Appropriating Gaming

A Quantitative Content Analysis and Issue Mapping of the Online Campaign #NotMyBattlefield

Abstract

This thesis aims to examine how online engagement in the #NotMyBattlefield campaign can be understood as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of the Gamergate controversy. Research has shown that Gamergate was appropriated by external political groups, such as the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right is known to be highly adept in media manipulation, executing deliberate framing strategies as a means to push political agendas and gain influence online (Blodgett, 2020, p. 187; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 10). The group's appropriation of Gamergate and gaming culture is highly indicative of the politicisation of gaming culture.

The aim of this research is twofold. First, an overarching content analysis seeks to analyse the rhetoric arguments and thematic patterns found in conjunction with the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield on Twitter. Secondly, this thesis employs an adapted version of Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016) method of issue mapping. The purpose of this mapping is to analyse the campaign's relationship to prominent actors within online media, as well as to examine the structure and patterns the campaign followed. The combined results of the content analysis and issue mapping reveal how the #NotMyBattlefield can be understood as a continuation of Gamergate, influenced by Alt-Right ideologies. They bare similarities in the way feminism and political correctness are painted out to be instigators of an attack on gaming culture.

Furthermore, the results also reveal how such campaigns are primarily reactionary - only showing increased levels of activity in response to external factors and events. At no point in time did the campaign show any indications of self-sustained motivation or engagement. The results of this thesis further signify the politicisation of gaming culture. The influence of external forces, such as the Alt-Right, signifies a need for further research in order to gain a better understanding of how to circumvent and prevent the radicalisation of gaming.

Keywords: Gamergate, Alt-Right, SJW, Twitter, Hashtag, Online Campaign, Issue Mapping

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1. Introduction

In 2014, an impactful movement was birthed within gaming culture, namely Gamergate. The movement professed to be making a stance for ethics in games journalism. However, it has since been shown to have been intentionally orchestrated as a front for sexist harassment. It also demonstrated an unprecedented level of organisational effort within gaming culture, which arguably distinguished the movement from prior backlashes (O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3).

Gamergate resulted in misogynistic attacks and severe harassment directed at female gamers and women within the gaming industry. This abuse included threats of both rape, death, bomb, and mass-shootings (O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3; Poland, 2016, p. 144; Todd, 2015, p. 64). The movement has since been described as a "massive tidal wave of harassment aimed at anyone and everyone" (Poland, 2016, p. 157). Gamergate represents a focused and organised backlash against political correctness and feminism, which the movement perceived as forces set on destroying gaming culture (Blodgett, 2020, p. 191; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3). Slowly, Gamergate came to something of an end. Although the internet is still affected by the movement, its proponents and their unavoidable presence on social media has dropped down to a more unobtrusive level (Poland, 2016, p. 157).

However, in late May of 2018, this very same movement seemed to be surfacing again as claims of "historical inaccuracy" echoed across social media. After DICE, the Swedish video-game studio behind the *Mirrors Edge* (2009) and *Battlefield* (2002) franchises, released the trailer for their upcoming title *Battlefield 5* (2018), the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield went viral. Fans were outraged and social media was once again flooded with organisational efforts to make a stance against political correctness and SJWs (Social Justice Warriors).

The trailer portrays an exaggerated WWII scene which prominently features a female character with a prosthetic arm, which seems to be what displeased fans of the series. The trailer currently sits at about 14,000,000 views, 225,000 comments, and a like to dislike ratio of 351,000 to 543,000 (YouTube, 2018a). Outraged over what was shown, gamers turned to Twitter to voice their frustration. The criticism seemed to revolve around the inclusion of a female character in a WWII setting. Hundreds of users made claims of "historical inaccuracies" and that the inclusion of a female soldier was an attempt to revise

history, as a result of political correctness. At the time of writing the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield has been included in over 3,000 Tweets.

Research has shown that Gamergate gained early support from members of the Alt-Right and Men's right activists (Greene, 2019, p. 34; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 2; Salter, 2018, p. 248). Groups affiliated with the loosely connected and informal alliance of far-right political actors commonly referred to as the Alt-Right, appropriated Gamergate to push their political agendas. Gamergate provided these groups with a guiding framework on how to exploit controversies to elicit news media attention, which provides them with the desired spotlight (Blodgett, 2020, p.196). The appropriation of Gamergate by the Alt-Right is indicative of the politicisation of video games and the potential for radicalisation within gaming culture. As the Alt-Right becomes a force of global significance, the role of social media in mediating and mobilising aggression and harassment campaigns is an essential area of research (Salter 2018, p. 259).

According to Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016, p. 81), studying such online controversies helps us understand the arguments and identities of those involved in particular issues. Studying controversies empirically, they argue, is fundamental to understanding how issues emerge, engage, and overlap. If it is the case that the #NotMyBattlefield campaign is a re-emergence Gamergate or expression of Alt-Right politics, then it would be an ideal subject to study to gain further understanding of the politicisation of gaming and gaming-related harassment campaigns.

Properly examining and mapping out this campaign would contribute to the field of media and communication by researching an online harassment campaign. The study is aimed to provide empirical data on, and analysis of the rhetoric arguments, thematic patterns, and structure this type of online campaign follows.

This study, therefore, raises the following research question:

RQ: How can we understand online engagement in #NotMyBattlefield as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of the Gamergate controversy?

To answer this question, this study utilised a mixed-method approach of content analysis and an adapted version of the issue mapping proposed by Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016). The content analysis aimed to describe and analyse the rhetoric arguments and thematic patterns found in conjunction with the hashtag

#NotMyBattlefield in order to examine any correlations between this campaign and Gamergate or the Alt-Right. The issue mapping built on the content analysis's findings, with the purpose of mapping and describing the extent of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. Together they illustrate the entirety of the campaign in relation to research on Gamergate and the Alt-Right movement, highlighting both its rhetoric and discursive patterns, as well as suggesting a structure to which the campaign adhered.

2. Background on Gamergate and the Alt-Right

There are two prominent movements which require some background context to situate #NotMyBattlefield within the broader academic discussion about the politicisation of gaming culture. These concepts are:

- Gamergate
- The Alt-Right

Understanding the relevance of these concepts is crucial to understand the broader social and cultural significance of gaming-related online harassment campaigns, such as #NotMyBattlefield. This chapter aims to provide necessary contextual background on these concepts, as subsequent literature review and analysis draws from research done on these topics.

2.1 Gamergate

To understand the #NotMyBattlefield controversy and why it is relevant to study as a case of an online harassment campaign, one first needs to understand its predecessor, Gamergate, and what enabled the rise to prominence of this controversy among and beyond gamers internationally.

Misogyny and harassment directed toward female gamers and women in the gaming industry have been widely known for a long time. It was not, however, until 2014 that it became part of public discourse in the form of the online Gamergate movement (Richard & Hoadley, 2014, p. 261; Todd, 2015, p. 64), with reports of rape-, death- and mass-shooting threats, primarily directed toward women and progressives within the industry.

Gamergate is by design hard to explain due to a torturous complexity (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016, p. 83). Its birth has been accredited to a sequence of incidents following a series of posts on the website 4chan in 2014 by Eron Gjoni. There he accused his former girlfriend Zoe Quinn of sleeping with game journalists in order to acquire favourable reviews of her upcoming game. The accusations were succeeded by severe harassment of Quinn in the form of doxing, daily rape and death threats and a continuous witch-hunt online. The accusations have since been proven unfounded, but the backlash provided lasting damages for Quinn and her family (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Todd, 2015, p. 64). Both men and women who voiced their support for Quinn and their female colleagues also experienced severe harassment directed towards them. What these victims had in common was a critical stance against the portrayal of women in games and the cultural embedment of misogynistic tendencies within the gaming industry (Todd, 2015, p. 65).

Following this, Gamergate grew in several directions (Blodgett, 2020, p. 187). Many continued their efforts to defame Quinn and other prominent industry personalities (Todd, 2015, p. 64). Others were seizing the moment to make a stance against left-leaning politics, claiming that game companies and publishers had begun to pander to women and minorities, rather than their core demographic of heterosexual white men (O'Donnell, 2019, p. 2). Gamergaters started to push back against what they call SJWs (Social justice warriors), claiming that they were trying to ruin video games with feminism and political correctness and only pushing their political agenda – by promoting more diverse and positive representations of women and minorities in games (Blodgett, 2020, p. 191; Greene, 2019, p. 58; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3).

2.1.1 Post Gamergate

Gamergate's professed cause, to highlight the topic of ethics in games journalism, does not seem to be what the controversy ultimately resulted in. After the events that took place in 2014, Gamergate has morphed into new forms, choosing new outlets for its misogyny and harassment toward women and minorities. Related campaigns have reached areas that have nothing to do with gaming or the gaming industry whatsoever. The one consistent factor is the focus on anything that seems to be related to SJWs (Poland, 2016, p. 157).

This does raise the question of whether it ever was about gaming in the first place, or if the surrounding conditions contextualised the movement in gaming culture.

