“They’re coming for our games”
– A study of far-right social mobilization in the gaming community

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to study and understand the development within the gaming community in the latter half of 2014, where a harassment campaign against the female developer Zoe Quinn led to an industry-spanning controversy that divided large sections of the gaming community, and how this fed into a far-right radicalization of certain groups of young male gamers. This thesis focuses on the idea that the controversy in question helped mobilize these games into an online social movement that aimed to “take back our games” from the perceived outside threats of feminism and political correctness, and how they through that process became an easy target for assimilation within large far-right and white supremacist movements.

To prove this, data have been collected from two points: from the comment section on YouTube of the pre-controversy 2013 trailer of the video game Wolfenstein: The New Order, and from the YouTube comment section of the post-controversy 2017 trailer of the sequel, Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus. These points have been chosen to interpret the difference in reaction between the two games, and whether or not the controversy had a mobilization and radicalizing influence.

To study social movements, Sidney G. Tarrow’s definition of what a social movement is and contentious collective action will be the main theoretical thread of the thesis, but it will be supplemented with theories from W. Lance Bennet and Alexandra Segerberg’s study of online collective action, Cass R. Sunstein’s work on in-group radicalization, along with further theories.
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1. Introduction
In recent years, the importance of the internet has gotten more pronounced in our political systems. The internet’s role as an organizational platform and tool for activism has been highlighted in events such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street protests, but the internet has also been utilized as a platform for refining a political agenda, as well as dividing and creating filter bubbles (Margretts et, al. 2016).¹

One early actor who realized this potential for political activism and social activism was Steve Bannon, the man who would later become the executive chair of Breitbart News LLC and Chief Strategist to Donald Trump’s White House, who in 2005 lived and worked in Hong Kong for the company Affinity Media. The company worked with virtual currency in MMORPGs: massively multiplayer online role-playing games, primarily the online game World of Warcraft. MMORPGs like World of Warcraft are video games set in a virtual world, where players can interact and trade in a shared online community, and Affinity Media worked with selling virtual items in the game in exchange for real world money, a practice referred to as ‘real-money trading’. This practice, however, was deeply unpopular among the players. The Chinese players who were tasked with the monotonous task of gathering the virtual currency for Affinity Media to resell were met with racially charged vitriol from the American players, who believed the presence of the Chinese workers was impairing the collective enjoyment of the game among American players (Green, 2017, p. 81-82).

Steve Bannon was not unaware to this negative reaction to the company’s business practice. In fact, the existence of these thousands of intense young men, who were highly resourceful, motivated when dealing with issues that mattered to them as well as highly present online, captivated Bannon.

“These guys, these rootless white males” Bannon said in an interview to Joshua Green, author of the book Devil’s Bargain, referring to the gamers he had encountered. “had monster power.” (Boburg and Rauhala, 2017)²

¹ A filter bubble, or an echo chamber, is a space where an individual only seeks to hear from other likeminded individuals and exclude outside opinions and facts; (cf. Pariser, 2011).
Years later, Bannon capitalized on these insights on the site Bannon joined after leaving Affinity Media: Breitbart News, which Bannon described as the “platform for the alt-right” (Posner, 2016)³. When the gaming community in 2014 was dragged into scandal with the *Gamergate controversy*⁴, Breitbart delivered on Bannon’s belief, and provided a platform for the disgruntled gamers, to help them mobilize in the social and political movement that took place with this scandal (Lees, 2016)⁵. But how did these gamers mobilize, what was the situation and how did it affect the young gamers as well as the far/alt-right movement going forward?

1.1 Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to examine the dynamic that created a social movement from within certain sections of the traditional gamer community towards a radicalized right-wing organisation, particularly within the alt-right movement. *How did the gaming platform become politicized through the Gamergate controversy, and why did certain gamers join a social movement within the alt-right?*

To do this, the study will focus on the case of Gamergate as a turning point, and how the scandal politically activated sections of the gaming community. This change will be proven with illustrations from the backlash around major game releases such as *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*, and the radicalization within the gaming community will be put in context with other far right movements and social movement mobilization.

The focus will ultimately be on the political development into expressions of extremism caused by Gamergate, and how the parts of the gaming community shifted to the far right, and the consequences thereof.

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⁴ Gamergate was a controversy in 2014 concerning issues of sexism and feminism in videogames, which mostly took form in the shape of harassment campaigns against women in the gaming industry; this will be further elaborated upon in chapter 4.1.

⁵ [https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump)
2. Theory and earlier research
The following study will be influenced by elements of the work on social movements done by Sidney G. Tarrow, a well-esteemed professor within the subject whose 1994 book *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* have helped define the study of social movements. While the study will take inspiration from Tarrow’s work on the mobilization of social movements, it will be supplemented by W. Lance Bennett’s and Alexandra Segerberg’s 2013 work on the role of digital media and the personalization of politics. By using this literature, I want to identify analytical concepts that will be used for my model of social movements, which will be presented later in the essay.

2.1 What is a social movement?
A social movement is a *group action*, performed by an organization or other forms of social groupings consisting of multiple weaker actors campaigning together in action-oriented networks (Tarrow, 2011, p. 17). Social movements have taken many different forms through human history and continue to change shape to fit the needs of the modern moment. While the complexity of the field makes it difficult to single out an undisputed approach, the earlier mentioned Sidney G. Tarrow is famous for his work on social movements. Tarrow means that the base of social movements are *contentious collective actions*; actions undertaken by groups who lack regular access to representative institutions and as a result act in new, unaccepted or fundamentally challenging ways towards the authorities or the status quo to get their will across (Tarrow, 2011, p. 7). The motivation is the *contention*; be it grievances or the feeling of being under threat or a protest against elites, the motivation for a contentsions collective action is the presence of an antagonist the movement can campaign and make action against. For Karl Marx and the communist, the antagonist is the capitalist state, and for Emile Durkheim, it’s the mass society (Tarrow, 2011, p. 22). Regardless of what form the social movement takes, a goal or antagonist is necessary (Tarrow, 2011, p. 31).

However, if the participants feel that they can’t overcome their perceived antagonist, the social movement will not take form. This means that a *political opportunity* is necessary for a social movements’ development. The participants need to feel like the benefits of participating in a social movement outweigh the potential risks involved, either out of a sense
of duty or a calculation of risk versus reward. This can take the form of either opportunity, when the participants sense a moment of weakness in their chosen foe, alternatively when they feel they are under threat, and the social movement becomes their only tool for survival (Tarrow, 2011, p. 160).

Another method of creating a social movement is the making of meaning: in the book *Power in Movement*, Tarrow raises the example of how Hindu nationalists in India motivated a social movement through symbolically laden messages to gain support from followers, attract fence sitters and mark themselves off from the opponents. This making of meaning creates a group identity, frames the conflict by creating an antagonist, and can in turn mobilize a group to form a social movement (Tarrow, 2011, p. 142).

However, most of Tarrow’s theory on social movement is bound to the geographical place and the time, and he argues that social movements on the internet can’t substitute the value of ‘interpersonal trust that comes from personal ties’ (Tarrow, 2011, p. 263). But is this truly the case? To expand on the topic of social movements on the internet, one may instead need to turn to more contemporary research, which I will study in more depth in 2.6 Social Movement on the internet: Online social movements.

### 2.2 Mobilization

For a social movement, *mobilization* is crucial. Without mobilization, you don’t have a social movement out of the simple reason that movement can’t spring out of nowhere; some degree of mobilization is always required. Tarrow argues that four main points result in mobilization:

* The challengers interpret what is happening and frame the field of contention.

* There is a weighing of opportunity and risk; does the potential gains outweigh the risk of reprisal, or is the level of threat so high that the challengers have no choice but to act?

