means of installing authority based on the form and the style of the piece which conveys authority. The audience has come to expect a certain style and form of writing, and adhering to it establishes a certain level of credibility. Form and style have traditionally always been markers of journalism’s prowess. They have become staple markers for individual media outlets, signifying their positions and
reliability. On the sole basis of form and style, a lot of authority can be conveyed. This was demonstrated with Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds*, which had people believing in an alien invasion without a shred of evidence for it.

Welles’ radio play had people think it was the truth because it followed the same rules as traditional news broadcasts did. Traditional journalism includes forms and frames such as interviews and other organizing principles to convey their authority. They also use professional practices such as the reliance on official documents, and “information is attributed and multiple sources, preferably eyewitnesses, are quoted” (Broersma, 2010, p.17). Furthermore, journalists use form and style practices such as the inverted pyramid. The inverted pyramid is a prime example of a method used by traditional journalism to establish a certain expectation in the reader, as it is a method in which “the reporter writes the most important news at the top of the story and gradually parses out more specific information,” something the audience has grown accustomed to (Robinson, 2006, p.67). Broersma (2010) explains the importance of various style aspects, including the inverted pyramid:

The length of news items, for instance, reveals ideological and strategic choices. The space required by an item represents the importance editors attach to it, while the way a story is structured—linear or nonlinear, chronologically, by applying the conventions of the inverted pyramid, merely narrative or discursive, polemic or factual—stresses the interpretation of social reality that is voiced in a newspaper (p.21).

The opposite of this style is the buried lead. This style is considered journalistically poor as it withholds the information from the reader at first, and when searched for as a style one is more likely to find results advising one on how to avoid burying the lead rather than advice on how to write a proper one. The idea is that when using a certain news style that speaks to the audience well the audience will continue reading the article and might move on to read more articles, creating a positive feedback loop. For written articles, the selection of news style is the first step in establishing journalistic authority. Traditionally, this has been best done through the inverted pyramid as it has been accepted as the method dedicated to objectivity and delivering
facts, but in game journalism this might differ. For lifestyle journalism it is more important to
hook the reader, to intrigue them enough to continue reading the rest, and the style with which
they do so can be telling of their authoritative strategies.

As such, game journalism does not fully correspond with what has become known as the
‘news style’ of journalism, but perhaps is more akin to the reflective style. “Views rather than
news is the credo of the reflective style” (Broersma, 2010, p.25). This corresponds with the
notion held by reviewing content creators in game journalism that readership keeps the business
afloat. The games that get reviewed are oftentimes the big titles, even when these are not the
most innovative or even most recent game releases, simply because these titles will attract a
larger viewer base.

The position of game journalism is one as a “stand between consumers and producers as
fulcrums, spinning and molding the knowledge that each has (access to) about the other,
impacting consumption habits as they simultaneously shape production practices” (Carlson,
2009, Introduction section, para. 2). To keep this position they need the trust of both parties, and
on the audience side this is mostly dependent on their writing. Similar to the manuals that large
newspapers such as the New York Times have, some game outlets have a similar writing outline.
These outlines do not enforce the same level of rules such as objectivity, but do convey messages
important for online writing such as avoiding clutter. Writing game reviews according to ‘The
Videogame Style Guide and Reference Manual’ should adhere to a variety of rules, including:
“Avoid first- and second-person references in your reviews. Keep your writing squarely focused
on the subject matter. Remove yourself and the reader from the review” and “don’t waste time
trying to come up with an overly complicated, clever opening and/or closing. Get to the heart of
the matter. Be quick about it” (Thomas, Orland, & Steinberg, 2007, p.77). A review written
following these rules would then be considered good and would therefore be the correct way to
establish audience trust and gaining journalistic authority. Not following the rules would,
according to the manual, lead to a badly written review, which could have the opposite effect on
the viewer trust and reviewers authority.

So for this thesis it is important to understand that “journalism’s claim to truthfulness and
reliability is crucial for its existence” (Broersma, 2010, p.16). It tries to establish this truthfulness
by trying “to impose and legitimize valid representations of the social world by the choice of form and stylistic devices” (Broersma, p.16). In this “form can be analyzed into three subcategories that cover structure, design and genre” (Broersma, p.21). Taking these markers into account when analyzing game journalism will help in understanding the mediated subjectivity that is in place in these articles, as these articles are not direct representations but are mediated by the journalist, but first and foremost, they will help find the signifiers for the use of a certain form or style in an article.

However, most of these methods were designed and analysed with written journalism in mind. Video for example has several more style elements that come into play. It deals with strategies such as the anchor and the camera point of view. John Fiske (2010) states that camerawork can “give us a perfect view of the scene, and thus a complete understanding of it” (p.4). This is for example used to establish the protagonist and antagonist, but also in granting the anchor authority by looking at him from a particular angle. Fiske in total accounts for the following ‘Codes of Television’: camerawork, lighting, editing, sound and music, mise en scène, casting, setting and costume, make-up, action, dialogue and ideological codes (2010). He believes these to be the most important parts for analyzing television, and many of them are applicable to newscasts as well.

For the purpose of standard television news, for example, camerawork is of great importance. A large variety of shots will have a large variety of influences on audience opinion and perception. A long shot “may make the viewer feel distant from the action” where a close-up “can encourage the viewer’s sense of intimacy with what is taking place on screen” (Creeber, 2006, p.39). The same goes for any of the other codes, but in the translation to the Youtube era, some of these codes their values or uses have changed. In Peer and Ksiazek’s research into the challenge that Youtube poses they took into account a large set of variables such as shots, edits, and sounds. With the traditional ways in which news items used these in mind they analyzed how much the Youtube news videos still followed those rules. They found that “on the whole, successful online news videos adhere to most traditional standards when it comes to production elements, but display more relaxed standards when it comes to their content” (Ksiazek & Peer, 2011, p.56).
For the analyzing of game reviews on Youtube these same codes and elements can be relevant. Game review videos contain several of the elements that have been used to analyze news videos on both television and Youtube. The content of the reviews are full with audio, sound, edits and video material that can be subjected to similar analysis as traditional news. The consistent use of high quality audio and video, for example, can increase the likeliness of a viewer returning to a channel, increasing that channel’s popularity and authority when the viewer consistently views their reviews. Quality of any kind can therefore be used as a method for gaining authority. Furthermore, the code of casting can be relevant. The role of the traditional anchor can be replaced with the reviewer, and if viewers have a good reason to trust the reviewer as a person, this will increase their credibility and authority. Finally, Creeber in his shot-by-shot analysis touches upon a new code he named graphics. He mentions that “television increasingly uses graphic images and written text to add meaning and style to all of its programmes” (Creeber, 2006, p.42–43). With YouTube being the child of the digital era, graphics are possibly even more used there, and could very plausibly have a place in game reviews as a technique.