Furthermore, Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 9) explain that Gamergate set the conditions for the rise of the Alt-Right. Many of the most visible proponents of Gamergate are now core figures in the Alt-Right movement. The group's success in mobilising impressionable young men to push an ideological agenda indicates potential in radicalising these types of communities. Blodgett (2020, p. 196) further strengthens this argument by stating that Gamergate acted as the testing bed for a new type of social media-based mobilisation strategies. Modern movements are swiftly adapting to new conditions, which is shown by Gamergate proponents transitioning into memberships in the Alt-Right and MRA. What Gamergate did was present young disenfranchised men with communities where their toxic and angry mindset could find a home, accompanied by a clear framework on what sort of behaviour and abuse that elicit news media attention (Poland, 2016, p. 157).

2.2 The Alt-Right movement and Men's Rights Activism (MRA)

The Alt-Right, short for "alternative right" is an umbrella term that refers to a network of people and groups on the extreme political right (Greene, 2019, p. 33). The group's spectrum of ideologies and beliefs make them rather complicated to pinpoint and accurately describe. Nevertheless, researchers have described them as the following: An amalgam of white nationalists, Men's Right advocates, anti-feminists, anti-SJWs, conspiracy theorists and bored young people (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 3). A self-professed identarian activist movement seeking a cultural shift (Bergman, 2018, p. 1). They are characterised by ironic, self-referential culture in which anti-Semitism and Nazi imagery can be explained either as sincere or tongue-in-cheek (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 4).

One of the most vocal actors involved in Gamergate that falls under the Alt-Right umbrella are the Men's Rights activists, or MRAs. MRAs are a group of men who ostensibly work to support men's need in what is perceived as a matriarchal or misandrist culture (Poland, 2016, p. 127). They are known to engage in misogyny and harassment of women online (Koulouris, 2018, p. 752). Howe et al. (2018, p. 2503) suggest that the #NotMyBattlefield campaign might be rooted in questions of traditional gender roles - and its subversion. This is one of the main concerns of men's rights activists. There is,

therefore, reason to believe that this particular branch of the Alt-Right might have been involved in the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. For this study, both MRA and the Alt-Right will be referred to as the Alt-Right.

3. Literature Review

A study conducted by Howe et al. (2018) is the only one done on the topic of #NotMyBattlefield to date. The study links the harassment campaign to questions of gamer-identity and traditional gender roles. It does, however, not draw any connections to Gamergate or place the phenomena in a broader socio-political context. The following review will present research on hashtag activism, Gamergate and the Alt-Right (which is in many ways related to Gamergate), which might help us understand and explain the #NotMyBattlefield campaign as an expression of Alt-Right ideologies and a continuation of Gamergate. The chapter will also shed light on gaps in research and on how this study aims to contribute to the field.

3.1 Hashtag activism

The use of hashtags such as #Gamergate or #NotMyBattlefield resembles the way Clark (2016, p. 1) describes 'hashtag activism'; a vast number of users protesting an issue using hashtags. Hashtags are keywords or a string of text prefixed with a hash symbol (#) used on social media such as Instagram or Twitter. They are clickable links to a wider set of content containing the same tag (Bastos et al., 2013, p. 264). Hashtags allow the gathering of multiple orientations and viewpoints on the same topic. Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, (2019, p. 1991) suggest that users of the same hashtag imply a will to speak to each other but do not necessarily say the same thing. It allows people to connect to an assumed like-minded audience.

In the case of Gamergate and the Alt-Right, Marwick and Lewis (2017, pp. 26-35) explain that the groups have been reported to work together to deliberately manipulate Twitter's trending topics with repeated use of specific hashtags and large amounts of fake accounts to amplify certain stories or messages. This implies that the groups use hashtags, not only as a tool for connecting to others with shared beliefs but as an effective means to deliberately manipulate and spread a message that otherwise may not have been heard or

seen by many. Understanding hashtags and how they can be exploited is beneficial in understanding #NotMyBattlefield, not just as an expression of dissatisfaction, but as part of a deliberate, thought-out activism strategy.

3.2 Previous research on Gamergate and the Alt-Right

As previously stated, Gamergate is tortuously complex and has been researched from several different perspectives using different methods. When compared to other misogynistic online controversies, Gamergate can be seen as unusual, both in scope, size and longevity. Nonetheless, Poland (2016, p. 123) argues, that in order to understand how such movements have come to be requires the understanding that no movement is unique or unprecedented in their actions and tactics.

3.2.1 Gamergaters and Alt-Right's Cause

As a part of shaping the narrative, Gamergaters have defended their actions and framed their cause with the notion of "Actually, it's about ethics in games journalism", harkening back to the movement's inception surrounding Zoe Quinn and the allegations made against her. Poland (2016, p. 141) argues that this is the kind of narrative that and reactionary anti-feminist may latch on to when looking for an excuse to harass women. From the very start, Gamergaters began looking for ways to spin the harassment in order to frame it as a legitimate issue of theirs (2016, p. 143). What supposedly was about ethics in journalism manifested in systematic harassment of women, progressives, and their allies within the video game industry (Buyukozturk et al., 2018, p. 595). Gamergaters made feminists such as Quinn out to be the sole driving force behind objectionable feminism and the attack on gaming culture, culminating in the creation of a narrative that sanctions their actions (O'Donnell, 2019, pp. 10-14). According to Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 28), a common belief of the Alt-Right is that they must work from the ground up to establish counter-narratives, positioning themselves as the oppressed, something which best is done online. What this does is imbue online participation with a sense of urgency, portraying the Alt-Right as victims struggling against the domineering left.

In the case of #NotMyBattlefield, it is still unclear whether the claims of "historical inaccuracy" are genuine concerns or part of a framing strategy. Through a content

analysis and mapping of #NotMyBattlefield, this thesis aims to provide a base for understanding whether or not the campaign can be linked to the Alt-Right. If that is the case, then it is possible that what is being expressed could be part of a deliberate framing strategy.

As previously stated, the allegations made toward Quinn has since been proven unfounded. This information is, on the other hand, irrelevant to proponents of Gamergate. In the vein of conspiracy theorists, adherents saw opposing facts as indications of collusion and foul-play, rather than evidence (Poland, 2016, p. 144). The group's true cause and motivation have always been maintaining a status quo in which the primary goal of anything related to video games should be appealing to straight white men. To push for a more inclusive culture is not perceived as an attempt to help the culture move forward but as a direct attack on gamers and their culture (2016, p. 145). This is one of the most significant signs of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign being rooted in Gamergate, with its clear reluctance toward the inclusion of female characters in *Battlefield 5* (2018).

Gamergaters used the buzz surrounding the initial controversies as an opportunity to interpret feminist critique as systematic oppression of the gamer identity (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 8). These individuals see their culture as a refuge under attack from feminist, political correctness and SJWs. This is mirrored in Bergman's (2018, p. 6) description of the Alt-Right as a reactionary movement. The Alt-Right does not seem to be concerned about acting for men's collective issues, but rather seem to discuss men's rights in reference to feminism. They do not act for men; they act against women.

Bergman (2018, p. 9) strengthens the link between Gamergate and the Alt-Right by suggesting that a common denominator within the Alt-Right is white male victimhood, which stands in opposition to feminism and anti-racism. Important to note is that the Alt-Right consists of an array of different movements and groups, so there are ideological differences at play, but this is according to research something many have in common (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 4).

While some researchers refer to Gamergate as a movement (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 8; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 2; Poland, 2016, p. 126). Buyukozturk et al. (2018, p. 596) argue that Gamergate, due to its failed efforts to materialise into a sustained movement, rather should be considered an episode of contentious politics. This, they argue, helps in understanding why it failed as a movement.

Buyukozturk et al. (2018, p. 598) explain that, on Reddit, instead of Gamergate becoming an engine for change, the discussions culminated in nothing, becoming a circular debate about the meaning behind Gamergate. Furthermore, they explain that while group members tried to clarify the group's purpose, they failed to achieve consensus and instead presented diverging viewpoints (2018, p. 599). The group also failed in achieving a coherent framing which instead acted to decentralise the group (2018, p. 601). It is important to note that this study was done on Reddit, which reportedly played a part in Gamergate, but it is not a commonality within research on the subject, in the same way as 4chan. Nevertheless, this provides some insight into that the group might, in fact, not have had a common cause at al. As shown in Figure 7, #NotMyBattlefield, as a campaign, was rather short-lived. This is possibly due to failure in achieving consensus and ideological homogony. This thesis employs a content analysis of the prominent themes and rhetoric arguments, with the aim to illuminate whether or not this may have been the case.

3.2.2 Tactics and Strategies in Gamergate

In order to understand the #NotMyBattlefield as a possible continuation of Gamergate, understanding the tactics and strategies employed by Gamergaters is crucial in order to analyse the movement in relation to the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. These tactics are core factors in what enabled Gamergate's rise to prominence (Marwick and Lewis, 2017, pp. 8-9) and may have been employed in similar ways during the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. It also allows us to put into perspective how Gamergate possibly have evolved since. The following section, therefore, covers tactics and strategies utilised by Gamergaters, as reported by research, and acts as a foundation for the study's analytical framework.