* Both challengers and the challenged utilize the tools at their disposal to maximize gain and minimize risk.

* Challengers engage in collective actions to attract supporters and grow their ranks, and move to impress or threaten the challenged, while the latter organize to oppose or appease the challengers (Tarrow, 2011, p. 188-189).
Through these four steps, groups are mobilized to become a social movement. While Tarrow refers to social movements that share a geographic location and proximity with these steps, they can easily be applied to large international structures as well as online structures.

Another important step necessary for mobilization is the political opportunity; an opening within the political landscape in which the mobilized group can challenge the political system and social control in place. As the early challengers within a social system reveals the systems weaknesses and strength, even formerly timid actors are invited to align themselves with one side or the other (Tarrow, 2011, p. 189). Through that processes, the actors are mobilized and driven to participate within the social system.

2.3 Radicalization

Most social movements consist of multiple different groupings, and between these different groups, competition may arise. The competition between these groups may arise out of ideological conflicts, a struggle for space or personal conflicts between organisation leaders. What often then occurs within the competing groups is radicalization. Tarrow describes said phenomenon as “a shift in ideological commitments toward the extremes and/or adoption of more disruptive and violent forms of contention” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 207).

Beyond competition alone, repression and frustration are two common reasons for radicalization, due to their tendency to push actors into more extreme behaviour (Tarrow, 2011, p. 207).

Tarrow’s focus is however mostly, as earlier mentioned, on social movements bound to a time and place, rather than the more open virtual environment that online social movements exist in. This means that while the causes Tarrow offers for the radicalization process certainly exist within the virtual world (groups can rival for space online just as well as they can offline, which spurs the radicalization process), one might need to look elsewhere for a further elaboration on how online radicalization would look.

This is something that American legal professor Cass R. Sunstein goes into in the 2009 book *Going to Extremes – How like minds unite and divide*. In the book, Sunstein elaborates further
on how individuals divide themselves into groups that reinforce their existing opinion. Dubbed the *echo chamber*, these are communities that just turn inward and start living in their own world where they continuously reinforce the shared viewpoints (Sunstein, 2009, p. 119). Online, individuals seek and select the group they are most compatible with, and the interaction among like-minded people produces polarization against a shared perceived foe (Sunstein, 2009, p. 120).

Through the internet, these fringe groups can interact and continuously reinforce one another’s opinion, without any need for second guessing. Through this process, another form of radicalization, more attuned to the virtual world, may take place.

2.3.1 Divergence
An important aspect that follows in the wake of increased radicalization is divergence, or what Sunstein calls biased assimilation (Sunstein, 2009, p. 50). What this means is that groups, rather than going together and converging, or “meeting in the middle”, groups that are presented with balanced, substantive reading on a topic they feel passionate about will discount the uncongenial points and embrace the congenial ones, meaning that even if both sides of an argument are presented with the same facts, the respective groups will still use said information to further their belief and strengthen the respective echo chambers (Sunstein, 2009).

This, combined with the filter bubbles, mean that it’s very hard to change a person opinion. Instead, individuals in a group tend to rely solely on the groups’ interpretation of facts and dismiss opposing views as propaganda from the opposing side (Sunstein, 2009, p. 51).

2.4 Campaign
When a social movement carries out a sustained, public effort towards a targeted authority or injustice, they are driving a campaign. There are many ways to drive a campaign, be it through lobbying, public performances or media, but what defines most campaigns is that they consist of a group of people who claim to represent a particular constituency, and target an authority (usually the government, but not necessarily: property holders, bankers and more have been repeatedly targeted with campaigns) that directly affect the wellbeing of the
Campaigns often grow out of single protest events and take form around the initial conflict from said events. With that event creating the outline for the conflict, multiple weaker actors band together to take more direct action against stronger actors, who the weaker actor perceive to be a threat towards the groups welfare (Tarrow, 2011, p. 191).

Street protests are a common tool for campaigns based in the real world, they are less effective for online groups. While they can happen: either through online organization, where a group is united through an online platform to agree to march together in real life, like in the Unite the Right Rally that took place in Charlottesville in 2017 (Philips, 2017), they can also be carried out solely online, like the Gamergate movement. This online social movement was carried out through attacks on online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and more, through death threats and hacking attacks (Dewey, 2014). Rather than one specific campaign, it was instead a continuous action stretched out over a longer period of time, where individual users campaigned together, albeit individually yet afar. This is a type of campaign only possible through what W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg call the *technological openness* (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013 p. 37), but these points will be further emphasized in the section below.

2.5 Social movements on the internet: online social movements

*The Logic of Collective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, the 2013 book written by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, could be seen as a continuation of Tarrow’s studies of contentious collective actions and social movements. Bennett and Segerberg primarily focuses on the usage of digital media, and their role in modern politics. In the book, Bennett and Segerberg argues that one of the reasons for online social movements growing importance is not just the increasingly omnipresent internet, but also the modern society’s increased individualization; rather than engaging in a collective, a growing number of people instead desire a personal path to engagement, with more self-
expressive and self-satisfying means (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 23).

However, personalized politics doesn’t necessarily mean it’s disorganized or ineffective. In fact, the individuals can communally develop political identifications over a shared issue like the environment, women’s equality and so on and then carry out those politics on an individual basis (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 24).

Being able to conduct a political movement or a protest campaign solely through online means opens up the movement to scaling up in size more quickly, while simultaneously offering unusual flexibility in tracking moving political targets and bridging different issues like economy, environment, geographical location, giving the participants an unprecedented flexibility (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 25). This puts the onus on the individual to act, and it’s why online social movements often have an inclusive nature with easily personalized attributes: like Put People First in the 2009 London protests, or We Are The 99% in the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

Online social movements similarly possess a technological openness for the individual to take greater place and feel like they participate as an individual. People post and spread the social movements message through their personal account, and with a personal touch to their contributions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 37). Simultaneously, these individual posts make up a large network of similar sentiment, creating a social movement where the individual plays a unique participatory role.

2.5.1 Why gaming?
One question one would need to answer is why is gaming relevant in the study of online social movements? Though gaming have been involved in controversy before, often relating to the effect of violent video games, it has rarely if ever been taken seriously as a political vehicle. Despite that, gaming is a rapidly growing industry that more and more people participate in (Ingraham, 2017)8.

Gaming also has a social aspect not found in other media; through the internet, people may play and interact with one another at the same time. The players are not only interacting with the game, but also with other players playing the same game: game systems can therefore allow human-to-human interactivity comparable to that of the real world (Castronova, 2007, p. 35). And as more people become involved with gaming and with virtual worlds and communities, it will affect the real world in turn. The socialization and the connectivity that gaming offers allows for plenty of opportunity for interest groups to work together for the purpose of mobilization.

2.6 Summary and analytical model

There are many different forms of social movement, but as displayed above, they all share overlapping characteristics. It’s these characteristics that Tarrow summed up with his theory of contentious collective action, and Bennett and Segerberg continued to elaborate on with their book *The Logic of Connective Action*. While certain aspects of social movements differ depending on if they take place offline or online, it’s clear that the two forms have more in common than they differ, and that online social movements are a powerful, relatively recent new form of movement that’s worthy of study.

Within the scope of this particular study of social movements, three of Tarrow’s terms on the subject of mobilization will be emphasized and analysed in even greater detail in the empirical analysis. Those terms are:

**Threat**

When the challengers define the field of contention in the mobilization process, they do so in response to a threat. The threat might be a political decision or a perceived threat through cultural developments, but regardless it’s something that the group will need to mobilize to counter. In the past, the threat tended to be simple, such as lack of food, but in today’s society, threats are often more complex. The threat is created through interpretation and the making of meaning; through a shared threat, the group reinforces their identity through emphasizing what they stand against (Tarrow, 2011, p. 189).
In a way, the threat creates the *political opportunity* that becomes its counter. When the group feels pressured and threatened, they have an opportunity to mobilize in result.