YouTube also proved to be the breeding ground for more easy-going content, as it attracts higher viewership. This is in line with Broersma’s view on reflective journalism, with views being the driving force behind content. Beyond that, however, the less ‘professional’ content is also considered less objective, an attribute which is often considered essential for journalism. In game journalism, however, the use of subjectivity has become accepted to at least a certain extent, and not just for YouTube content. Jennings researched the use of subjectivity in video games criticism, the cornerstone of reviewing practices. Subjectivity for these purposes is defined as allowing for personal experience and opinion to influence the journalist’s review.

Jennings argues that “player experience is crucial to game text. As others writing on video games have observed, without a player there is no game” (Jennings, 2015, p.5). With this, she posits “an approach to games criticism in which the subjectivity of the critic is accepted as central, unavoidable, and necessary” (Jennings, p.2). This is contradictory to the traditional news value of objectivity, but in the digital era in which it has been proven that according to Peer and Ksiazek’s research, on Youtube at least, the items that do not follow traditional values thrive the most. Jennings poses that, in the instance of game critiquing, the pleasure of play can be used as
an example of critical subjectivity, allowing for the critic’s enjoyment of the game to become “a component of the actualization of the text; passion becomes a method of research” (Jennings, p. 13). With this she creates a way in which the inherent subjectivity from a game critic becomes a helpful tool of reviewing, rather than being a journalistic problem. It makes a method of installing authority out of a previously considered conflict in journalistic values.

But there are problems that arise when subjectivity is considered not only acceptable but a legitimate course of action. An example of this is explained by Rebecca Carlson (2009), who researched the use of subjectivity in covering a game called *Too Human*. She states that “video game journalists … work explicitly to ‘define and fix’ the consumer norms, desires, and tastes of video game fans; they don't make games themselves, but rather they function to create a continued need among consumers for games” (Carlson, 2009, Mediating video game value section, para. 1). Because it is game journalists’ their job to create this need, it is important for them to succeed in creating and maintaining their authority to speak. For their audience, they are after all “the only route to prized insider or expert knowledge regarding future productions, release dates, and industry personalities, all which expert fans might—convinced from within fan circles as much as from magazines themselves—believe must be consumed to make one a ‘real’ fan” (Carlson, section Mediating video game value, para. 3).

In the case of *Too Human* there was a clash between the developer, Denis Dyack, and a reviewer, Mark MacDonald, who was particularly harsh based on his personal experiences with a preview build of the game. The developer called out the reviewer for allowing his personal tastes to dominate a lot of the review, rather than trying to give it a fair treatment, Dyack argued that “it was unnecessarily harsh in order to be provocative” basing this on sentences from the review such as “I wouldn't show this at a high school science fair” (Carlson, 2009, Convergence section, para. 3). This goes to show that there is a large spectrum between objectivity and subjectivity that can be employed in a review, and that the use of either end of that spectrum might lead to retaliation. Too far one way and the review is boring, too far down the other path and it will not be taken serious. This is in part due to the fact that “fans purchase or seek to acquire through other means the journalist’s expert knowledge, symbolizing an established consumer trust in that knowledge” (Carlson, Mediating video game value section, para. 1). They do this by spending
their time on reading or watching a review and they have a certain expectation from it. This expectation can differ based on their experience with a certain outlet and as such differs from outlet to outlet as well. In the end, however, the main point is the same for each of the game journalism outlets, as the consumer trusts their knowledge because they are their gateway into the game industry. Keeping that trust is key in maintaining the authority to speak on the topics of the industry.

Both YouTube reviewers and the more traditional ultimately have the same functions, namely to act as advice guides on what to buy and offering information about games that are out or about to release. Their second function is perhaps most clearly stated in the words of Kieron Gillen (2004), a game reviewer of repute, when he said: “they operate as a shit filter” (para. 5). They sift out the games that are worthy of a closer look, saving the consumer time and possibly money. Their ways of achieving this and communicating to the audience might differ, but both the traditional outlets as well as the YouTubers rely on their authority to speak in order to be able to fulfill their tasks.
2. Methodology

To analyze the aspects present in the reviews by the ‘traditional’ outlets as well as the content made by the newcomers I will conduct empirical research on how the content from new YouTube actors differ from the content made by the traditional outlets, with the focus on the methods used to convey authority. To do this I have analyzed game reviews published by all four subjects, IGN, Game Informer, Northernlion and TotalBiscuit. The method used for the analysis is qualitative with an inductive approach, as, despite the construction of several categories by other researchers as apparent in the theory, the goal of this research is to uncover which methods are apparent, without having these be pre-selected.

I believe this to be the most achievable way of uncovering the differences in content and the methods used to imply authority, as every piece of the reviews will be put up to scrutiny without pushing it through a quantitative schema. For example, it will allow every aspect of the piece to show its inherent authoritative method if present, to then be classified and compared in the paper through the means of the literature, which is based on previous research conducted in other fields. The inductive approach towards the data collected in the qualitative method is most suitable for this as one of its primary purposes is “to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format” (Thomas, 2006, p.238). It is also a fitting approach “to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data,” as well as “to develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data” (Thomas, p.238). In other words, it is suited to ‘building’ theory rather than ‘testing’ theory, and thus better fits the aim of this research, to explore changes in game journalism. With these features, I believe it will be the method best suitable to answer the research question: how do reviewing practices differ between the traditional and new game reviewers and how does this reflect on the changing dynamics of the games journalism and lifestyle journalism landscape?

2.1 Research Design
The research in this thesis is a qualitative, inductive, textual analysis of four key game journalism outlets who each have positioned themselves as a place for information and entertainment based on their critique of video games. The use of a textual analysis makes sense in this research as with its research one can “make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (McKee, 2003, p.1). This fits with the research set out in this thesis, as it attempts to understand the implications of elements present in video game reviews and critiques. Because of how it attempts to understand how people might interpret a text, for this research the textual analysis is most applicable to the concept of establishing authority, as the elements that are present in the text that are meant to imply authority will only succeed when the reader interprets them as such. Fairclough explains part of this by the means of the term ideology. In his view, “ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (Fairclough, 2003, p.9). As it is likely that the ‘traditional’ outlets and the YouTubers have a different occupational ideology, their means of establishing and changing the social relations between the audience and the reviewer will differ. Traditionally in game reviewing media this relationship has been one in which the reviewer is a teacher of sorts, relaying what is the truth to the student, the reader. With the hands on approach of the YouTubers they might be changing this relationship.