Several factors contributed to the success of Gamergate. The movement gained early support from members of the Alt-Right. (Greene, 2019, p. 34). The group appropriated Gamergate as a vehicle for their own socio-political beliefs and agendas, much in the same vein that game developers have been accused of pushing theirs (O'Donnell, 2019, p. 2). Gamergate utilised several tactics and strategies to rise in prominence, many alluding to militaristic language and tactics (O'Donnell, 2019, p. 4). Social media allowed

Gamergate to target and distribute content to those most likely to agree with their cause while masking their presence from the rest of the population (Blodgett, 2020, p. 187).

Researchers argue that Gamergaters utilised algorithms and the ways news cycles and sensationalism work to drive and frame their movement (Blodgett, 2020, p. 187; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 10). This meant that technologically adept members of the movement could capture news media's attention by appearing to be part of a controversy that needs addressing, thereby maintaining the ability to actively control the narrative and framing. This built the foundation that has allowed the Alt-Right to overcome their biggest obstacle, the inability to mainstream their ideologies, based on their wild unpopularity. Media manipulation literacy, provided by Gamergate, have allowed the Alt-Right to utilise tactics that generate events which journalists in good conscious cannot ignore (Bergman, 2018, p. 3).

While most of the planning took place on sites like 4chan, 8chan and Reddit, most of the execution and visible harassment took place on Twitter (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 8; Poland, 2016, p. 156). The communicative culture and interactive mechanics of these websites interact in ways that tend toward abusive or intense exchanges while providing few ways for users to protect themselves or others from harassment. Twitter's combative mechanics and lack of moderation significantly contributed to the success of the attacks during Gamergate. Twitter's system of "likes" and "retweets" acted as a kind of scoreboard in the gamification of online abuse (Salter, 2018, p. 257). Thousands of new accounts were created for the sole purpose of engaging in abuse and swarming targets with harassments. After one account was suspended, a new one was created to take its place (Poland, 2016, p. 144). This makes it difficult to ascertain the actual number of people involved and might give Gamergate the appearance of being a much larger mob than it truly was.

Previous research on Gamergate illustrates how controversies that are allegedly about issues relating to video games could instead be rooted in misogyny and anti-feminism. Research also suggests that the Alt-Right have been reported to highjack controversies to further their political agenda (Greene, 2019, p. 34). It is therefore essential to try to understand this topic further to gain an understanding of whether #NotMyBattlefield truly is about "revising history" (Howe et al., 2018, p. 2502) or if it is a result of a political schism conducted by members of the Alt-Right. In turn, this would help the field of media

and communication to understand and map out the politicisation of gaming culture, as brought on by Gamergate and the Alt-Right.

4. Analytical Framework and Methodology

To answer the question "How can we understand online engagement in #NotMyBattlefield as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of Gamergate?" this study employs a mixed-methods approach in two phases. Initially, a content analysis of the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield was conducted, followed by a mapping of the entire campaign.

The aim of the content analysis was not to simply describe and summarise what has been expressed in conjunction with the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield on Twitter. The purpose was to analyse rhetoric arguments, thematic strands, as well as to determine whether the campaign can be understood as a continuation of Gamergate and if there were signs of the Alt-Right and Men's Rights activists' involvement. The analysis was, therefore, conducted through the lens of research's description of rhetoric arguments, patterns, and tactics used in Gamergate and by the Alt-Right (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 28; Poland, 2016, p. 132). Initially, a statistical approach was employed to determine what percentage of rhetoric arguments or patterns that were the most prominent (Thomas, 2013, p. 238). This allowed the analysis of the most significant thematic strands and provided a clear overview of the distribution of identified patterns.

Categories and themes were also compared to one another to determine and analyse correlations, similarities, or differences. Following that, overlaps in themes and categories were examined in order to analyse rhetoric arguments and patterns repeatedly found within different themes. Patterns and thematic strands were continuously analysed according to an analytical framework and research on Gamergate and the Alt-Right.

The purpose of the following section is to provide a description of the analytical framework on which the content analysis was based. The framework has guided the analysis by providing a clear overview and description of the rhetorical arguments and patterns which characterises the Alt-Right. This, in turn, resulted in crucial insights regarding the nature and motives of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign.

Following the content analysis, the study employed an adapted version of Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016) method of issue mapping. In its original form, the method allows for careful mapping of issues across many different dimensions. However, in the case of this study, tools and resources needed were not deemed available for a full-scale adaptation. The method has, therefore, been slightly modified to better suit this thesis. The reworked method used in this study chronologically maps and analyses antecedent events and subsequent prominence online to examine the campaign's key events and their relationships. The foundation of the mapping is built on media sources which surfaced from theory as well as the results from the content analysis.

By itself, a content analysis does an excellent job in answering questions about content and the different components of said content. However, it does not address surrounding contexts which might have played into the production of the content. Similarly, issue mapping does not provide deep insight into the content on which the mapping is built. Therefore, the two methods work as complements to each other. One describes and analyses the content in question, and one illustrates the context and structure in which the content is produced and consumed. Together they provide comprehensive and holistic insights on the topic of #NotMyBattlefield.

4.1 Rhetorics and organisational centres linked to the Alt-Right

Research suggests that the Alt-Right movement has previously appropriated controversies to further their agenda (Greene, 2019, p. 58; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 2). This sort of appropriation resulted in Gamergate being deeply influenced by outside politics and ideologies, such as anti-feminism, anti-SJW rhetoric and white supremacy. Hence, the focus of the content analysis is to examine the rhetoric arguments and key themes most prominently expressed in conjunction with #NotMyBattlefield and to examine similarities and differences between the two. This section aims to provide a grounded basis for how this thesis approached the analysis and subsequent mapping.

To understand whether the rhetoric arguments and thematic patterns expressed in conjunction with the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield on Twitter can be linked to the Alt-Right, it is first necessary to clarify what sort of language is used by the Alt-Right. For this study, rhetorical arguments typical for the Alt-Right is understood as being

characterised by the following nine traits, as identified by Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 28):

- Contempt for SJWs and liberal activists
- Disdain for multiculturalism
- Strong antipathy toward feminism
- Belief in intrinsic differences between people of different genders and races
- View of political correctness as censorship assault on free speech
- The belief of the existence of a "culture war" that the left is winning
- Deep embedment in contemporary internet culture
- Promotion of anti-globalism and nationalism
- A tendency to construct and spread conspiracy theories

Poland (2016, p. 132) suggests that their tactics online follow a particular pattern: identification of a problem, followed by deliberate obscuring of its true cause, presentation of altered information or lies, as well as ignoring complex web of factors that may be in play. Skilful use of attention hacking and refined understanding of media platforms allows these groups to rise to prominence where they can publicly express and share the aforementioned rhetorics and sentiments (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 20).

This study understands the Alt-Right's tactics as a specific set of strategies which is enabled by a nuanced understanding of contemporary media platforms. The aim of the strategies is to gain media attention and to push a political agenda. Furthermore, this study is specifically concerned with how the political and activist potential within hashtags (Williams et al., 2019, p. 6) can be systemically exploited (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 35) to deliberately manipulate and spread a message that otherwise may not have been seen or heard.

Researchers have suggested that many actions surrounding Gamergate and the Alt-Right can be traced to the online forum 4chan.org (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Greene, 2019, p. 36; Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24; Poland, 2016, p. 124; Todd, 2015, p. 64). Specifically, a board called /pol/ is frequently mentioned. /Pol/ was set up so that moderators of other boards on 4chan could direct racists discussions there in order to remove that kind of content from other parts of the forum (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 25; Poland, 2016, p. 125). After Gamergate, the board has been known to facilitate the organisation of raids and creation of strategies by the Alt-Right (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24; Poland, 2016,

p. 156). Research (Poland, 2016, p. 155; Salter, 2018, p. 251) also suggests that 8chan.org - the less moderated 4chan clone, and the subreddit Kotaku In Action are both linked to Gamergate and have since become havens for the organisation of harassment plans.

Thus, when tracing and mapping out the controversy, 4chan, 8chan and Kotaku In Action are the primary key media sources that were manually reviewed and analysed, beyond what emerged from the content analysis.

4.2 Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine how online engagement in #NotMyBattlefield can be understood as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of Gamergate. The two methods used are content analysis and issue mapping. They are meant to work as complements to each other, one addressing the content in question, and one addressing its surrounding context of production and consumption. The following section will cover how this study has adhered to the neo-positivist research paradigm, how the methods and analysis were employed in practice, as well as this study's limitations.

4.2.1 Content Analysis

In short, content analysis is the systemic examination of symbols within communication that have been assigned values according to coding. Relationships between these values are analysed using statistical methods to describe and draw inferences about the meaning of the content (Riffe et al., 2013, p. 19).