One thing that is important to note is that Tarrow talks about different kinds of threat in his book. One is the threat listed above, where a group feels pressure by an outside influence, and another is a risk-weighing process of benefits and risks of protesting. In this study, I will focus solely on the former, with threat defined as an outside force threatening the group and pressuring them to action (Tarrow, 2011, p. 33).

**Antagonist**

While the threat spurs the social movement into mobilization, the antagonist is the actor responsible for said threat taking place. The antagonist usually takes the role of the authorities or the government and become something for the social movement to focus their attention on. The antagonist usually takes the shape of elites, or more powerful actors that the weaker actors need to band together as a social movement to counter.

Simply put, the antagonist is the foe that the social movement rallies against. In the Occupy Wall Street movement, the threat came from income inequality, while the antagonist was the ‘1%’, the ones responsible for the situation. The social movement mobilizes, either to demand concessions from the foe, or to outright defeat them.

Like with threat, having an opponent is a crucial part of creating an identity and framing the conflict the social movement faces. But with the conflict framed, the social movement moves into campaigning.

**Campaign**

When the social movement have been framed and mobilized in opposition to a threat and an antagonist, the movement is driven to action. This may take the form of marches, lobbying to institutions, or political occupation or at the most extreme end violent protests. A campaign is when the social movement is driven to act or encourage others to act.

A campaign only takes place when a political opportunity is presented. Without an
opportunity, there is no need for the movement, and it will not take offer. After all, unless a
group feels actively threatened, they will not be motivated to act against it. But when the
space has been provided with a political opportunity, the campaign is the action driven or
encouraged by the social movement.

From these terms, the study will focus on a social movement formed within the far-right that
utilizes the gaming community as a platform, as well as the political opportunity that allowed
said far-right activists to spread their agenda within the gaming sphere. The comments will be
studied through a content analysis, and their role in a process of far-right radicalization and
divergence will be put in context.

From these theoretical points, I expect that after Gamergate, the image of the threat and
antagonists will have become far clearer after having been crystalized through the
controversy. In Gamergate, the social movement created a narrative of who the antagonist
was, and what threat said antagonist posed. Through the mobilization effect, the group will
also have become more tightly knit, and helped drive each other further into Sunstein’s theory
of divergence and biased assimilation, which will make campaigning a more natural action.
3. Method

3.1 Research design

When working in the social sciences, there’s often a philosophical divide between the ambition to understand or explain compared to the ambition to predict. While some studies try to combine the two, studies are often divided between the two (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 67). Similarly, a line is often drawn between a qualitative case study, which focus on a smaller amount of cases but in a more in-depth fashion, and quantitative case studies, which focuses on a larger amount of content but engage with the material on a more superficial level (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 196).

This particular study is a case study aiming to create understanding about a social movement and will combine both qualitative and quantitative aspects into what is called a mixed method, so that both qualitative interpretation and quantitative data-gathering can be combined (Biddix, 2009). Through the large amount of quantitative data, one will be able to create a representative view of the social movement in the focus of this study, while a subjective interpretation of deliberately chosen comments will be analysed in a qualitative method.

The data gathering occurs around two specific cases at two specific points to compare them, both against each other but also against the theory of social movement presented above, based on Tarrow’s model. The qualitative method will be reading to analyse the theoretical framework put in place to look for threat, antagonists and campaign in the available data.

3.2 Data gathering: time frame, sources and data points

When gathering data, it’s important to make a representative selection from the population at large; it is after all impossible to study the entire population, so a selection need to be made (Jorgensen and Philips, 2000, p. 52-53).

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9 https://researchrundowns.com/mixed/mixed-methods-research-designs/
Having chosen to use YouTube, data will be gathered by scraping\textsuperscript{10} all the YouTube comments from the reveal trailer from each of the two new Wolfenstein games in order to compare them against one another; and to compare why Wolfenstein II’s reveal received a far more intense reaction than its predecessor. However, due to the sheer amount of comments made for each video, this is where the combined qualitative and quantitative characteristics for a mixed method applies.

To limit the data, only the first month of each video will make up for the quantitative data, due to the fact that the first month would be the most intense, discussion-heavy one as viewer’s interest are at their highest before interest start to drop off. From that first month, a further selection will take place where a hundred comments are chosen from the middle of the first month, where a qualitative selection is made from a process where comments deemed \textit{political} are separated and organized depending on if they portrait a \textit{threat}, an \textit{antagonist}, if they call to action to \textit{campaign}, as well as a separate categorization if the comments are deemed “neutral” or “far-right”.

While the repetitive nature of YouTube comments make the selection feel representative regardless, since the nature of the comments are often very similar, the subjective choice of political posts as well as the categorization are more personal. However, following the chart below, it is an easily reproducible study that feels representative of the community as a whole.

The purpose of the study is to study the discourse in use between the releases of the two reveal trailers, to see what – if anything – has changed after the political mobilization during Gamergate, and if this study’s hypothesis that Gamergate was a turning point and mobilization factor for the online far-right is accurate or not.

3.3 Why Wolfenstein: The New Order and Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus?

A case is chosen depending on whether it is representative or an outlier, and in the case of Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus, the case is an \textit{outlier}. When Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus was first revealed, it was first met with backlash from certain sections of the gaming

\textsuperscript{10} Scraping, or ‘web scraping’, is the act of using a web software to download all content on a website as text. For this study, every single comment on the two trailers was scraped and saved as two text documents through the free program \textit{YouTube Comment Scraper}.
community over the trailer. This reaction made it an outlier, and therefore interesting to study.

Another way to consider it is, in the terms of “most likely” or “least likely” case study design, Wolfenstein II was most likely (Esaiasson et al, 2017, p. 131). While it was a sequel to a long-running series, it included elements that made it a lightning rod for the forces that targeted the groups activated during Gamergate: it heavily featured a black woman and it depicted white men as the enemies. Because it was most likely, that made it more likely that one would receive interesting results for the study; a “least likely” research might not have received any comments at all, and therefore been uninteresting to research.

Similarly, because a similar game was released only a few years prior; the game’s prequel, Wolfenstein: The New Order, there existed a data point to compare the game to. And because the games came out before and after Gamergate, that made them the perfect point to study whether or not Gamergate was a turning point for the gaming industry.

![Figure 1: A simplistic timeline for the research setting.](image)

This puts the respective data points; release of trailer 1, and release of trailer 2, on each side of the Gamergate controversy on the timeline. Because of that, it is a most likely case to depict the reaction one would wish to see.
3.4 Analysing the data: how and why?

The community in the focus of this study are spread over multiple websites and forums, so the first step would be to decide which platform to study them on. The website chosen is YouTube, due to its representative value. Other mainstream gaming websites, such as IGN or Kotaku, are websites the user deliberately chooses to participate on, meaning that one would only analyze IGN or Kotaku’s userbase if one were to go there. Similarly, if one were to study right-wing leaning websites like 4chan or Breitbart, one would only study right-wing posters.

YouTube, however, is a platform used by people from every leaning. It is not a choice the user can make, for if a gaming company releases a video, odds are high they will release it on YouTube, and that YouTube will be the platform that receives the most views. Because of that, a video and its comments on YouTube would be the most representative, since it reflect both sides of the cultural divergence, which makes them particularly relevant for a comparative study.