Two of the selected outlets are ‘traditional’: Game Informer and IGN. The other two are considered newcomers and create their content on YouTube: Northernlion and TotalBiscuit. Because the research has been conducted by a single interpreter of content, and the purpose was to find underlying elements that should be present the content of each of the studied outlets, there was no specific selection of reviews, nor was there a set amount of reviews that had to be read. Instead each outlet has been studied until I believed that my grasp of their methods and techniques was at a level that allowed me to not only find and name them, but also compare and contrast them with the elements found in the content of the other parties.

The analysis was focused on a single outlet at a time, analyzing that outlet to completion before continuing on to the next. After each outlet analysis a comparison was made to the previous to see if there are any major differences, which will prove both useful within the same
type of media, but also between the two written outlets and the two Youtube outlets, allowing for a glimpse at which methods transfer into the new media and which are left behind, either on purpose, by compatibility or by chance.

Finally, the results of all the analyses were compared to one another to find the major and minor methods differences between the outlets and their preferred methods of implying authority. In the results chapter of this research these findings and their meaning will be discussed.

2.2 Case Study and Approach

A large selection of reviews from the four different outlets will be analyzed. Game Informer has been selected as one of these because it is one of America’s oldest and best read game journalism magazines. To complement this form of outlet and allow for a better insight in the differences between media types IGN will be used as well. IGN is a popular entertainment focused website which has grown to have localized versions all across the world. The important similarity it has to Game Informer is that both of them publish written reviews and as such can complement each other, allowing for comparing and contrasting within the same field, as well as having a broader base to juxtapose with the Youtube style review outlets. On the Youtube side of the reviews TotalBiscuit’s ‘WTF Is …’ series will be analyzed. TotalBiscuit has been selected because he is one of Youtube’s most revered gaming critics and is for many the prime example of the new style of gaming critique. To broaden the Youtube part of the research TotalBiscuit’s ‘WTF Is …’ will be joined by Northernlion’s ‘Let’s Look At’. Northernlion is not quite a staple of the Youtube gaming critique branch, but with nearly 600,000 subscribers his medium large Youtube game content channel has grown rapidly over the last few years, creating a large community and plenty of content for analysis.

This research will be a content analysis, conducted with a qualitative method through an inductive approach. Constructing an approach for such a research can be confusing when not clearly established beforehand. To avoid any problems that might come up with this method that is less clearly delineated the construction of the analysis will follow Thomas’ model regarding the coding process:
Table 1: The coding process in inductive analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial read through data</th>
<th>Identify specific segments of information</th>
<th>Label the segments of information to create categories</th>
<th>Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories</th>
<th>Create a model incorporating most important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many pages of text</td>
<td>Many segments of text</td>
<td>30-40 categories</td>
<td>15-20 categories</td>
<td>3-8 categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The larger part of the research will also follow a five step plan by Thomas, which has been expanded upon (Thomas, 2006, p.241-242):

1. **Preparation of raw data files:**
   In most research, this would entail making sure that all the data up for analysis is uniform and has a common format. In the instance of this research, however, all the data is already made uniform and common by virtue of its publishing. As such, the preparation of the raw data files in this case means bookmarking the review list of every outlet and every review analyzed from those outlets. This preparation could be taken further by for example downloading all the Youtube video’s for optimal editing access, but this is prohibited by time, especially for the marginal benefit it would provide.

2. **Close reading of text:**
   This is the most self-explanatory of the steps. The coder will closely read a large selection of reviews by Game Informer and IGN and will carefully watch an equally large amount of video reviews by TotalBiscuit and Northernlion. This close reading is necessary to find the methods that are not openly obvious and as such is essential to find the answers to the research question. In future reference the term text can both refer to a video as well as a traditional text and reading can be both the act of reading and watching as well as listening.
3. **Creation of categories:**
   Based on the close readings of all the texts, the coder will make a list of categories. In this research, that list will be all of the methods of implying and establishing authority that can be found in the texts, as authority will be the concept most closely studied in the differences between the game critiquing articles. But it will also include other defining elements of the reviews, such as the level of judgment that it might pass, or the tone that the writer uses.

4. **Overlapping coding and uncoded text:**
   Part of this step is reducing the overlap between categories to make sure that redundancy does not become an issue later on in the results. Another part of this step is establishing if text can have overlapping categories and how much of text can go uncoded. For the purpose of this research one segment of text can be coded into several categories as long as it is deemed relevant. Regarding the amount of text that can be left uncoded it is not unheard of for texts to be left over 50% uncoded due to the specific outset of the research. Because this research sets out to only uncover a very specific part of reviewing practices, the use of authoritative methods, a lot of text will be analyzed but only a small fraction of it will be coded.

5. **Continuing revision and refinement of category system:**
   Throughout the process of coding and analyzing the categories will be changed and adjusted to fit best with the found results. This includes updating definitions throughout the coding, but also refining the coding scheme itself by creating sub-topics where necessary, giving definitions and have quotations to exemplify the category as best as possible.

With the use of this five step plan the four selected outlets will be analyzed through the use of qualitative inductive research of which the specifics and the reasons for their selection will be explained in the following chapters.

**2.3 Reflection and Justification**
The decision to go with the qualitative approach over the quantitative approach is because of its suitability to answer the research question on the differences between critiquing content and means of implying authority between the four selected parties. The reason for this decision was primarily because “in qualitative content analysis, data are categorized using categories that are generated, at least in part, inductively (i.e., derived from the data), and in most cases applied to the data through close reading” whereas in “in quantitative content analysis, data are categorized using predetermined categories that are generated from a source other than the data to be analyzed, applied automatically through an algorithmic search process (rather than through reading the data), and analyzed solely quantitatively” (Forman and Damschroder, 2008, p.39-40). The research in this paper lends itself more to be analyzed through a method in which the categories are primarily derived by closely reading the texts. The question of which methods of authority are used and how the content from the old actors differs from that from the new actors can be answered much more comprehensively by finding the methods and differences from the original texts, rather than establishing all the possible methods beforehand and then testing the texts for those categories. Another option by which to research the research question at hand would be through conducting interviews with all the parties involved. This option however is not viable. In part due to the schedules of the selected parties, with TotalBiscuit currently going through chemotherapy as the most extreme example. In general, it would require being granted a significant amount of time with people who run their own business and do not have the time. Furthermore, IGN and Game Informer each have a wide variety of journalists working for them, and getting access to all of them is nigh impossible. Because of these considerations, as well as the fact that a textual analysis can unearth elements that the writers themselves would not have mentioned because they grew so accustomed as to be unaware of them, I chose for a textual analysis.