In general use, the hashtag peaked in popularity in the days following the trailers launch on May 23d. As can be seen in Figure 7, the hashtag gained some new traction around September and in late November, which is when the game itself was launched.

Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016, p. 82) suggests the use of Digital Methods Initiative Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolset (DMI-TCAT, 2020). However, DMI-TCAT is structured around Twitters own API, which does not allow the collection of historical data in a price range that is appropriate to this study. Instead, an adapted approach has been used. This study instead used OrgneatUI (Orgneat, 2020) to collect

Tweets. OrgneatUI allowed for the extraction of historical Twitter data, containing Tweet ID, user ID, username, date and time, permalink, Tweet content, number of Retweets, number of favourites and Boolean data regarding if the Tweet is a reply, Retweet or containing sensitive content.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield on Twitter*

	#NotMyBattlefield
Total uses	3,195
Total likes	18,870
Total Retweets	2,552
Average likes	6
Unique users	2,110

4.2.2 Codebook Development and Sampling

For analysable data to be collected, a coding protocol had to be developed. A coding protocol (or codebook) is the framework which dictates which data is to be extracted from content and which values to be assigned (Riffe et al., 2013, p. 46; Thomas, 2013, p. 321). The steps taken to develop the codebook and subsequent coding is shown in Table 2. The coding process drew inspiration from Wheatley and Vatnoey (2020, p. 13) in their step by step approach, and Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019, p. 1993) in their choice of method and style in developing a codebook.

Table 2. *Coding process and codebook development*

Stage	Approach	N=	Description
Pre-Coding	Sorting for inclusion/exclusion	3,195	All Tweets were read. Tweets not deemed relevant were excluded from the sample in this stage. Media sources that might be relevant to the mapping were noted down.

Table 2. (Continued) *Coding process and codebook development*

Stage 1	Inductive	1,543	15% sample was read, and general themes were identified
Stage 2	Retroductive	1,543	Sub-sample of Tweets was reread, and examples for each theme found. New categories were created.
Stage 3	Inductive & Deductive	1,543	Categories were grouped by theme. Each major category and subcategory were further defined and analysed.
Stage 4	Deductive	1,543	The entire sample of Tweets was coded according to the complete codebook, see Appendix A.

Even though the term "NotMyBattlefield" has been included in more Tweets than "#NotMyBattlefield", only Tweets including the actual hashtag were included in the sampling. This because, according to researchers, the use of hashtags is a deliberate tactic utilised by Gamergaters and the Alt-Right (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, pp. 26-35), and this study is specifically concerned with the tactics employed by those groups.

The initial dataset of Tweets containing the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield posted from 22 May 2018 onwards was collected using OrgneatUI (Orgneat, 2020), this sample consisted of 3,195 Tweets. The next step after this was to manually go through every Tweet to determine which Tweets that would be included in the final sample and coded for. According to Wheatley and Vatnoey (2020, p. 11), manual selection of Tweets minimises representativeness concerns as the whole dataset is covered. The criteria they had to fulfil was the following:

They had to:

- Be intelligible
- Have a clear codable theme (Certain Tweets that only contained the hashtag in just itself or only in conjunction with unmotivated disappointment or resentment would not be included in the sample since they did not contain any analysable theme or rhetoric that would contribute to this study)

- Contain the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield

- Not be an ad (The focus was on the individual's involvement, not corporations)

- Contain the rhetoric argument in text form (Image analysis was beyond the scope of this study)

- Not be a link to or update from another social media website (Certain Tweets in the original sample consisted of users automated updates from other social media, such as YouTube. These were, however, noted down and brought into the mapping)

After this process, a sample of 1,543 Tweets remained. In stage 1, 15% of the remaining sample (n=231) was analysed using an inductive approach in order to identify general themes and categories. This was because researchers suggest that an inductive approach allows for the establishment of generalisations about the distributions and of patterns within the content (Blaikie et al., 2019, p. 111; Mayring, 2000, p. 4). Following that, in stage 2, the sub-sample (n=231) was gone through in more detail to establish more categories as well as to gather example Tweets from each theme. The inclusion of example-Tweets helped in illustrating and explaining the identified categories in the codebook.

Seven main themes were identified; these themes were:

A: Claiming, mentioning, or referring to historical inaccuracies

B: Resentment or antipathy expressed toward inclusion of women, minorities, or persons with disabilities

C: Resentment or antipathy expressed toward contemporary politics

D: Nostalgia or reference to previous instalments in the Battlefield franchise

E: Critique of the game itself

F: Reference to or comparison to other franchises

G: Opposing or ridiculing the hashtag and campaign

Within most themes, several sub-categories were identified. For a complete overview and explanation of each theme and category, see Appendix A.

After all the categories were identified, they were grouped together according to themes and went through a thorough process of clarification. Stage 3 in the development required much careful consideration since the coding of the remaining sample (n=1,543) would require a lengthy process. It would have been unfavourable to identify flaws or gaps in the codebook during the coding process, as this would have required revision of the codebook and starting the coding process over again.

Stage 4 of the process was the actual coding of the entire sample-set (n=1,543) according to the codebook. In practice, the data collection procedure worked like this: Each theme was assigned a capital letter (A-G) and a lowercase for each specific sub-category (a-e). Each Tweet was then assigned either one or a combination of letters. For instance, the Tweet "Absolutely disgusted in what kind of political correct shit feast this has turned into. #Notmybattlefield" was assigned a value of 'Cd' since its rhetoric argument has to do with theme 'C' (Resentment or antipathy expressed toward contemporary politics) and explicitly mentioning the phrase "political correct" (d: Mention of or alluding to political correctness; Mention of the terms: politically correct, PC or political correctness). In the first iteration of the research design, the themes and categories were only assigned a numeric value of 1-27, but this turned out problematic when Tweets fit into more than one theme. This method also helped to properly mark each Tweet so that they could more easily be extracted according to theme when being mapped over time according to frequency.

4.2.3 Adapted Issue Mapping

Using content analysis and theory as a foundation, this study employed a modified version of Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016, p. 82) method of issue mapping. They suggest that their method is appropriately used to map public issues. They define 'issue' as the following: Matters of shared concern that involve uncertainty and/or disagreement – but that can be multisided and are not necessarily binary debates (2016, p. 80). Public issues are given life by acute controversies, which in the case of this study is the #NotMyBattlefield campaign.

Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández method allows for careful mapping across many different dimensions; however, in the case of this study, tools necessary were not deemed

available. The campaign was, thus, only mapped over time to describe the campaign's key events, their relationships, and their impact on the campaign's success.

Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016, p. 82) acknowledge that extensive organising, debating, and engagement may be conducted in closed channels, something that the issue mapping method is not able to cover. Hence, this study does not claim to be mapping the entirety of the events surrounding the #NotMyBattlefield campaign, but rather the key publicly accessible discussions and events.

The method was adapted using the following sequential steps:

1. Collection of every Tweet containing #NotMyBattlefield
2. Extraction and analysis of relevant data from collected Tweets using content analysis
3. The controversy's antecedents and subsequent prominence in popular culture were traced using manual review of key media resources that emerged from the data and theory
4. The key themes that emerged from the content analysis were traced over time according to levels of activity, see Figure 1
5. Analysis of key media sources and surrounding events possible impact on the campaign's overall level of activity
6. Presentation and analysis of inferences made about the relationships between key events and spikes in frequency
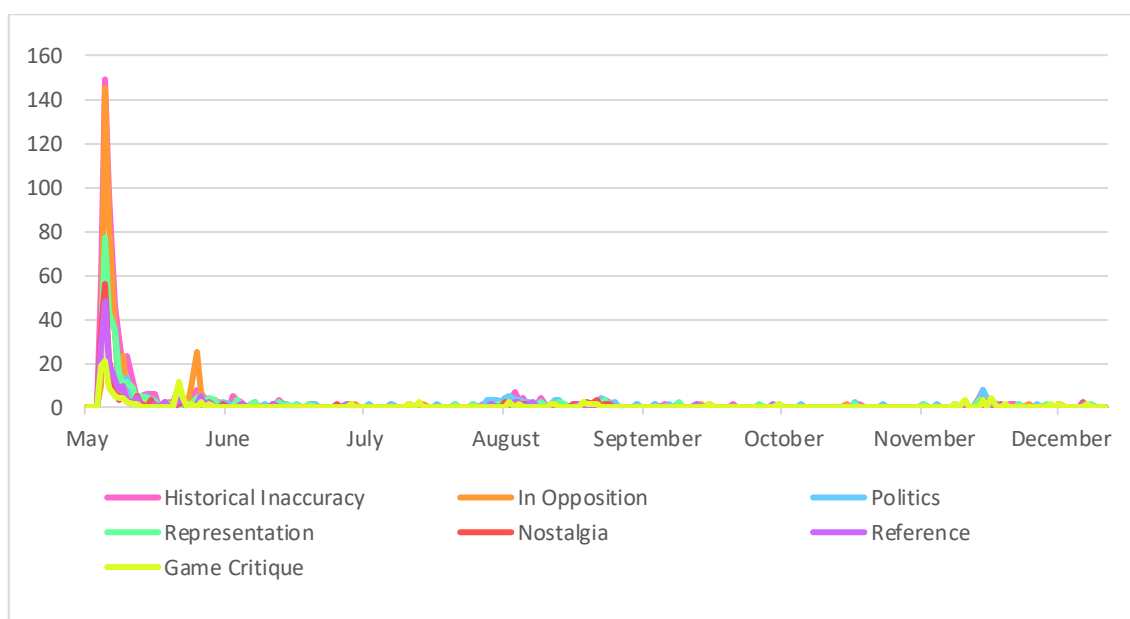

Figure 1. Frequency of each major theme in 2018

4.3 Research Paradigm

Since the aim of this study has been to answer the question "How can we understand online engagement in #NotMyBattlefield as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of Gamergate?" this study adhered to the neo-positivist research paradigm. In this paradigm, questions of this nature are answered by identifying regularities in the form of relationships between concepts (Blaikie et al., 2017, p. 37). This correlates with the study's aim to identify and describe themes in order to map out the relationships between these themes and related media sources.