To study the comments, a content analysis have been used. A content analysis is a combination of a qualitative discourse analysis and a quantitative studio, with a focus on frequency and space: how often are key phrases mentioned, and how much space they take (Esaiasson et al, 2017, p. 198). Paired with this, an interpretative side have also been included from personal close reading, regarding whether or not the post is political or far-right.

From the earlier mentioned first month of comments, a hundred comments from each video have been chosen, for a total amount of two hundred comments to study in depth. Threat, antagonist and campaign will be studied according to the model based on Tarrow’s theories. How these comments have been identified will be listed in the section below.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Due the large amount of data and the length of the document (2000 pages total), it will not be included in the appendix. However, the entirety of the comment data can be provided upon request.
3.5 Definition and discussion of central concepts

To analyze the frequency of certain content, it’s important to have definitions in place to successfully identify the terms in order to conduct a content analysis. Through well-established definitions and operationalizations in place, the study’s reliability increases due to allowing others to be able to replicate and fact-check the study’s findings (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2015, p. 318). This is especially important in a study like this, where the categorization is up for interpretation.

In the study, these following terms and definitions are especially important:

**Social movement**

Based on Tarrow’s definition, a social movement is a collective action performed by a group of weaker actors with a shared objective in mind. Actions undertaken by the group are *contentious actions*; actors challenging a system that do not benefit them, either due to neglect or the below mentioned threat.

Historically, social movements have shared a geographic area, which allowed them to campaign together. There has been debate in the modern day if a social movement can truly exist as a primarily online entity, due to lack of cohesion, but for the purposes of this study, the mobilized gamers will be treated as if they were a social movement regardless of that debate.

**Threat**

In his study of social movements, Tarrow uses two difference definitions of threat. One kind of threat is the risk versus reward calculation every member of a social movement makes before deciding it is worth to join up in the movement or not (Tarrow, 2011, p. 189). The other manner of threat he describes is the outer threat, real or perceived, a group faces that forces them to mobilize (Tarrow, 2011, p. 33).

In this study, the threat will be interpreted as the latter category: an outside force that forces the group to mobilize to resist the threat it poses.
Antagonist
If the threat is the consequences and risks the group faces, then the antagonist is the one responsible. It can be a single entity or a group, and this antagonist is the one responsible for the threat being carried out towards the group. As a result, the categories “threat” and “antagonist” are often overlapping; the former is the risk the group faces, while the latter is the one responsible for said risk.

Campaign
When a social movement have been mobilized in the face of a threat and against an antagonist, they drive a campaign to combat the threat and antagonist. Historically, these have been street protests, sit-ins or lobbying action, but for online social movement, things are different.

Online, a campaign may take the place of petitions, hacktivism (attacking and shutting down websites, etc), or email/comment bombing, doxing (revealing personal identifiable information about an individual), along with other tools (Chadwick, p. 130). Ultimately, the more personalized environment of an online social movement makes campaigning a more individual action, where posts calling to action represents an attempt to drive a campaign.

Neutral
In the comment section, there are some political comments which are still neutral in nature. These are comments that refer to political subjects; political history, alternative history, or commenting on the political situation without taking either side (usually by criticising both sides).

These comments don’t have a political leaning, but since they are still political in nature, they have been included in the political chart to paint a fuller picture of the political spectrum in the comment section, unlike the gameplay-focused and spam posts, which have been removed from the data set.

Far-right
The focus on this study have been on the mobilization among gamers in far-right movements, and it’s therefore very important to specify what the far-right is. Far beyond the usual right is
the far-right, a subsection of people who participate in racially charged political conspiracies, extreme nationalism and authoritarianism, a belief in the “pure people” versus the corrupt and dirty outsiders.

A subsection within the far-right movement is the alt-right. This is a newer movement, heavily built and organized through internet communities such as 4chan and Breitbart. This movement is heavily tied together with internet culture, and communicates heavily through irony and comedic internet memes. This will later be exemplified in the study’s research chapter.
4. The setting

4.1 The Gamergate controversy

While the Gamergate controversy began in August 2014, the seeds of it dated back to years prior, to the feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian’s series titled *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. The videos were feminist critiques of video games that were uploaded to YouTube, criticizing certain video games for poor representation, a lack of female characters, sexist tropes and more. These videos then lead to a hostile response: Sarkeesian faced harsh harassment on the video and over social media, with her website and Wikipedia article repeatedly vandalized, thousands of rape and death threats being sent in, and campaigns to ruin her reputation and stop her from producing videos were organized (Sarkeesian, 2012)\(^\text{12}\). Online games where the goal was for the player to “Punch Anita” bloody and bruised were released, and photoshopped and drawn pornographic images of her being sexually assaulted were created (Nagle, 2017, p. 20). This enormous backlash to what was fairly basic feminist critique foreshadowed the latent “monster power” within sections of the gaming community, which would be further displayed a few years later, in the summer of 2014.

The year prior, independent video game developer Zoe Quinn had released the video game *Depression Quest* to mostly positive reviews. Swiftly after the scores game out, some gamers believed the game to have received undeservedly positive feedback, and a harassment campaign against Quinn started, much like it had done with Sarkeesian before. After her ex-boyfriend released a post alluding to that Quinn had cheated on him by having a relationship with a gaming journalist, and that was why the game had received positive attention, Quinn’s personal information was posted online and her e-mail and accounts were hacked, and death and rape threats soon followed (Eördögh, 2014)\(^\text{13}\).

The harassment continued, and soon spread to other feminist game developers and game critics such as Brianna Wu, Felicia Day and Jennifer Allaway, all who suffered intense hate campaigns, pornographic spam and online attacks (Nagle, 2017, p. 22). However, all the while a separate narrative was being presented; that Zoe Quinn had slept her way to a positive

\(^{12}\) https://feministfrequency.com/2012/06/07/harassment-misogyny-and-silencing-on-youtube/

reception, and that Gamergate actually was about ethics in video game journalism; that games deserved undeservedly high school for pandering to feminist or politically correct narratives, rather than for the gameplay itself. However, due to the sheer toxicity of the personal attacks relating to the Gamergate movement, the statement “It’s about ethics in video game journalism” swiftly became a joke, with a dedicated article on Know Your Meme, a site dedicated to chronicling online jokes (Know Your Meme, 2014).

While the controversy had started in the gaming sphere, it soon spread beyond it. With the constructed narrative that feminists, politically correct “SJWs”; Social Justice Warriors, a derogatory term created during the Gamergate controversy to refer to people are progressive, believe in feminism and possess other progressive values (Ohlheiser, 2015) and LBTQ+ individuals were taking over gaming from “real gamers”; mainly white, heterosexual young men, other groups soon saw an opportunity to join the discussion. Breitbart, the self-proclaimed platform of the alt-right, began to publish articles with titles like “Feminist bullies tearing the video game industry apart” (Yiannopoulos, 2014), as did the men’s right activism site Return of Kings (Chubbs, 2014). While mainstream gaming sites banned any discussion of Gamergate, these more extreme platforms became the new source of information and the forum for discussion for these now politically activated gamers. The question then becomes, how does this shift affect the gaming community and the political landscape within it?

4.2 The background of the Wolfenstein franchise

The Wolfenstein series is one of the oldest franchises in video game history, with the first game in the series, Castle Wolfenstein, having been released in 1981 for the Apple II. In the game, you played as a prisoner in the titular Nazi-occupied castle Wolfenstein during the Second World War, where the player had to steal the Nazi war plans and the escape the castle. The game was noticeable for being one of the very first stealth-games, which are games that focus on avoiding combat and sneaking around enemies rather than confronting them head on.