However, the textual approach has its limitations. When researching how the content created by the ‘traditional’ outlets and the YouTubers differs in style and authority through a textual approach, it leaves out related questions such as what the audience gets out of consuming the content. It is also possible for the textual approach to miss elements if they are not apparent
enough, even after considerable analysis. Regardless of these limitations, however, the textual approach seems to be the most effective approach, as it allows for in-depth analysis of content and comparison of findings. The analysis therefore can answer the posed question in the necessary detail, as it unearths the ways in which the content differs from each other, while taking into account how authority is implied.

Another limitation of this research is that it is based on case studies, namely those of the four selected outlets. It is entirely possible that the selected parties are not fully representative of their whole medium, but the selection of cases is necessary to achieve any kind of in-depth analysis. To ensure that the analysis would be reliable, I first drew preliminary conclusions based on five reviews from each outlet. Then, after some time had passed between the analysis of the first five reviews of each outlet, another set of five reviews each was analyzed. The conclusions from each of the two sets were then compared, which showed that the results were consistent. Important to note is that, because it was a qualitative and explorative piece of research, there was no coding such as would be present in a quantitative piece. Instead, each review was read or viewed several times while making note of everything that seemed of importance to the research, after which the findings went through the rest of the process as set out in section 2.2.

2.4 Video and Text

Something else to reflect upon are the problems that may arise due to difference in medium used by the selected game critics. For the YouTubers, video is the main means in which it produces its content, while for the older outlets it is text. Because of this difference, it is impossible to compare the results of the two sides on a one-to-one scale. However, it is not the purpose of the research to uncover how the two sides differ from one another based on their preferred medium. Rather, it is to see how they differ in aspects such as form, style, and means of implying authority. Because of this, it is absolutely likely that there will be some results that have their origins in the different medium employed by each player, but these will often be based on using a medium to its fullest potential. Because of this it is possible to compare most results that are not medium bound to one another, and also compare medium bound results to each other with
the caveat that, albeit different, they still serve the same purpose. However, in the case of comparing the legacy gaming outlets to the new players, these differences are part of the point that is being made. In many cases, the YouTube gaming critics make an effort to distinguish themselves and as such, the differences in results that may be problematic when compared on a one-to-one basis offer insight when accepting that these differences are there for a reason.
3. Results

In this section, the results of the research are set out, upon which the most notable will be reflected. For the YouTube videos, the research was conducted by doing a close reading of each game critique, for which purpose the texts were read several times and notes were made of everything that could be considered a technique or means to gain authority, intentionally or not. The results of the analysis of each video were compared to each other to extract the common themes, for the purpose of synthesizing a list of characteristics. This follows with the model for research suggested as in table 1, where the first read-through of all the texts resulted in a large amount of results. This was then narrowed down by doing a second reading, in which specific concepts and text was extracted. These were then labeled into a large amount of categories, which were subsequently compared and corrected to reduce overlap. This leaves the research at the fourth step, at which point an average of fifteen to twenty categories should remain.

On YouTube, game critiquers often have a style, a means by which they convey their personality. TotalBiscuit’s style is one of professionalism when compared to the other selected YouTube content creator Northernlion. The latter uses a more personal tone of conversation. Both of these styles can work, but each will most likely influence the methods of authority used by the respective outlet. Because of this, some of the methods that are reoccurring in the works of TotalBiscuit might be completely absent from others, and vice versa. Due to these differences the research will create a list of methods of authority per outlet. This means that each outlet will be analyzed on its own, going through the first four steps of table 1. At the end of these steps each outlet will have had its categories reduced to a number between fifteen and twenty. For the final results, in which the amount of remaining categories needs to be downsized to a maximum of eight, the results from all outlets will be compared. Methods that were found in all four sources will be kept automatically as a category, while further categories will be selected based on importance to the using outlet.

Important to note is a small but critical difference in the way that all four subjects market their reviews. Where Game Informer and IGN have no problem marketing their opinion pieces as reviews, TotalBiscuit and Northernlion have deliberately chosen for other terminology. Prime
reason for the latter two to do this is to clarify that they have not completely finished the games and as such do not want to give a verdict on the complete product as such. Instead they use different names, those being ‘WTF: is...’ and ‘Let’s Look At’ respectively. By doing this, they signify that their opinions are based on the amount of time they spent with the product. Besides this, it also is a far more open term. The Youtube reviewers do not grade the games and instead explain the game, highlight the up- and downsides of it and allow for the viewer to decide whether the game is worth it or not. This use of different nomenclature shows immediately that these two different styles of game journalism rely on different techniques.

To create the baseline for the term review as it will be used in this thesis the common aspects from the four subjects will be extracted. As such, the general consensus for what constitutes a review is defined as a game critical piece which consists of the opinion of the reviewer and their arguments for that opinion. Generally, this is illustrated in detail in the main body of the review and is then summarized at the end, in one of several ways. This can be a summation of the positives and negatives, a summary by subject, or a short finalization of the reviewer’s opinion. In summary, despite the diverging opinions on the approach of a review, even going as far as classifying the game critique piece by a different name, all of them can still be considered reviews in the larger definition of the term. With this in mind, the overlapping definition for the review would be a formalized instance of a game criticism intended to inform and entertain gamers and would-be gamers alike.