The use of the neo-positivist paradigm was helpful in this study as it provided a clear structure in the form of a linear series of steps, with an emphasis on the logical and systematic (Blaikie et al., 2017, p. 42). It also suggested evident logics of inquiry: inductive to establish regularities and deductive to provide a possible explanation and build theory. Beyond that, it also dictates the role of the gathered data, which is "to describe regularities and relationships about social phenomena" (2017, p. 39).

Blaikie et al.'s (2017, pp. 37-46) description and proposed use of the neo-positivist paradigm correlated with the purpose of this study and provided a structure with the potential of answering the research question.

4.4 Limitations

It is important to note that, although bot accounts are common occurrences in online campaigns (Wheatley & Vatnoey, 2020, p. 12), it was beyond the scope of this thesis to draw any conclusions about user-profiles and authenticity. Furthermore, according to the data, the hashtag has been included in roughly 3195 Tweets by 2110 users (see Table 1), I use the term roughly here because the collected data does not account for any deleted Tweets or Tweets from banned, deleted or private accounts. Furthermore, the study does not account for any possible misspellings of the hashtag #NotMyBattlefield.

The mapping is also limited by the type of data that is extracted by the software. It does not account for any shared variables between Twitter users, such as shared followers, Retweets or likes. The data is, therefore, not sufficient to illustrate networks between users and themes, which is why the mapping was done chronologically.

The mapping was also constricted by media sources publicly available. Research suggests that the 4chan clone 8chan was frequently used to organise raids and harassment plans during Gamergate (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24). However, the site went offline in August 2019 and later revived under a new name, 8kun (Conger, 2019). This meant that searchable archives of past posts were not available for this study and could therefore not be accounted for in the mapping.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues to consider when dealing with and collecting data from online sources, in the case of this thesis Twitter, mostly relates to questions of privacy and consent (Thomas, 2013, p. 57; Townsend & Wallace, 2016, p. 5). Vetenskapsrådet states in their report "Good Research Practice" (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017, p. 27) that in observational research, the researcher should strive for objectivity and try not to influence research subjects. The researcher is also responsible for ensuring that the identities of those involved are not revealed. However, as Burles and Bally (2018, p. 4) states, when passively analysing publicly available content, decisions about informed consent and privacy become unclear and complex.

The data used in this study originates from Twitter in the form of Tweets. Each collected Tweet has been used in conjunction with a hashtag, which implies intent to broadcast an opinion and connect to a broader audience (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019, p. 1991) as they are clickable links to a wider set of content (Bastos et al., 2013, p. 264). Townsend and Wallace (2016, p. 5) argue that Tweets, therefore, can be considered publicly accessible. However, they conclude with the suggestion that questions of whether data is private, or public relates to the extent to which one is ethically bound to seek informed consent.

Informed consent is a crucial ethical component of all types of research (Townsend & Wallace, 2016, p. 6). To sign up for an account on Twitter, one must accept their terms of service, which states that one understands and consent to the use and collection of publicly available information (Twitter, 2020). The first line of Twitter's privacy policy reads: "Twitter is public and Tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone around the world" (Twitter, 2020). Nevertheless, this is not to be conflated with informed consent within research. This would be problematic as this does not ensure that the social

media user has thoroughly read and understood the terms and conditions. Conversely, in the case of this study, acquiring informed consent from each user would also be problematic as the sample used consists of Tweets from 1128 unique users.

Furthermore, during Gamergate, scholars involved in gaming and gender research were reported to have experienced harassment and abuse from members of the movement (Todd, 2015, p. 65). When it comes to potentially harmful or ideological social media content, Townsend and Wallace (2016, p. 12) argue for such material as being exempt from informed consent, to ensure that social media research ethics does not result in indirect censorship of research and to protect the safety of the researcher.

5. Key findings and Analysis

What research on Gamergate and the #NotMyBattlefield campaign indicates are similarities in terms of rhetoric arguments and motivations. However, the study conducted by Howe et al. (2018) does not make any explicit statements or indications of the existence of any correlation between these campaigns. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4, at least in terms of frequency and search interest, #NotMyBattlefield is linked to Gamergate, with all showing unmistakable frequency spikes following the release of the trailer on May 23. Therefore, the following section provides an analysis of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign based on empirical data. This is done in order to explore the potential relationship between the #NotMyBattlefield campaign, Gamergate and the Alt-Right.
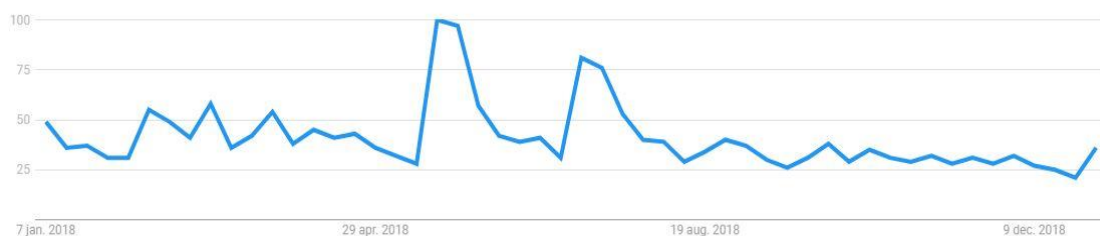

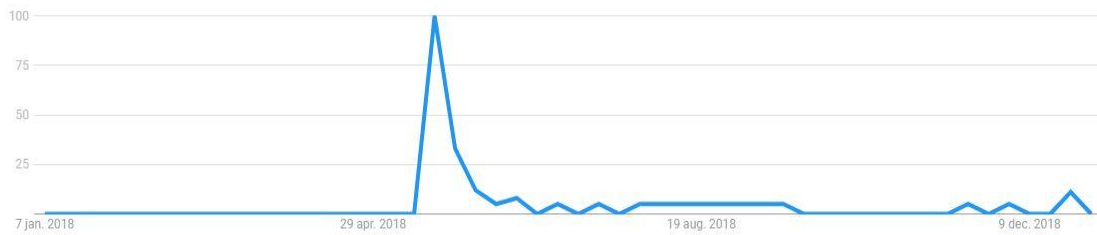**Figure 2.** Google Trend data for Gamergate in 2018 (Google, 2020a)

Figure 3. Google Trend data for #NotMyBattlefield in 2018 (Google, 2020b)

What Figure 2 and Figure 3 reveals is that, in terms of global search interest, both the term Gamergate and #NotMyBattlefield reached year-high peaks immediately after the release of the trailer. Furthermore, Figure 2 also reveals that interest surrounding Gamergate by no means was exhausted prior to the trailer's release.
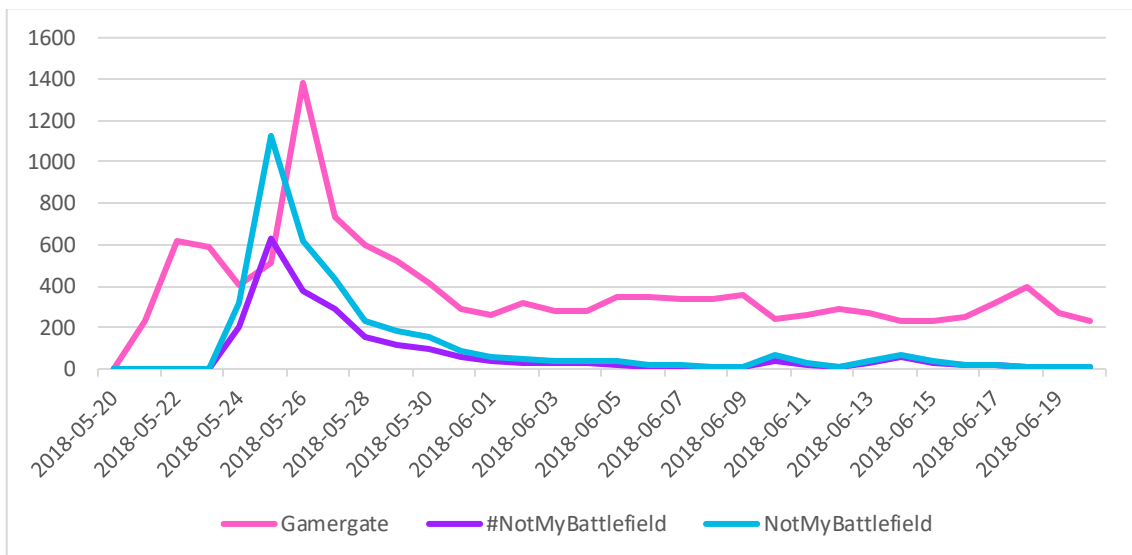
Figure 4. Daily frequency of terms included in Tweets, 2018-05-20 until 2018-06-20