14 http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/actually-it-s-about-ethics
16 http://www.breitbart.com/london/2014/09/01/lying-greedy-promiscuous-feminist-bullies-are-tearing-the-video-game-industry-apart/
17 http://www.returnofkings.com/42109/how-zoe-quinn-screwed-her-way-through-the-video-game-industry
The game was positively received and the developers, Muse Software, released a sequel titled *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein* in 1984. However, it wasn’t until the release of the third game in the series, Wolfenstein 3D, developed by id Software, that the franchise reached a mass audience.

While the original Castle Wolfenstein had a simplistic presentation where the unnamed player character had to sneak through the castle, Wolfenstein 3D was in many ways its polar opposite. It was one of the first games ever released which took place in a three-dimensional space, unlike old games which had been confined to two dimensions, and within this three-dimensional space, the player took control of allied soldier William “B.J” Blazkowicz as he violently escapes from the castle by killing Nazi soldiers, zombies and ultimately “Mecha Hitler” – Adolf Hitler, wearing a robotic suit that he uses to fight the player (Schedeen, 2010).

While only superficially similar to its predecessor, Wolfenstein 3D became a hit, and it created the genre of the first-person shooter; a genre that remains one of the most popular to this date, with the massively popular Call of Duty regularly selling millions of copies of its new installments (Statista, 2018).

The Wolfenstein franchise would not enjoy the same success for long. While games such as Call of Duty flourished, the games in the Wolfenstein series released in the early 2000s failed to reach the critical acclaim of their predecessor, with the lackluster sales of *Wolfenstein (2009)* resulting in the major layoffs for the studio developing it. Following this, the long-running franchise was put on hiatus for four years, until the 2013 announcement of a reboot of the franchise, handled by the Swedish developer MachineGames.

This installment would take the franchise is a new direction yet again. While the first *Castle Wolfenstein* was a more down-to-earth escape from prison, and *Wolfenstein 3D* was a campy action game, MachineGames sought to combine these two aspects of the

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franchise into their own product. While the game still explores over-the-top premises like Nazi moon bases and giant Nazi robots, the subject is no longer treated with the levity that it was in prior installments. The game’s enemy was no longer a cartoonish Hitler in a robot suit armed with machine guns; instead, MachineGames sought to treat the subject matter more accurately.

In an interview with Eurogamer, the game’s Creative Director Jens Matthies spoke of their approach as follows:

"We feel this is the appropriate approach - and it also connects to what the Nazis are about, because while we have Nazi characters that are larger than life and grandiose, we didn't want to undermine the attitude of the ideology, if that makes sense. So it's really important for us to make those moments, to put the player in a position where you really understand what they're about. Even though it's painted on this larger-than-life canvas, it's emotionally truthful to the Nazi ideology, so that's how we approached it." (Robinson, 2014)

This decision to focus on the world and the politics of the franchise paid off. Wolfenstein: The New Order was positively received, particularly for its dystopian alternative reality setting where Nazi Germany won the Second World War. The game sold well enough to receive a direct sequel in 2017 named Wolfenstein: The New Colossus, which was set in Nazi-occupied United States. Both games leaned heavily in the political nature of their premises and didn’t hesitate to show the oppression and cruelty of the Nazi regime. With trailers filled with loaded imagery such as the Nazi flag hanging above the US Capitol Building or a Nazi moon landing, it’s little wonder that the trailers sparked lively debate in the comments sections.

4.3 Wolfenstein: The New Order Trailer and Reception

While the game had already been announced to be in production, the full reveal trailer to Wolfenstein: The New Order was unveiled during the Electronic Entertainment Expo (more commonly known as ‘E3’) on the 6th of June in 2013. Following the E3 presentation, the

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20 https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2014-04-30-wolfensteins-new-order-how-machinegames-are-reviving-a-classic
video was uploaded on YouTube later the same day. As the return of a famous franchise, the video was heavily commented on: at the time of writing, the video has 3 284 994 views and 10473 comments, with 5893 comments being made during the first month when the video was at its most relevant; see “Method” above.

The video mainly consists of protagonist William “B.J.” Blazkowicz narrating over footage of famous landmarks and historic moments playing out in the alternative reality where Nazi Germany won the Second World War; from a nuclear weapon being dropped on Manhattan to a Nazi version of the famous cover of the Beatles Abbey Road album, the video sets up the new world the game will take place in. Towards the end of the video, the video gives way to gameplay footage, where Blazkowicz is depicted as fighting the Nazi regime that took over the world in the games first-person shooter action gameplay before the video ultimately ends on a reveal of the game’s title and logo (Bethesda Softworks, 2013)21

4.4 Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus Trailer and Reception

Like The New Order, the trailer to the sequel Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus debuted during the E3 conference, on the 11th of June 2017. While the trailer to the first game was two minutes long, the success of the previous installment meant that the trailer to the sequel was four times that length. Clocking in at 8 minutes and 30 seconds, the trailer was a substantial part of the publisher Bethesda’s 39 minute conference, and being the final trailer shown, it headlined the whole event (Bethesda Softworks, 2017).22

As a result, the trailer received more views and comments. In the ten months since its release, it has been viewed 3 824 323 times, received 13258 comments in total, where 9181 were made during the first month, all of which are a comparable amount to what The New Order received in four years. With this greater interest in the game, the video received a far greater amount of “Likes” and “Dislikes” on Youtube’s Liking system: while The New Order have in time of writing received a total of 29000 likes and 917 dislikes, The New Colossus have 55000 likes and 5000 dislikes23, which is approximately double the amount of likes while

21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1vfqGfGTar4
22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhY8T9epbeo
23 YouTube statistics don’t show specific numbers above the thousands.
quintupling the amount of dislikes (Bethesda Softworks, 2017). 24

While the length differs, the structure of the videos are similar. Like the original trailer, The New Colossus’ trailer starts with live action footage to set up the world, though it in this case takes form of showing television shows in the fictional 1960s Nazi-ruled United States. Like in the last game, it then changes to gameplay, but unlike the last trailer, it takes it time to further show a scene from the game, as well as establish some of the characters B.J. Blazkowicz will encounter in the game. Among these characters are groups that the Nazi Regime would find undesirable; for example an outspoken communist as well as a black woman revolutionary leader. After introducing these characters, the trailer then segues to similar action gameplay footage as the last trailer, before cutting to the Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus logo.

With the new trailer, new aspects were announced to the Wolfenstein franchise. While black characters had existed in the earlier installment, they were both men, and weren’t featured in advertisement and only played minor roles. In Wolfenstein II, Grace Walker (the black female character in the trailer) took up a major role as a figure of authority and acted abrasively towards B.J Blazkowicz. The shift of setting to Nazi-occupied America also carried with it imagery that would resound strongly with Americans: white robed Ku Klux Klan members walking openly in the street, American citizens ruled over by German overseers, Americans cities with Nazi flags hanging over them.

While the trailers were superficially similar in many aspects, these differences in the sequel’s trailer along with changes to the political climate following the Gamergate controversy were enough to create a wide array of different reactions not seen from the reaction to the first trailer, which is what will be in the focus of the empirical research below.

24 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHht8480cEo
4.5 Summary

In this section, the stage of the study has been set: from the Gamergate controversy that served as the political opportunity and catalyst for a social mobilization to take place within the right-wing sides of the gamer community, as well as the two data points that will be analyzed, along with a description of the content of each point. The history of the franchise as a whole has also been presented, to put the backlash following the release of Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus in greater context.