3.1 Findings

The textual analysis of all four outlets showed that each one of them holds to a certain form, style and logic. For example, all showed a certain level of passing judgment, but the extent of which differed significantly between the parties. A similar situation emerged with the levels of showing and telling of information, where there was a clear divide between the ‘traditional’ outlets and the YouTubers. To summarize these findings, all were synthesized into categories and then ordered into table 2.
Table 2: Findings from IGN, Game Informer, TotalBiscuit, and Northernlion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet/Findings</th>
<th>Passing Judgment</th>
<th>Showing &amp; Telling</th>
<th>Referencing Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IGN</td>
<td>High, argumentative essay, grades</td>
<td>Telling, backed up with edited showing</td>
<td>Frequent, comparisons, examples and jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Informer</td>
<td>High, argumentative essay, grades</td>
<td>Telling</td>
<td>Frequent, comparisons and examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TotalBiscuit</td>
<td>Medium, opinionated coverage</td>
<td>Mostly showing, accompanied with text</td>
<td>Frequent, comparisons and proof of concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northernlion</td>
<td>Medium, opinionated coverage</td>
<td>Mostly showing, accompanied with text</td>
<td>Frequent, comparisons and proof of concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outlet/Findings</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Balanced Reporting</th>
<th>Form &amp; Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IGN</td>
<td>Argumentative &amp; Personal</td>
<td>Low, +/- graphic</td>
<td>Inverted pyramid, judging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Informer</td>
<td>Argumentative</td>
<td>Low, sidebar with aspect completion</td>
<td>Buried lead, judging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TotalBiscuit</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Medium, balanced subjectivity</td>
<td>Inverted pyramid, informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northernlion</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Medium, balanced subjectivity</td>
<td>Inverted pyramid, informative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Key Differences and Similarities

As can be seen in table 2, the YouTubers and the ‘traditional’ outlets are very similar to one another on most occasions, with a few exceptions with aspects such as the used tone throughout the reviews. However, far more obvious are the differences between the two parties, as this research set out to find in the first place. On top of that there are a few clear similarities between the two parties involved as well. The differences can be categorized into a section revolving
around the level of judgment being passed and the methods that are used to do so, and a section considering the differences between the showing and telling of information. The similarities are mostly found in how all outlets make reference to their own experience. To understand why these differences and similarities are in place, each of them will be analyzed and theorized in regard to their position in the field of games journalism and their desired ideals.

3.2.1 Degrees of Judgment

The first aspect that differs between the two groups is the degree of judgment that is present in their content. Whereas the ‘traditional’ outlets are subject to using a high degree of judgment, the YouTubers are more moderate in that sense, although certainly not without judgment at all. IGN and Game Informer pass judgment as it is what they consider to be the job. IGN believes that a review is “a critical view of how a game succeeds or fails at what it’s trying to do, and to give you all the info needed to determine if a game is worth your time and hard-earned cash” (IGN n.d.). As such to them passing judgment is an important part of the job, and the subjectivity that comes from being opinionated has been considered an essential part of the makeup of a review as it makes the reviewer part of the text itself, something that Jennings (2015) calls “subjective critical interventions” (p.14). The reviewer’s experience becomes an integral part of the review, as a game is completely dependent on the player. From this position the reviewer can make arguments based on the game and his own interpretation of its aspects. Jennings exemplifies this with the instance of Samantha Allen criticizing the implicit masculinity present in the video game Skyrim “by using her own subjectivity, her experience of playing the game, and her identity as lenses with which to read the game” (Jennings, p.15).

This passing of judgment is largely done through the style of the articles that Game Informer and IGN write. The reviews from the outlets take a particular shape where the author rather than being complete, attempts to argue a certain point. The writers start the article with a certain mindset, his opinion in a way, and then the article is in essence a way to argue the correctness of this opinion. As such, the balance between the positive and negative aspects of the game is buried, and when present is more than mildly in favor of the argument the author is
trying to make. Take for example Game Informer’s review of *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End*. The article starts with a buried lead, but after that the extremely positive opinion of the author is apparent in both his diction and his choice of highlights. The game is described in terms such as fascinating, powerful, and its story is complimented. For the most part, the article is therefore explaining what the game is about in terms that clearly reflect the author’s rather positive opinion. This is also apparent when the article must turn critical. The only real critique given is that “A Thief’s End doesn’t have that big, iconic set piece moment like the previous Uncharted games did,” which is then immediately offset by stating that the game “succeeds as a collection of smaller ‘I can’t believe we survived that’ sequences” (Reiner, 2016, para. 8). The one paragraph that mentions some critique goes out of its way to also immediately defend the game and tell the reader that despite this, it is still an amazing game and that the critique does not matter, because it is being made up for. This arguing for an opinion is typical in lifestyle journalism, and makes sense in the light of reviews. The job of all reviewers is essentially to form an opinion and then convince others of that opinion. A food reviewer wants people to believe him or her when saying that a certain meal is good or bad, and a travel reviewer wants people to go to the places he recommends and avoid every place that is in his opinion unpleasant.

For the YouTubers, however, the occupational ideology they hold is different. TotalBiscuit summarizes this in his YouTube description: “YouTube's #1 PC gaming critic. Sick of game reviews? Watch lengthy first impressions gameplay with honest and informative commentary. Get an idea about what you're getting into before you spend your money with ‘WTF is..’, YouTube's most popular first impressions gaming series” (Bain, n.d.). With this explanation of his core-series, which is also the series up for analysis, TotalBiscuit makes it clear that despite the attempt to differentiate from traditional game reviews, his version also tries to occupy the same niche by drawing those that previously or otherwise would have gone with the reviews from traditional outlets. Northernlion does not push back as hard towards the ‘traditional’ outlets as TotalBiscuit does, but he does describe his ‘Let’s Look At’ series as: “Need to know how good that new game is? Come check out my thoughts! One of my most popular, longest-running series” (Letourneau, n.d.). By doing so, he is offering an alternative to
the reviewing practices held by ‘traditional’ outlets, and as he is in the field, offering a service, as such he must either be adhering to the constructs of the field or trying to alter them.

This difference in the degrees at which judgment is passed therefore has to do with the different occupational ideology that the ‘traditional’ outlets and the YouTubers have. Where IGN and Game Informer intend to truly review a game in the sense that the game is played, and based on the experience of that playtime, an opinion is formed. This opinion is then argued to be the critical perception of the game, because the reviewer has a certain authority as he has experience in ways that the reader does not. For TotalBiscuit and Northernlion the situation is different. Similarly to IGN and Game Informer they intend to have an advisory role towards their audience, as they both wish to inform their audience of the quality of a game. However, at the same time the degree of judgment they pass is of a lower order. This is not because they do not have an opinion, but because the style of their content is different. Take for example TotalBiscuit’s review of *The Swindle*, in which he states that “you have got to love the visuals, at least, I got to love the visuals. I think the visuals are absolutely wonderful for the most part” (2015). He makes his opinion very obvious, but at the same time he is not trying to argue to the viewer that the visuals are of high quality, but rather that he believes that they are wonderful, which by itself can influence the audience to agree.