Mirroring what is shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, Figure 4 reveals that Gamergate, #NotMyBattlefield and NotMyBattlefield all followed similar daily frequency curves on Twitter, following the trailer's release. The fact that Gamergate outweighs both the other terms indicates that, beyond being a campaign focused on a specific issue, #NotMyBattlefield also incited a more extensive discussion and interest on the topic of Gamergate.

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5.1 Presentation of Content Analysis

The following section presents key findings from the content analysis. Firstly, statistics from the total population of data is presented and explained. Following that, findings and analyses that help answer the research question are presented, along with illustrative examples. The analysis was continuously conducted in dialogue with theoretical perspectives.
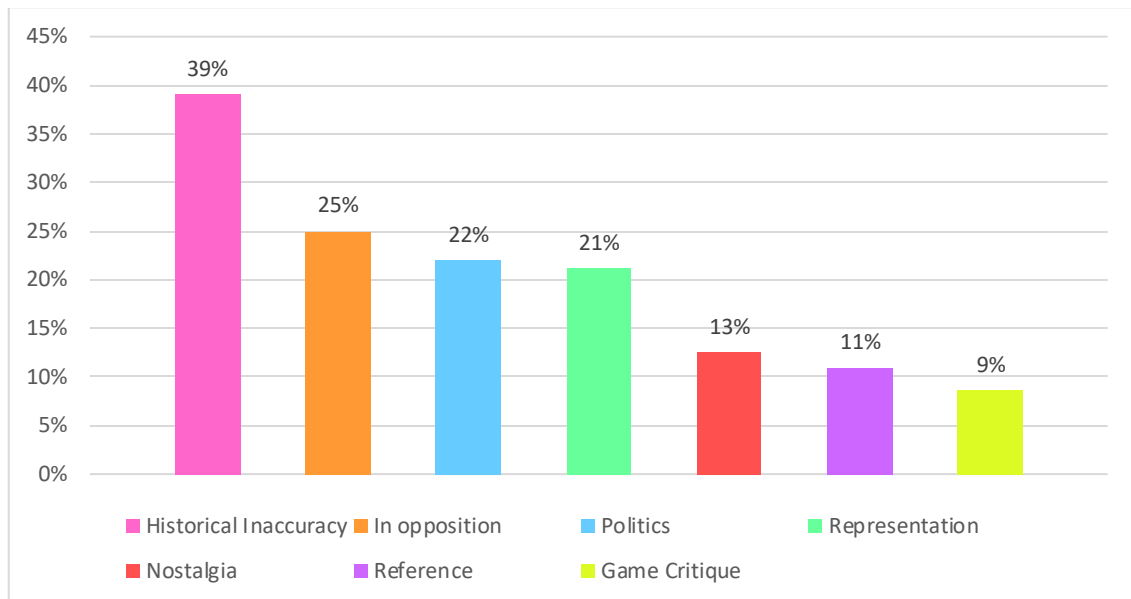
Figure 5. Graph showing distribution per each major theme in percentages

As shown in Figure 5, 39% of the Tweets (n=602) expressed claims of historical inaccuracy. So far, this is in line with the reporting of previous research, as is the 21% (n=326) which explicitly expressed concerns regarding the game's choice of representation or inclusion (Howe et al., 2018). What has not reported, however, is the frequent referencing to and opposing of contemporary politics (n=340). Since the least frequently represented theme, at 9%, is actual critique of the game's aesthetics and gameplay (n=132), there are strong indications that the campaign's primary concern is not rooted in gaming itself, only manifested within gaming culture.

5.1.1 Historical Inaccuracy and Representation

Out of the 602 Tweets that made claims of historical inaccuracy, 46% (n=274) alluded to this being due to the inclusion of women. Furthermore, out of the 326 Tweets that expressed concerns regarding inclusion, 75% (n=244) was explicitly concerned with the

inclusion of a female character. The following Tweet exemplifies this rhetoric: "Just watched the @Battlefield V trailer. Saw a female soldier and instantly disliked the game for being historically inaccurate and putting 3rd wave feminist and sjw moments in the game trailer. Sorry but I'm gonna throw up some hashtags. #NotMyBattlefield #EA #FuckEA"

This is in several ways similar to researchers recount of the derogatory discourse around Gamergate directed especially toward women promoting progressive and inclusive ideals within gaming and the gaming industry (Buyukozturk et al., 2018, p. 595; Poland, 2016, p. 141; Todd, 2015, p. 65). In the case of Gamergate and Alt-Right, researchers suggest that what is said could be made up veneers and misleading rhetorics, used to hide true intentions. An example of this from Gamergate is the phrase "Actually, it's about ethics in games journalism" (Buyukozturk et al., 2018, p. 595; Poland, 2016, p. 144). This does raise the question if the apparent concern regarding historical accuracy is the real issue, or if the phrase is used to disguise the campaign as being rooted in something it is not.

One of the tactics that the Alt-Right employs is the use of deliberate ambiguity when conveying messages online. This ensures that readers never can be quite sure whether or not they are serious in what is being said or joked about (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 7). It also allows users to distance and disassociate themselves from vulgarities while still pushing the movement's agenda (2017, p. 11). Greene (2019, p. 50) argues that the Alt-Right's use of ambiguity demonstrates that there are levels of complexity one must consider when analysing content produced by the group.

A suggested lens of viewing and analysing content produced by the Alt-Right is through the adherence of what is known as Poe's Law. Poe's Law dictates that determining the difference between extremism and satire in online discussions is impossible, which makes intent impossible to make out (Greene, 2019, p. 49; Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 7). While though Poe's law original intent revolves around the inability to differentiate between satire and seriousness online, it has been helpful in this analysis by providing a way of approaching content possibly produced by the Alt-Right. For instance, the following Tweet: "Transgender Womans In WW2 WRONG #notmybattlefield" might be read as either a serious concern regarding the inclusion of transgender characters in the game, a mocking of those who find it concerning, or even an attempt to generate a response from those who would find the Tweet offensive. The misspelling and lack of correct grammar

could indicate this Tweet being satirical or an attempt at trolling. Trolling is a term referring to online activities designed to provoke a response from a target, or group of targets, without the target understanding the "troll's" alleged intention. It is similar to the "just joking" defence of disparaging humour. It is yet another way to distance oneself and reject responsibility for any ideological implications of one's actions (Greene, 2019, p. 48). However, Greene (2019, p. 50) concludes by stating that individual intentions are far less significant than the social consequences actions may bring. Thus, this analysis does not try to determine intent or read between the lines to attempt to make out what is actually being said.

In the case of this study, apparent concerns expressed regarding historical accuracy, representation, or the state of modern politics will, therefore, be understood as concern regarding just that.

Koulouris explains (2018, p. 755) that members of the Alt-Right have claimed oppressed status and occupy positions of exceptional confidence as they attack the liberal or progressive left, which in their view has facilitated the success of feminism, political correctness and identity politics, over the notion of white western masculinity. Without a proper justification for their belief system, the movement is fearful of a future where white masculinity may not secure them the same privilege as it once did (Bergman, 2018, p. 2). Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 18) strengthen this argument by suggesting that fear is expressed toward progressives challenging traditional gender roles; the emasculation of men, which is linked to notions of traditional masculinity. A central belief is that men and boys are at risk of marginalisation and in need of defence (2017, p. 15). This is in line with the study by Howe et al. (2018, p. 2503) which suggests that #NotMyBattlefield is rooted in questions of traditional gender roles and gamer-identity.

To understand what gamer identity is, it is necessary to understand its predecessor – the geek identity. Blodgett (2020, p. 185) suggest that this identity was developed in the 1980s as a way for producers and marketers to capitalise on a specific type of consumer – tech-savvy and socially inept white men (Howe et al., 2018, p. 2498). It was an alternative pathway, through technological knowledge, to masculine identification (Salter, 2018, p. 250). The geek identity is often associated with being bullied or disliked by peers, especially women. They felt like they were entitled to hobbies marketed as part of that identity, such as, comics and video games. These media became strongly

associated with their primary consumer, the geek. This ecology formed an environment where these consumers felt control and authority over the different franchises since their existence is based on their money and engagement. The combination of being disliked by women and an identity based on media consumption, formed the roots of Gamergate (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Salter, 2018, p. 247).