From this, one can track how the Gamergate controversy, with its antagonist with the “SJWs”, feminists and more, helps define the backlash to the Wolfenstein II reveal trailer a few years after the fact. From studying Gamergate and the backlash to Wolfenstein II in tandem, one can see that the discourse have become more similar between the two, especially compared to the first data point from before Gamergate. These three points; the reveal trailer for Wolfenstein: The New Order, the Gamergate controversy and the reveal and backlash towards Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus are the main data points and the setting for this essay, with particular weight put on the importance of Gamergate.
5. Reactions and discussions relating to the Wolfenstein game reveals

5.1. Introduction

In the following analysis, I'll be presenting the data found from scraping the first month of the YouTube comments from the trailers of Wolfenstein: The New Order and Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus respectively, with a special emphasis put on 200 comments I deemed political.

To analyze these comments, I’ll use the analytical model presented in 2.7 and study what the commenters believe to be the threat, who they consider the antagonist and how they will act (campaign) against them, or if the comment is a neutral one without a political leaning. The comments have also been categorized as ‘Far-right’ if they fit the definition/operationalization from 3.4.

More importantly, the focus will be on how the perception among the Far-right commenters threat, antagonist and campaign shifted between the two data settings, as well as how the character of the posters themselves shifted. Through this presentation, I hope to successfully make the case that the Gamergate controversy politically activated and mobilized sections from the gaming community into a Far-right movement that aligns with the with the broader Alt-right movement.

5.2. Overview of comments

After the comments were collected and assigned whether they referred to a threat, an antagonist, a campaign or if they were neutral, the comments were categorized and organized into the chart on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Antagonist</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolfenstein:</td>
<td>51 (51%)</td>
<td>47 (47%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td>40 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfenstein II:</td>
<td>55 (55%)</td>
<td>69% (69%)</td>
<td>8 (8%)</td>
<td>13 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Colossus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summarization and Classification of comments to the Wolfenstein trailers. Please observe that the same comments might be included in multiple columns.

Within the categorization, certain comments were categorized as ‘Far-right’. In the trailer for The New Order, 40 comments were qualified as Far-right. In the trailer for The New Colossus, 64 comments were categorized as Far-right, which means there was a 24 point (60%) increase.

These are the results of the 200 comments analyzed, with 100 comments taken from each comment section. From this, one can immediately see a decrease of posts deemed politically neutral from The New Order’s 40% neutral post to The New Colossus, where only 13% are neutral. In The New Order, the comment section included many posters discussing the game’s alternative history setting or discussing the historical setting in general, often in an informal way due to commenting culture on YouTube. One representative example of an informal, albeit politically neutral statement, is example number 17) from The New Order comment data.

“Yea he stopped Stalin from invading Europe by invading Europe himself! You know how stupid that sounds? Even if Hitler’s real objective was to stop Stalin them he didn’t do very well because after World War II half of Europe belonged to the Soviets.”

17) bjehulk

The statement is considered neutral since it doesn’t hold a particular political leaning on the left/right scale beyond commenting on that Hitler’s actions were stupid. However, since they don’t comment on the game, nor is the comment spam, and it’s tied to the game’s political nature, it’s still considered a political comment.

Note that while the percentages are quite high, these are still small numbers, which makes a large percentage drop more easily accomplished.
This is the shape most neutral comments in the trailer of The New Order takes; historical/alternative history discussions. However, when one looks at the comments deemed neutral on the trailer of The New Colossus, one can immediately notice a trend, as exemplified with the following comment:

"Shooting Nazis to pieces in the 90's/2000's: Good old fun were all cool with, because there Nazis and we don't like them. Shooting Nazis to pieces today: is now suddenly Social Justice Jewish Socialist Anti-White Anti-Male Global Conspiracy Propaganda. The SJW bashing was fun at first, then it got kind old, now it got more annoying then the SJW's. Its come full circle." 41) zer0dog

While this commenter is neutral by the merits of criticizing both sides, one can still see that new aspects have appeared. There are still historical comments in the trailer to The New Colossus, but many of the now far smaller group of neutral commenters are instead engaging in the political debate and using the language of the political posters by discussing ‘social justice’, ‘anti-male’, etc.

At the same time as the number of neutral commenters have decreased, the political comments have increased, with a heavy lean towards the far-right side, and have jumped from 40 to 64 between the two videos. While the trailer for The New Order had a smaller amount of far-right comments, and they came mostly from a small, highly motivated and loud minority, like the poster “HelpSaveWhiteRace” who posted 16 of the 40 posts defined as Far-right in the first trailer, The New Colossus have more far-right comments and more unique posters, since there were now a far bigger, mobilized far-right structure in place to mobilize and facilitate a response.

But how has the view of the threat, the antagonist and the need to campaign changed from 2013 to 2017? In the following sections, I will go through each category one by one and detail the changes that have occurred.
5.3. Threat

Between The New Order and The New Colossus, the amount of comments referencing a threat have increased by four percentage points; a marginal improvement at best. However, the statistics become misleading due to the earlier mentioned highly motivated posters such as “HelpSaveWhiteRace” and “ilovevideos0864”, who together represent almost half the comments in the ‘Threat’ category. To help visualize this, one need only to look at the spread of unique posters.

The trailer to Wolfenstein: The New Order, have 51 comments that fall under the category “threat”, and 28 unique posters. For the trailer to The New Colossus, there are 55 comments referring to a threat, and 53 of them are unique posters. Repeat commentators mostly kept to replying to their own thread, while there are a constant supply of new people willing to participate in the main conversation, unlike the repeat commentators “HelpSaveWhiteRace” and “ilovevideos0864” who were highly motivated and started multiple threads to spread their message.

The content of the messages also differs between the two videos. In the trailer released in 2013, the narrative and discourse used by the far right posters is traditional Neo-Nazi, very much in line with the historical Nazi’s propaganda. Terms like “international Jewry”, “white/European genocide”, or Nazi code words such as “14/88”, referring to the far right Fourteen Words and the term Heil Hitler (Anti-Defamation League, 2018) are frequent.

A representative example of the far-right discourse on the trailer for The New Order would be the following:

“You mean you don't like international Jewry enslaving all mankind flooding every western civilization to genocide the entire European race while creating a racial Jewish ethnostate in Palestine?” 59) HelpSaveWhiteRace

Or:

“AeonBlackSun is totally right in the top comments. i was just about to post something very similar. the zionist jews make games like this to demonize the germans and specifically nazi ideology (which contrary to popular belief was not racist, it was anti-

26 https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/14-words
27 https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/88
communist and about cultural preservation) its the corporations run by bankers who don't want us to know our only escape route...which is National Socialism. don't believe any anti-nazi propaganda, they have sinister reasons for putting it out." 66) Adolf Hitler

These commenters don’t hide their Neo-Nazi ideology, even flaunting them with their chosen usernames (on YouTube, the user may call themselves whatever they wish). Meanwhile, their interest in the gaming community is very low; instead they engage in the traditional kind of Nazi ideology.

Compare this with the comments on the trailer of The New Colossus, and the differences are immediately noticeable. While there are still more traditional Nazi comments present, the focus of a large amount of comments are instead aimed on the threat posed by the “SJW”s;

“Nice to see they have totally destroyed the franchise. How'd you go from awesome shit like RTCW and ET to this tripe? Fucking pathetic story full of SJW shit. And still no MP? What the fuck. This game will be a flop.” 28 40) satchmodan

Or, referring to the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement, another poster posts:

"The trailer looks really good however my one fear is that this game will have a BLM overtone. Please Bethesda, do not give into the PC pressure! Wolfenstein is supposed to be the most offensive game out there! Don't let the PC Police curb your game making." 29 52) 556deltawolf

Beyond the presence of a black woman in the trailer, there are no hints of a feminist agenda nor the Black Lives Matter movement, but in the framed field of contention constructed with

28 RTCW and ET refer to ‘Return to Castle Wolfenstein’ and ‘Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory’, which are prior installments in the Wolfenstein franchise.
29 BLM is short for “Black Lives Matter”, the movement protesting police brutality against African-Americans in the United States, while PC stands for Political Correctness.
from the Gamergate movement, feminism and political correctness are the enemies of “gamers”, as displayed by the commenters to this video.