Where IGN and Game Informer use a style that is evocative of argumentative essays and the proving of a thesis statement, Northernlion and TotalBiscuit take a more exploratory approach in which a piece of the game is shown from start to finish and elements cannot be selected once the camera start recording. This does not mean that the YouTubers do not select content that suits their opinions best, but it does mean that the footage shown is less selective than the content from the ‘traditional’ outlets, because for the YouTubers, the purpose is not to prove a point, but to inform. Because of this very different occupational ideology, the two parties greatly differ in how they pass judgment, and the degree to which they do so. However, both groups ultimately still pass judgment to a certain extent, as game criticism inherently requires opinion, as many of its parts revolve around subjective aspects such as visuals and music.

**3.2.2 Showing and Telling**
In Bourdieu’s theory of cultural fields, the dichotomy between heteronomy and autonomy is key. On the heteronomous side, mostly economical influences dictate what content is created. This is in contrast to the autonomous side of journalism, in which cultural value is the reason for content to be made (Janssen, 2010, p.261). Compared to some of the other cultural fields, the autonomy that journalism has is already limited, and this is even more so the case with game journalism, which also has to maintain its position as a cultural intermediary. Each outlet has to consider both the economical and cultural effects of their content. Some content might score high on the economical side, by attracting lots of readers. At the same time however it might lower their prestige and journalistic authority if the article is little more than so-called ‘clickbait’, which are articles written with over-the-top headlines in attempt to draw readers, even when the article itself may contain very little information of value. As such, it is important for the outlets to consider their articles and how they are written. Reviews that are well argued or well-balanced will get a better critical reception, but might not be the biggest hit in terms of readership. These are decisions that the outlets constantly have to make. At the same time the field theory also considers the dichotomy of the established versus the new. According to Janssen there is a struggle in each field between the old and the new in which the established players rarely see any need for change, but the newcomers are benefitted by changes (Janssen, p.262). By doing this the newcomers can establish themselves as game changers and distance themselves from the established outlets. An example of this is TotalBiscuit’s explanation of his work in which he, as formerly stated, claims to be an alternative to the popular reviewing media (Bain, n.d). This desire to distinguish oneself can manifest in the form of new genres and styles and is related to the connected means of publication (Janssen, 2010, p.262). This is directly related to the different occupational ideology that the different partakers in the field might have. Because of the different occupational ideology, the degrees of judgment between the ‘traditional’ outlets and the YouTubers are significantly different. Because of the struggle within the cultural field, however, there is also the drive for change inherent to the work of the newcomers. Their content differs, not just because of the different ideology, but also because, as the newcomers, they welcomed game changing opportunities such as the advent of YouTube, as it allowed for the
creation of video content, which was more showing and less telling, in essence creating a
different genre and style with its own means of publication, one that allows for the concept of
“show, don’t tell” to evolve beyond its traditional meaning.

Thanks to being able to show anything that happens in a game, the showing form of
exemplification is a strong form of gaining authority. When a person can prove their point
directly through footage, this makes it far more likely for the reader to believe them. Traditional
journalism attempts to quote as many relevant sources as possible to create a position of
objectivity and inclusivity. Through these means, it attempts to give a fair representation of the
truth. For game journalism, and especially game reviewing and critiquing, quoting is not as
relevant. Where traditional journalism uses eye witnesses to explain what happens, game reviews
can simply use in-game footage to achieve a similar goal. This is illustrated, for example, in the
critique of the game Party Hard. In TotalBiscuit’s opinion there is a lack of tutorial, due to hints
being given based on findable papers with random hints. He then goes on to play a level and
showcase how these hints work, and also prove that they are useless by showing that the given
hints explain something that hasn’t even occurred in the game during his playtime at all (Bain,
2015). Because of this visual proof, viewers will be more likely to accept the issue as fact. As
such, exemplification is oftentimes a strong means to improve the content and backup any given
critique. Such is the case in Northernlion’s piece on Volume, where throughout the video he
shows what he is talking about, such as gameplay elements: “now we have a tool called the
oddity, which I can aim with the right analog stick here” and “notice that when we walk on these
things that create that radius of sound around us the enemies don’t get alerted to it” (Letourneau,
2015). He does the same for issues that he has with the game, as he performs a certain action in
the game and then states: “it highlights a little bit of what I would describe as an AI deficiency”
(Letourneau, 2015).

However, as in the case of an eyewitness, there is still a process of selection happening.
The YouTuber still chooses what the audience sees, and can thus influence opinions. At the same
time, due to the chosen format by TotalBiscuit and Northernlion, once the video starts this power
is limited since, while they might have selected the level of the game to be shown, everything
that happens inside that level will be captured on video, regardless of intent. This does not
change the fact that the YouTubers selected that specific level, however, and a certain amount of influencing is definitely present.

Where the YouTubers have the ability to show, rather than tell, the ‘traditional’ outlets do not have this option in their typically written review. Because of this when they wish to explain something they require different methods. Where the YouTubers show, they tell. Take for example the review of Alienation by Game Informer. One of the complaints the reviewer had was with the consumption of ammunition in the game: “I was repeatedly frustrated by Alienation’s insistence on such a harsh ammo economy. Even when playing conservatively, I often ran out of bullets for all my weapons, and was forced to flee” (Miller, 2016, para. 5). He cannot show the reader that the ammo economy in the game is poor, instead having to tell them so, a method working towards a similar goal as the YouTubers’ ability to show is.

A commonly used technique to explain an aspect of a game to the reader and audience is comparing the aspect to something the reader probably has experience with in one way or another. The use of comparisons is an essential part of the makeup of the reviews by Game Informer and IGN. In the case of the previously mentioned Uncharted review by Game Informer for example they made comparisons to The Last of Us: “it’s a hell of a story that shifts between Uncharted’s patented ‘everything is suddenly exploding and everyone is yelling’ design to the slow and heavy emotional tone of The Last of Us. There’s clear inspiration from The Last of Us in Uncharted 4, and it’s a better game because of it” (Reiner, 2016, para. 5). Given that The Last of Us was a highly popular and well-selling game, making a comparison to it therefore allows for the audience to understand what the reviewers means better, due to a similar experience that they might have gotten elsewhere.

The comparisons can also be a lot more specific, in order to get a detailed understanding of a single occurrence, such as in the case of IGN’s review of Hyper Light Drifter: “similarly, you can upgrade your sword to reflect incoming projectiles back at attackers, perform a dash-lunge, or hold your slash for a powerful, charged AOE swipe in the style of The Legend of Zelda: A Link To the Past” (Tyrrel, 2016, para. 3). By explaining a game and its parts on both a macro and micro scale to other games and their aspects, reviewers are appealing to their
audience’s knowledge base, in an attempt to transfer information in a more understandable manner.