Research suggests that the Alt-Right fear the emasculation of men, which is brought on by feminism (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 18). Furthermore, research suggests that Gamergate was rooted in an identity which is based on a closed media ecology, governed by men who is stereotypically disliked by women. Salter (2018, p. 248) argues that it is a masculine impulse to defend technologies, such as video games, from perceived intrusion by women and diverse audiences. Which in turn, he argues, illustrate the fragility of the geek identity and its reliance on unequal forms of technological hegemony. This might help in understanding why a substantial part (n=274) of the sample, explicitly expressed concerns regarding the inclusion of a strong female character in the trailer.

According to Poland (2016, p. 132) the tactics of MRA's and the Alt-Right follow a particular pattern online: identification of a problem, followed by deliberate obscuring of its true cause, presentation of altered information or lies, as well as ignoring complex web of factors that may be in play. This pattern can be applied to the #NotMyBattlefield campaign in the following way: The identified problem being the inclusion of a playable female character; its true cause being fear of women invading male spaces; altered information in stating that the campaign's cause stems in concerns regarding historical accuracy; as well as ignoring opposing claims that women actually did partake in WWII. This is not necessarily a pattern that is universally applicable to every aspect of the campaign but does help in situating efforts made in a sequential series of steps.

Altogether, the Alt-Right's protection of traditional gender roles and Gamergates roots in gamer-identity, indicates that the #NotMyBattlefield campaign may be understood as a continued expression of Gamergate and Alt-Right ideologies.

5.1.2 Anti-SJW Rhetoric

22% (n=340) expressed resentment or hostility toward cotemporary politics with more than half (n=221) of those using either the phrase SJW or a form of political correctness. The first main characteristic trait of Alt-Right rhetoric is contempt for SJWs and liberal activists (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 28). Several Tweets (n=51) also explicitly expressed contempt toward feminism, using terms such as "feminazi" and the hashtag #feminismiscancer. The following Tweets exemplifies the ideologically charged rhetoric, which was commonly found:

> "It should spawn fear and questioning as to why Battlefield 5 would adandon a factual WW2 setting for an artificial; forcibly racialised; censored; PC SJW cess pool teaching this post-modernist ideology that is the cancer of this generation. #NotMyBattlefield"

> "#BattlefieldV looks like straight up SJW trash. A woman with a fucking prosthetic arm sliding around and spitting one liners in world fucking war 2? Forced political agenda! Wouldnt be surprised if they put Idris Elba as Hitler for "diversity". #NotMyBattlefield"

Research suggests that the Alt-Right members engaged in Gamergate were made up of young, white men who felt they were being disenfranchised by political correctness when SJWs aggressively were invading their space, making demands and pushing their political agenda (Blodgett, 2020, p. 191; Greene, 2019, p. 58; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3). In an interview with Gamasutra on June 11, 2018, chief creative officer at EA, Patrick Söderlund had the following to say about the trailers backlash:

> These are people who are uneducated—they don't understand that this is a plausible scenario, and listen: this is a game. And today gaming is gender-diverse, like it hasn't been before. There are a lot of female people who want to play, and male players who want to play as a badass [woman].

> And we don't take any flak. We stand up for the cause, because I think those people who don't understand it, well, you have two choices: either accept it or don't buy the game. I'm fine with either or. It's just not ok. (Gamasutra, 2018)

This statement sparked further outrage, which can be seen in this Tweet: "#notmybattlefield I am too "uneducated" to buy Battlefield Vagina. Until they remove

women and make an official apology stand together and Boycott Battlefield 5! Only 7% of women play First-Person Shooters. Get Woke Go Broke!" Reactions such as this one further strengthens the relationship between theory on the Alt-Right and the #NotMyBattlefield campaign.

Placing this all together within the circumstances previously explained, regarding SJWs aggressively pushing an agenda, and bearing in mind the geek-identity and associated attitudes toward women. It is clear to see how Söderlund can be perceived as the aggressive SJW in this case, explicitly stating that it is a cause that they are standing up for.

A rhetoric argument employed by Gamergate proponents was the use of ableist mental health labels in attempts to discredit feminist and anti-racist critique (Crooks & Magnet, 2018). Ableism refers to discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, and social oppression toward people with disabilities (Bogart & Dunn, 2019, p. 651). In the case of Gamergate, advocates employed ableist logic by mobilizing the label of Narcissistic Personality Disorder to exclude those interested in social justice from the gamer identity, which according to Crooks and Magnet (2018) is typical of the Alt-Right, and can be understood as an extension of a historical relationship between disability rhetoric and institutional oppression. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the 7% (n=104) of Tweets, which explicitly referred to the female character's prosthetic arm in a demeaning manner, exemplified by the following Tweets:

> "No; the biggest thing is the woman's missing hand and nationality.Instead of giving credit where it is due they made her British and gave her a prosthetic arm; that for me especially breaks the immersion on max. A freaking prosthetic up to and above the elbow!!!#notmybattlefield"

> "Who else remembers that time in WW2 when a bunch of disabled lesbian women with robot arms; wielding Katanas killed all those black Nazis? Yeah nobody #NotMyBattlefield Quit rewriting history for political reasons."

While the ableist logic employed during Gamergate referred to mental health and the one found in conjunction referring to physical ability, it still demonstrates similarities in being used as attempts to exclude and discredit due to level of ability.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that out of the 340 Tweets mentioning or expressing hostility toward contemporary politics, only 1% (n=4) expressed actual critique of the game itself, in terms of aesthetics and gameplay. This correlates with Poland's (2016, p. 157) suggestion that the Gamergate movements concerns have moved away from gaming itself and has more to do with anything SJW related.

It is important to note that the analysis of the data does not point at any tangible connections that can be made between the #NotMyBattlefield and the Alt-Right. Nevertheless, there are strong indications of a relationship made in terms of similarities in rhetoric and shared concerns.

5.1.3 Opposition and Attention

In the campaign's first month, in terms of frequency, claims of historical inaccuracies were only matched by the campaign's opposition, see Figure 6. As of writing, however, the Tweets opposing or ridiculing the campaign makes up 25% (n=386) of the total sample (n=1543). The campaign seemingly generated equal outrage from the opposing side, with Tweets such as: "I deeply hope all the people who says #NotMyBattlefield will have their nazi ugly face crushed by a girl with a hook holding a cricket bat." and "#NotMyBattlefield is bullshitWOMEN DIED IN COMABT POSITIONS IN WORLD WAR TWO DO THE RESEARCH DO THE RESEARCHDO THE RESEARCHHISTORY MATTERS."
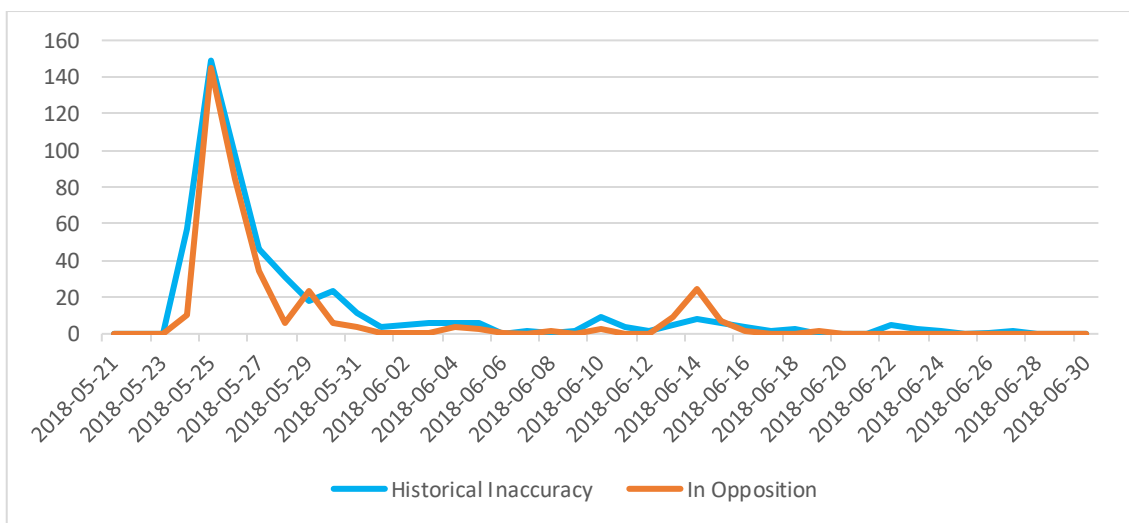

Figure 6. Graph showing comparison of the two major thematic patterns during the campaign's first month

What is worth pointing out is that at certain points in time, the surrounding opposing buzz generated by the campaign supersedes the campaign itself. Furthermore, searching for the hashtag on Google generates over 18'000 results (Google, 2020c), which by far outweighs the number of times it has been included in a Tweet, which is around 3,100 times. Research suggests that the Alt-Right has developed techniques known as "attention hacking" to increase notoriety through strategic targeting, use of social media and coordinated raids on the attention economy (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 42). Social media, and the internet as a whole is an attention economy where that which attracts the most attention is regarded as most valuable. If a hoax or coordinated attack generates enough buzz, smaller news outlets might pick up on it. If done well, the story may work its way up the attention-ladder (2017, p. 39). For the Alt-Right, it does not matter if the outlet reporting on the story aims to debunk or dismiss it. As long as they have covered it in the first place, they have succeeded. This is similar to the tactic's researchers have argued that Gamergaters employed. The movements utilised algorithms and the way news cycles and sensationalism works to provide their cause with the desired spotlight (Blodgett, 2020, p. 187; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 10)

 In the case of the #NotMyBattlefield, the campaign was reported on by several big outlets such as Metro, BBC, and The Verge (BBC, 2018; Metro, 2018; Verge, 2018a). Which means if the goal would have been to merely generate media attention, it succeeded.