5.4. Antagonist

As the threat changes from perceived Jewish conspiracies threatening the entirety of western civilization, as it were in the comment section of Wolfenstein: The New Order, to an implied feminist agenda that threatened the video game industry, the antagonists changed as well. While plenty of far-right commenters still posted, the greater number of unique posters introduced and the changed political climate from between the two trailers. To demonstrate this, one need only to look at this following table of who the commentators interpret as their antagonist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazis</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJWs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Americans</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The five concepts with the largest difference between them. Please observe that the same comments might be included in multiple columns. This table is an excerpt: a full version will be available in the appendix.

This chart depicts the most common antagonists depicted in the 200 political comments. While some of the categories are summations (The category “Jews” consist of the phrase “Jew”, but also of “Zionism”, “International Jewry” and “Judaism”, while “Black Americans” consist of “Black”, “Black Lives Matter” or “BLM”, along with various racial slurs that refers to African Americans), the table itself is representative of which groups are perceived to be the biggest antagonist and threat in the current point of time.
In the trailer for The New Order, the most frequent antagonist to rally against are the Jews. Due to the highly active Neo-Nazi posters, they post frequently and spell out their conspiracy theories, like with the earlier listed “HelpSaveWhiteRace”, who mention ‘international jewry’ being responsible for the world’s ills, and many of the far-right posters share their sentiment.

Another thing that’s clear from reading their messages is that most of their enemies are different names for the same thing; Jews are responsible for communism, which is another major threat, and they are also responsible for multiculturalism due to their agenda, as explained by ilovevideos0864 when they reply to a poster about whether they are a Nazi.

“Why yes. If you hear the other side of the story, you may become one too. History books are written by the victors in any war. But there is another side! A non-evil one. Do you sympathize with the Jews who are deliberately causing Europe to rapidly become a Muslim continent instead of a European one, whilst carefully limiting ‘multiculturalism’ in Israel by imprisoning and sterilizing blacks, and forbidding Muslims to marry Jewesses? If not, then we have a lot in common.”

36) ilovevideos0864

Here, immigration and multiculturalism are all part of a Jewish ploy, and the large conspiracy is repeated in the comment section, frequently also blaming America’s situation and final inequality on Jews:

“Hitler reunified a Nation, rebuilt its communities, rearmed his people, deported and executed the filth of bankers and communists and doubled German birth rates. The success of Germany was so great that countries ASKED to be a part of the German Empire. Weimar Republican Germany was a haven of Jewish business and media moguls destroying Germany just like they are currently destroying Britain and America. Racist? Damn straight. Who else will fight for the interests of the European working class?” 64) Tikoftok

Conspiracy theories are frequent, and the antagonists blend together. Meanwhile, the opposition and non-far-right comments seem to be content mostly posting their opposition in simple ways, such as:

“Nazism will be not tolerated.” sexyme lorenz
It’s simple opposition, with a low bar of entry, considering that they don’t need to show the same form of motivation as the far-right commenters due to their opinions being more mainstream. As a result, the comments for The New Order can be summed up primarily as Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories versus opposition to the Nazi ideology.

It’s the second trailer, post-Gamergate, that’s more interesting. Here, not only the spread/plurality of Far-right posters have increased, but their language have changed. While more traditional neo-nazi posters still exist, those who post anti-Semitic conspiracy theories similar with what HelpSaveWhiteRace on the former video, most of the far-right posters have found new antagonists.

“To all SJW’s. People were not triggered about killing Nazis before you started to get triggered about "not enough womyn!" and "not enough people of colour!". You split people in groups. You are the one who started all this. The more I get shoved "strong colored womyn" down my throat the more I defend everyone else. Easy.” 93) Erik Kovár

Just as with threat, the antagonists are the politically progressive SJW, and way for the right-wing movement to counter them is to mobilize in the exact opposite direction. While it’s most likely unintentional, the user Erik Kovář simultaneously spells out the divergence process taking place; how the increasing presence of social justice drives him deeper into his own opinions.

Like with the Jewish example before, the far-right users have many names for the same foe: SJW, feminists, lefties: all who are overly politically correct non-gamers who pose a threat to gaming and the morality of society as a whole.

">Feminists call everyone who disagrees Nazis
> People who disagree literally become Nazis
This plan has backfired so tremendously. I'm not even mad, feminism can suck some NatSoc30 dick.” 54) Eldrich Blacklion

30 National Socialism
Often, the three groups are used interchangeably, as there is very little difference between them. Frequently, the suspected feminist agenda intersects with the Jewish conspiracy theories, portraying the Jews as the masterminds of the feminist agenda. Even Black Lives Matter (Shortened to BLM), a group that formed to protest against police brutality in America, are suspected of intervening with the gaming industry.

"The fuck you're talking about? BLM members killing white people is not "wolfenstein".. More leftist bullshit propaganda. This game will bomb so hard, there will never be another wolfenstein..." *Mister No*

It’s important to keep in mind that nowhere in the trailer does a BLM member show up, since the game takes place in the 1960s. What the trailer does show is the earlier mentioned character Grace Walker, a black woman leading part of the American rebellion against the Nazi regime.

"if you dont think this is part of leftist agenda you surely are blind. Empowered black woman, check. Le ebil soulless caricature nazi, check. Klansmen hanging out with nazis. Oh my gawd. Hitler wasnäť even a fan of KKK" *Mr Solros*

"too many niggers, sorry but i don't buy that the only resistance fighters are niggers and women. when bethesda goes SJW you know the gaming industry is fucked" *The Sharpmarksman*

Her presence in the trailer is frequently credited as a SJW, feminist or BLM conspiracy, and something that ruins the game for the players: a manifestation of the perceived threat of woman and people of colour ruining their games for them inside of a blockbuster videogame.

### 5.5. Campaign

By far the most infrequent of the three factors, the call to action is barely above 5% of the 200 total comments. As very few posters actually motivate for action, it might be easy to assume that Tarrow’s mild expectations towards the persistence and actual value of purely online movements are justified (Tarrow, 2011, p. 293).

The comments that do call to action on the first trailer are mostly simplistic ones; calling for the death of Nazis and fascists on one side, and for the preservation of the white race and war
against Jews on the other. On the trailer for Wolfenstein II, very little have changed. Out of all the categories, this is the one that’s the most unchanged between the two games.

Then, what does this mean? The simple answer is that the group is already mobilized after the Gamergate controversy, and are now entrenched on sites like Breitbart and reddit threads like r/KotakuInAction. To see evidence of this, one can read the articles on the sites and analyze the comment section. Below are a brief except along with comments from the Breitbart article “Leftists think Gamergate caused Donald Trump; maybe they’re right”:

“If GamerGate had an impact, it’s because video games are (or were) the most important hobby for a generation of disaffected, disillusioned male voters with little to no prospects in the economy. Having seemingly denied them a future, the established political order then tried to impose its values on games, their one avenue of escape from an increasingly grim world.

That kind of unnecessary cruelty against an already-downtrodden demographic generates more than mere disagreement – it generates motivation that is easily converted into relentless political activism.” (Bokhari, 2017)

This is the exact same sentiment that Steve Bannon shared after he worked at Affinity Media, overseeing the selling of virtual currency to players of World of Warcraft. Which may not be surprising, considering that Breitbart is the very site he left Affinity Media to work on, and the site he helped convert to the ‘platform of the alt-right’ that it is today.