3.2.3 Referencing Experience

Possibly the single largest reason for a person to be considered an authority in a field is due to the large amount of experience they have. In the videos from TotalBiscuit and Northernlion, this experience is brought forward in several ways that can be synthesized to the single overarching method of achieving authority through experience and showcasing that experience. One of these ways is implicit in what is usually the first thing that is said about the game: the classification. In every video, the introduction is followed by a classification of the game into genres and gameplay mechanics. By doing this in a way that is not just repeating what the game says on the box, the author shows not only enough experience with the game to know what it is like, but also larger overarching experience with other games to be able to classify it with others. For example, in *WTF Is... Sublevel Zero*, right after asking the introduction question he answers it by stating: “it is a rogue-lite six degrees of freedom shooter” (Bain, 2015). He then goes on to explain what that means and gives examples of other games that occupy that genre.

By giving examples of other similar games the YouTubers imply more experience. Making comparisons and putting things into context is a means oftentimes used by the author, which has as an effect that people are reminded of his experience in the field. For example, in the critique of *Transformers: Devastation*: “if you played Bayonetta you might be immediately familiar with what just happened… The kind of has a Witch time system, they call it focus here” (Bain, 2015). This happens several times in every video. By comparing games to one another on such a scale there is no doubt about the YouTuber’s experience in the field, granting him an authority to speak on such a topic. Finally, there is the authority implied by having experience with the game at hand. This goes hand in hand with the authority through proof of concept, previously mentioned as exemplification. By showcasing a large amount of experience with the game, the reviewer makes it more likely that the viewer will believe him. After all, the reviewer had a substantial amount of time with the product, and proves it by going through all the aspects
that matter. This is illustrated in Northernlion’s video on the game *Rocket League*. During the review, there is a claim to authority based on playtime, as he states: “I have 23 goddamn hours in Rocket League …. That’s like 4,5 hours a day” (Letourneau, 2015). The amount of time spent on the game grants Northernlion a certain amount of authority, as that is likely more than any of the audience has spent on the game and as such, he is more likely to be knowledgeable about any of the aspects of the game.

The experience with previous games allows for setting up context, which allows readers a better understanding of the game and its aspects. However, the experience the reviewer has with the game at hand makes him uniquely qualified to inform others of it, granting him a significant amount of authority. For instance, in the case of Game Informer’s review of *Alienation*, in which the reviewer sets out his understanding of the classes of the game: “the bio-specialist’s healing, tank’s squad shield, and saboteur’s stealth each have a place in the fight, and a well-balanced team goes a long way to ensuring survival, even as additional passive and active actions unlock all the time” (Miller, 2016, para. 2). But the knowledge of the reviewer can also be based on games outside of the one that is being reviewed. Such is the case in the IGN review of *The Banner Saga 2*, in which authority is built upon experience with the prequel: “it avoids its predecessor’s slump into monotony by introducing new units for both friendlies and baddies” (Johnson, 2016, para. 8). By establishing his experiences with a game and his knowledge on the whole, the reviewer becomes the authority on the matter. As such, just like with the YouTubers, the establishing of experience with a game is a method of establishing authority, which justifies the reviews’ existence and verdict, in which the reference to oneself as an authority through the use of experience is what grants the reviewer the authority to speak and judge.

The construction of authority through experience is also sometimes done through the use of jargon. When the reviewer uses terms that are specific to a niche, genre or situation, it establishes their knowledge and experience. Such is the case with the IGN review of *Pokkén Tournament*, in which the reviewer starts listing terms that are only meaningful to those with experience with the genre: “a narrated guide instructs new arrivals on Phase Shifts, Synergy Gauge, Support Gauge, Wall Combos, Wall Burst, Cancels, and Guard Breaks” (Huskey, 2016, para. 5). By using these terms it is implied to the reader that the reviewer is the right person to
review and have his opinion be believed as fact, because he has the required experience as is evidenced by his vocabulary. The use of jargon can also imply a certain fandom in the reviewer. However, outside the occasional mentioning of a particular enjoyment of a genre or game, this is mostly avoided as it can also detract from the reviewers authority, as a fan is less likely to give a game it’s fair amount of criticism.

Beyond this, the experience the reviewer has with the game does not only allow him to show this by explaining certain complicated aspects, it also allows him to give a balanced verdict of the game. The reviewer has plenty of experience with the game and seems to understand it quite well, after all. This is all pushed aside, however, in the ultimate appeal to one’s own authority, creating a situation in which the reviewer calls for his audience’s trust in him based on himself and no other reason. In TotalBiscuit’s piece on *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* he makes the most blatant reference to his experience and uses this to push his opinion: “if I have build up even an ounce of credibility with you over the past three years of doing this, then you will listen to what I have to say on this” (Bain, 2013). This kind of extreme reference to one's own experience without connecting it to verifiable aspects is highly uncommon, but it does show how each outlet tries to build its own authority for the audience to believe them.

### 3.3 Computer Game Analysis Versus the Review

Comparing the YouTubers and the legacy outlets clarifies several matters: the newer generation is going back to the roots of game criticism, resembling objectivity and adopting patterns such as the ones Konzack set out. This is in stark contrast to what the legacy outlets have built up as reviews which follow the path of Keogh, who states that games shouldn’t be held to a normative standard, but should be critiqued in their own light. The argumentative style from Game Informer and the selective approach from IGN follow more closely to this logic. It has also adopted a far more personal style of game critiquing, in which persona’s are created which use aspects such as humor to strengthen their position. Finally, the biggest change is the one that moves game critiquing journalism from telling to showing, as the YouTubers have the ability show everything they are referring to, rather than having to explain it with many more words.
It is possible that reviewers are no longer trying to influence your opinion to match with theirs and that the methods of authority used are not meant to convince you that they are right, but rather are meant to give you as much information as possible. This is partially the reason why Northernlion and TotalBiscuit do not identify themselves as reviewers, but as critics who showcase the game, give their opinion, but ultimately allow the viewer to make up their own mind, hopefully with enough information to do so thanks to their videos. However, if people do not believe what is being said in their videos, the content holds no value, and as such the reviewers must still appeal to their authority to speak. If what they say seems reasonable, then the audience will continue using them as a source because of the methods of authority which are being employed, and the seemingly open way in which information is given. By being complete, they succeed in both giving as much information as possible as well as positioning themselves as a fair reviewer. By referring to their experience with a game they turn themselves into an authority on the subject which can be believed due to their larger knowledge base. A large part of why any reviewer is believed is based on the fact that they have experience with a game while no-one else has. They have the ability to know things that no-one else can. How likely one review is to be believed over the other, however, comes back to the methods of authority used. If one review is clearly more objective, more complete, and showcases more experience and other methods of authority, then it will do a far better job at influencing or informing the reader than one that does not do these things.