Like in the YouTube comments, one can also see a similar line of thinking: video games were a final escape for a generation of angry young white men, and the sudden presence of uncomfortable politics; representation, tolerance and more is uncomfortable and takes away from the fantasy. From reading the comments, this becomes even more obvious:

https://www.breitbart.com/tech/2017/06/22/leftists-think-gamergate-caused-donald-trump-maybe-theyre-right/
The discourse on Breitbart, a leading far-right wing website and that shared by angry young gamers online are now near identical. They share antagonist: leftists and SJWs, and face similar threats of feminism and political progressivism.

In Power in Moment, Tarrow mentions that one outcome for social movements is consolidation with larger movements, with a smaller movement becoming a “franchise” of a larger one so that they can spread their influence (Tarrow, 2011, p. 136). The reason for the lack of calls to action, or campaign, is therefore simple: the campaign had already occurred with the Gamergate controversy in 2013, which ended with the sections of the gaming community that participated becoming members of the wider alt-right movement. As a member of the alt-right, these games later participated in the Trump campaign where online trolls played a major role in spreading his messages (Tett, 2018).\(^{32}\) With the consolidation of

\(^{32}\) [https://www.ft.com/content/be8ca142-fb0f-11e7-a492-2c9be7f3120a](https://www.ft.com/content/be8ca142-fb0f-11e7-a492-2c9be7f3120a)
Gamergate with Breitbart and other alt-right websites, these gamers became politically active as far-right activists.

5.6 A comment about the commenters style

While surveying the comments, there are many comments who are strange and difficult to decipher. The reason is that, in the online culture, these far-right posters often speak in advanced, coded language built heavily around in-jokes and memes that hide their racist origins:

"Good goyim! Kill all the ebil raycisss nazis! Imagine what the world would be like if the nazis REALLY would have won...Europe would be a country of WHITES instead of the enriched multicultural Europe we have today! There would be no private central banks to fund our perpetual wars in the Middle East to protect Our Greatest Ally, Israel!" 2) Inspector Rectum

While the irony here is fairly thick and obvious, it still illustrates the difficulty of trying to analyze their text as an outsider. More subtle examples are the following:

"Oy vey... Yes, yes goyim see how bad the world would be. The nazis would overtake the united states and take away your freedom goyim. The world would be bad because we wouldn't have ((diversity))" 3) Sod Din

"WE WUZZ KANGZ N SHIET"33 TheGrace020

From the stereotypical Jewish parody in the 2) and 3) and the triple parenthesis that are coded anti-Semitic symbols (Anti-Defamation League, 2018)34, the modern far-right movements speak in a combination of in-jokes and ironic racism to try and keep a plausible deniability of their far-right leanings. With this

33 "We Wuz Kangz" is a racially charged joke aimed at African-Americans, parodying their vernacular and often posting racist imagery. (cf) We Wuz Kings at: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/we-wuz-kings
34 https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/echo
study, I hoped to help better identify such coded messaging on the internet.

The style stems from the irreverent style of messaging boards such as 4chan, where anonymous commenters with the mindset of “doing it for the lulz”: doing offensive, racist and harmful things simply because they are perceived to be funny (Nagle, 2017, p. 15). The movement, having been born on the internet, is heavily involved in the culture and language of the internet, which might at times make it hard to comprehend due to the layers of irony and memes in place. However, the movement itself is not limited to only the internet. The Charlottesville Unite the Right rally was organized over these forums, and the anti-PC taboo-breaking culture have led to politically motivated terrorism of right wing extremists against minority groups in the United States, such as the 2014 Isla Vista killings and the killing of five Black Lives Matter activist in 2015 (Feldman, 2015).35

6. Conclusion and future studies

6.1. Conclusion

In this thesis, my goal has been to shed light on the ways the contemporary far-right movement acts and appears through the study of how the Gamergate controversy changed the discourse between the two data points of Wolfenstein: The New Order and Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus. The two games were ideal examples of displaying how much the discourse changed in merely a couple of years, as some gamers were radicalized and activated in service of alt-right movement.

In the end of the theory section, expectations were raised about the results of this study. At the end of my empirical study, my expectations were proven accurate. The view of the threat had become more crystalized; see 5.3, where feminism and political correctness have become the enemy of gamers.

Similarly, the view of the antagonist have become more focused. In table 2, you can clearly see that the perceived foe after Gamergate is the liberal, who have gone from 0 to 13 points between the two videos, and who are called under many names, be it liberal, leftist or SJW.

The campaigns, too, have gotten more organized and hateful. The group now has a shared language, and refer to the similar sites, such as 4chan or Breitbart, and seem to have a shared organizational structure through these sites.

Due to the strong mobilization that was in place, and the radicalizing nature of the groups’ action, it felt obvious to study them as a social movement. The change in in discourse made it obvious to see at a glance that something had changed, and through this essay I am making the case that Gamergate helped form the modern discourse of the far-right movement, not just among gamers; already variations of Gamergate have appeared within literature and the comic book industry (Britt, 2015; Francisco, 2018)\(^\text{36, 37}\). “Leftists”, “SJWs” and “feminists” are common foes among far-right groups, and while Gamergate might not have created most of

\(^{36}\) [https://electricliterature.com/how-bigots-invaded-the-hugo-awards-52f30f7f53a](https://electricliterature.com/how-bigots-invaded-the-hugo-awards-52f30f7f53a)

those terms, they helped consolidate them in the groups’ consciousness and they now see widespread use among far-right activists.

Ultimately, more than just a study of the internet, it is also a study of a macrocosm in a microcosm; the western world is facing a rise of populism and far-right activism, and while gaming might seem irrelevant for it, it is in fact a microcosm of society at large. The ‘disaffected, disillusioned males’ that were mentioned in the earlier Breitbart article are not only gamers, but the way the gamers were activated speak to how others may be activated as well. The feeling of threat, the creation of an antagonist and the campaign to call to action, and how the creation of a social movement leads to future divergence between left and right, and a radicalization inside the group.

6.2. Future studies

Ultimately, this study has merely scratched the surface of what one can research within the field of online social movements, as well as the alt-right gamers. There are two avenues to explore.

First is the continuation of studying online social movements. With every year that passes, the Internet becomes more intertwined with regular life. When researching the subject of online social movements for this essay, I have come across much modern research on the subject. Some of which are included in this essay, such as Bennett and Segerberg’s *The Logic of Connective Action* and Edward Castronova’s *Exodus to the Virtual World*, both of which depict the increasing role the online world will have on society going forward. As more and more people become increasingly connected, the role of the internet will only expand, and researching about that, and how people interact online through online social movements, would be an incredibly interesting field of future studies.

The second avenue of further study would be focusing on the gamers themselves as subject for research. While this paper focused on their mobilization as an online social movement, it’d be interesting to conduct a more qualitative study as well, focused on the identity creation where a gamer becomes a far-right activist; to see how these “rootless white males”, as Steve Bannon described them, becomes susceptible to an extreme ideology, and how such
developments can be prevented.

With all these potential avenues still left to explore, it’s clear that this is a study that still has room to grow and develop. In many ways, this study has merely scratched the surface in proving that a mobilization have taken place among certain gamers; elaborating on how and why through further research might be the next step, and one that I will hopefully undertake in the future.
References


Internet


Tett, G., 2018. ”Why the alt-right is winning America’s meme war”. Financial Times. January 19, 2018. https://www.ft.com/content/be8ca142-fb0f-11e7-a492-2c9be7f3120a

Appendix

Word cloud for Wolfenstein: The New Order:

Word cloud for Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus:
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Table 2: The concepts with the largest difference between them. Please observe that the same comments might be included in multiple columns. This is the full version of the table shown in chapter 5.