The YouTubers occupy the same space as the traditional reviewers, yet distance themselves from it, not trying to adhere to the traditional means of lifestyle journalism. In doing so, however, they do a better job of adhering to the mindset of regular traditional journalism, where striving for objectivity has been the norm for ages and where informing the public has been the task. Because of this difference, the newcomers use different methods, making their content look different from the traditional review. The new video content takes a strong show, don't tell-approach, and leaves far more space for elements such as humor. Because of their reliance on showcasing elements, the style has drastically changed as well, from argumentative to informative. Comparison and description oftentimes have made place for examples, creating a situation in which, somehow, those who distance themselves from game journalism are more in
line with the traditional values of news journalism than those who consider themselves traditional game journalists.

At the same time, both parties do have their similarities. Both have a heavy reliance on their authority based on their experience, not only with the game, but in the games industry in general. On top of this both sides have embraced subjectivity as a necessary component for reviews, although how they implement this does not only differ between the old and the new, but also amongst themselves. In the end, the results of this research show that game journalism is going through a change, a change made possible by the advent of media such as YouTube, but also by a new public sphere which demanded more openness.

These changes are not necessarily limited to game journalism. It is very well possible that several other subcategories of lifestyle journalism are going through a similar change, especially those who also rely heavily on reviews, such as film journalism, for example. Because of this possibly more widespread change in dynamics, it is important to see the results of this research for what it is: an example of how the new situation, both technologically and socially, has allowed for the advent of a new way of doing reviewing journalism, even when some of the parties distance themselves from that category, as by doing so they offer an alternative to it, and end up occupying the same space. Some of the legacy game journalism outlets such as IGN seem to have acknowledged some of the changes and have implemented things such as exemplary video content, showing that even those settled in the old system recognize that changes are occurring, and that to stay relevant they have to keep up. Therefore, the face of game journalism is not only changing because of the content of the new players, but also thanks to their influence on the legacy players.
Conclusion

This thesis set out to uncover how reviewing practices differ between old and new, and how this reflects on the changing dynamics of the game journalism and lifestyle journalism landscape. Through the theories of fields by Bourdieu and the concept of occupational ideology, a lot of the reasons of how and why new players joined the field of games journalism came to light. At the same time concepts of journalistic authority showed how all the players established a certain trust within their audience. This is then furthered by the notions of games journalists as cultural intermediaries, while at the same time their decisions are also economically motivated.

Based on the results, it is fair to say that the face of game journalism is changing to adopt a style that is more show and less tell, as has been made clear based on the findings previously discussed. The old and new players differ in critical areas, yet are not without similarities. The face of the field, therefore, is changing and becoming multifaceted, a face for each persona, but at the same time each face seems to be keeping some of the overarching recognizable key features. The research conducted in this thesis shows that it can be concluded that within the game journalism genre of lifestyle journalism there is a shift in the occupational ideology. The new players consider themselves to have a different job description than the ‘traditional’ outlets, while at the same time competing with those same outlets for an audience. The YouTubers have an approach in which showing takes over from telling, and although there is still a fair amount of judgment present in each critique, the degree of said judgment is less of a selling point than it is for the traditional reviewers. At the same time, however, both parties are in the same field of journalism, and as such still use similar tactics. This is most prominently the case with how they establish and reference their own experience.

These considerable differences can help understand the drift between the traditional lifestyle journalism outlets and new players in more fields than just games journalism. The rise of YouTube, and concepts such as the blogosphere have allowed for individuals to start creating and publishing their own content, which has been happening to considerable extents in fields such as fashion journalism. As such, this thesis touches upon the broader questions that surround the new versus the old players in lifestyle journalism. It touches upon the reasons for new players
to enter the field, but also on why traditional outlets are seemingly unwilling to change their models. It sheds light on the idea that several players in the same field might hold completely different ideas of what their job is, yet their results are remarkably similar. And then there is the question of why this phenomenon seems to be much more common in lifestyle journalism. It is reasonable to assume that ‘hard’ news still has an air of professionalism surrounding it to an extent that lifestyle journalism does not, making it a far easier field to introduce oneself in. On the other hand, however, journalism has always struggled with its identity as a profession, and is often considered a field anyone can enter. As such the sense of professionalism does not tell the whole story.

Within this larger structure, this thesis has shown how within games journalism at least, the concepts of fields and ideology heavily influence the creation of content, as well as how journalistic authority is a key part of game reviews. This fills a gap in the overarching field of lifestyle journalism, by adding to the understanding of why the field of game journalism is changing, and how this is done through the dichotomy of the old versus the new players in that field. It adds to the understanding of why and how new players can enter a field that was previously considered to be a closed one, one that always had to balance itself between the industry and the audience. At the same time, it also creates a ground for similar studies to be conducted in other subgenres of lifestyle journalism, as the concepts analyzed in this research certainly do not only apply to games journalism.

Future research in the field can help understand the shifting approaches in lifestyle journalism and gaming journalism by researching the same issue through different means. This can be done by selecting different players, and a different sample size, but also through the use of different research techniques. For example, if a scholar is in the position that he can get access to all players being researched, an interview regarding the topic would greatly enhance the understanding of why the field is changing. Similarly, it would be constructive to the field to do an audience study and uncover who the audience is more likely to trust and why. Doing so would help establish if and why there might be a shift in the genre taking place.

Another approach future research can take is to widen the research to include other categories of lifestyle journalism, in order to find the extent to which a similar trend might be
occurring in those fields. After all, the research conducted here does raise the question of not only why there is a shift in the genre, but also how far this wave of change carries. Journalism is changing on all levels. This is facilitated by technology, but enforced by the audience. To stay with the times and maintain an audience, outlets have to adapt both in medium and style. In the case of Northernlion and TotalBiscuit compared to IGN and Game Informer, there is a clear shift towards a more descriptive and less argumentative style. Perhaps this change is a symptom of a larger shift in the overarching field of lifestyle journalism. To uncover this, more research needs to be done, both within and outside of the field of game journalism.
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