5.2 Mapping the #NotMyBattlefield campaign

Accurately pinpointing the start of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign is somewhat problematic. From the data extracted from Twitter, it would seem as the hashtag saw the light of day in the following Tweet: "Whenever devs realise that we dont mind one game in the past but don't want 2-3 IN A ROW then we will have decent games again @Battlefield #Notmybattlefield." However, the extracted data does not account for deleted Tweets or Tweets from private accounts. It could also be the case that the hashtag was initiated on a different social media website altogether. Though for the sake of this study, this Tweet is accredited as the first instance of the hashtag on Twitter (**B**). The Tweet was posted just a few hours after the trailers launch on May 23, 2018 (**A**). The hashtag was then used over 700 times in its first 24 hours.

The most prominent media sources featured along the hashtag is a website called One Angry Gamer. The authors of the website proclaim to be anti-politically correct and "…a news and information site with a bit of a snappy edge and unbridled snark" (One Angry Gamer, 2020). The 23 Tweets linking to the website has accumulated 1218 likes, 399 Retweets and 199 replies. The first Tweet posted three hours the trailers launch is from the official One Angry Gamer account (**E**). The Tweet is a link to an article titled "Battlefield V Has Gone Full SJW And Gamers Hate It, Spawning #NotMyBattlefield" and sits at 193 likes and 41 Retweets. The article chronicles the events spawning the hashtag with the quote:

> DICE and Electronic Arts have managed to get gamers to start trending #NotMyBattlefield. The upcoming first-person shooter's first gameplay trailer makes it a priority focus put the point across that DICE has gone full SJW. The developer has made forced diversity one of the main promotional elements of the game, and repeatedly shoving in player's faces that they've been listening heavily to the corrupt, anti-gaming media outlets who are intent on destroying the interactive entertainment medium. (OneAngryGamer, 2018a)

The article mirrors much of the same rhetoric found in the content analysis, though it does not make a clear stance of being either pro or anti the campaign.

Shortly after the trailer was published, a thread was started on 4chan's /pol/ board (**C**) with the title "DISLIKE THE HELL OF THIS BATTLEFIELD V SJW GARBAGE" (4chan, 2018a). Urging users to "RAPE THE DISLIKE BUTTON NOW" and making the statement "FUCK YOU EA, FUCK YOU DICE SWEDISH KEKS, WE WILL DESTROY YOU." The thread accumulated 217 posts, most expressing profoundly offensive, racist and misogynistic language, such as the following "This whole presentation probably was one of the biggest insult to the whole white race that I've ever seen, it's REALLY extremely sickening." While the interest of 4chan users does connect the campaign to Gamergate and the Alt-Right, this thread does not display the same organisation and planning that was previously reported on (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24; Poland, 2016, p. 156). However, a thread posted two hours later, on May 24th does (**D**).

"OPERATION DONNER STURM" is the title of the post, (4chan, 2018b). The original poster urges users to "rise up again" and "prepare a massive raid against every single

platform." The user explains the strategy in four steps: massive downvotes on each platform; raiding every board; recruit cheaters to join the cause in order to "kill" the game online; give as many bad reviews as possible. The user concludes the post by stating "Let's kill the game and the leftist agenda once and for all #NotMyBattlefield #Wamenfield." The thread did, on the other hand, only garner ten replies, most seemingly unenthusiastic. Despite met with tepid enthusiasm, this does indicate that as with Gamergate, gaming was appropriated to push a political agenda (Greene, 2019, p. 34; Salter, 2018, p. 248). However, no change or irregularities in activity levels within any of the identified themes can be inferred to these posts.

The second most prominent media source that emerged from the data is an article (**F**) from The Verge (The Verge, 2018a). The article strongly opposes the campaign, stating that its "laughable" to think that any modern video game based on war is historically accurate. The article goes on to post examples of women actually involved in WWII. The article generated 1100 likes and 335 Retweets on Twitter. The increased awareness of the campaign from this article might be one of the reasons for the spike in Tweets opposing it early on, as seen in Figure 6.

On May 25th Oskar Gabrielson, general manager at DICE posted a series of Tweets (Twitter, 2018) opposing the backlash and claims of historical inaccuracy (**G**). In the Tweets, he stated that the Battlefield franchise has always been about playing the way 'you' want and that the option to play as a female character is here to stay. Gabrielson concluded his statement with the hashtag #everyonesbattlefield (Twitter, 2018b). This did not go unnoticed by members of the campaign and was subsequently only met with further opposition and ridicule.

A minor spike (**H**) in frequency increase, occurred on June 9th after the EA Play conference at E3 2018. Here the first new information about the game was revealed since the trailers launch, which was met with some critique from the campaign. However, the statistics from the YouTube videos which hosted this reveal indicates something else. Both IGN and Gamespot's videos sit at around 1 million views each, and what is notable here is the like to dislike ratio. On IGN's video, the ratio is 13,810 to 5,411(YouTube, 2018b) and on Gamespot's video, it is 16,731 to 2,575 (YouTube, 2018c). Compared to the original trailer, which has a ratio of 351,000 to 543,000, this is a remarkable turn-around. This indicates that the strategy described on 4chan to "kill" the game through

dislikes either does not apply to these trailers or the campaign and its proponents, at this point, lacked the motivation to act in opposition.

The Verge (The Verge, 2018b) posted a follow-up article on June 12th (**I**), covering the interview with Patrick Söderlund (Gamasutra, 2018) where he referred to members of the campaign as "uneducated" and telling them to "either accept it or don't buy the game." The Tweet in which this article was linked generated 225 likes and 65 Retweets, which might explain the second spike in Tweets opposing the hashtag mid-June, see Figure 6. This was the end of the initial outrage surrounding the trailer and the campaign.

The campaign had laid low until August 14th (**J**), when Söderlund announced his resignation from DICE (Polygon, 2018). This event was celebrated by the campaign, who saw this as redemption for him calling them uneducated. Five days later (**K**), One Angry Gamer posted a Tweet linking to an article titled "Angry Joe Gets Lambasted By Gamers For Misrepresenting Battlefield V Controversy" (One Angry Gamer, 2018b). The article explains how popular YouTuber "Angry Joe" has come under fire for apparently misrepresenting the campaign in a video. The Tweet generated 344 likes and 90 Retweets. The combination of Söderlund's resignation and the scolding of "Angry Joe" is why there was a slight spike in the use of the hashtag, mid to late august, see Figure 7.

The final event related to the #NotMyBattlefield campaign was the release of the game on November 20th (**L**) with a minor increase in activity a few days later. The topic of the Tweets posted around this time mostly revolved around the actual game itself.

No inferences or connections to 8chan or the subreddit Kotaku In Action could be made from the mapping. Both these websites were reportedly organisational centres during Gamergate (Poland, 2016, p. 155; Salter, 2018, p. 251), but does not seem to have played noteworthy roles in the #NotMyBattlefield campaign.

Table 3. *The #NotMyBattlefield campaign chronologically*

| Label	Event	N=	Date
A	Trailer Launch	0	2018-05-23 21:27
B	First instance of #NotMyBattlefield	1	2018-05-23 22:10
C	4chan thread #1	2	2018-05-23 22:39
D	4chan thread #2	115	2018-05-24 00:14
E	One Angry Gamer Article #1	131	2018-05-24 00:29
F	The Verge article	540	2018-05-24 16:31
G	Gabrielson launches #everyonesbattlefield	1,082	2018-05-25 17:53
H	Battlefield 5 showcase at E3	2,120	2018-06-09 21:00
I	The Verge article on Söderlund's interview	2,191	2018-06-12 18:04
J	Söderlund's resignation	2,466	2018-08-14 13:43
K	One Angry Gamer Article #2	2,498	2018-08-20 02:34
L	Battlefield 5 launch	2,837	2018-11-20 00:00
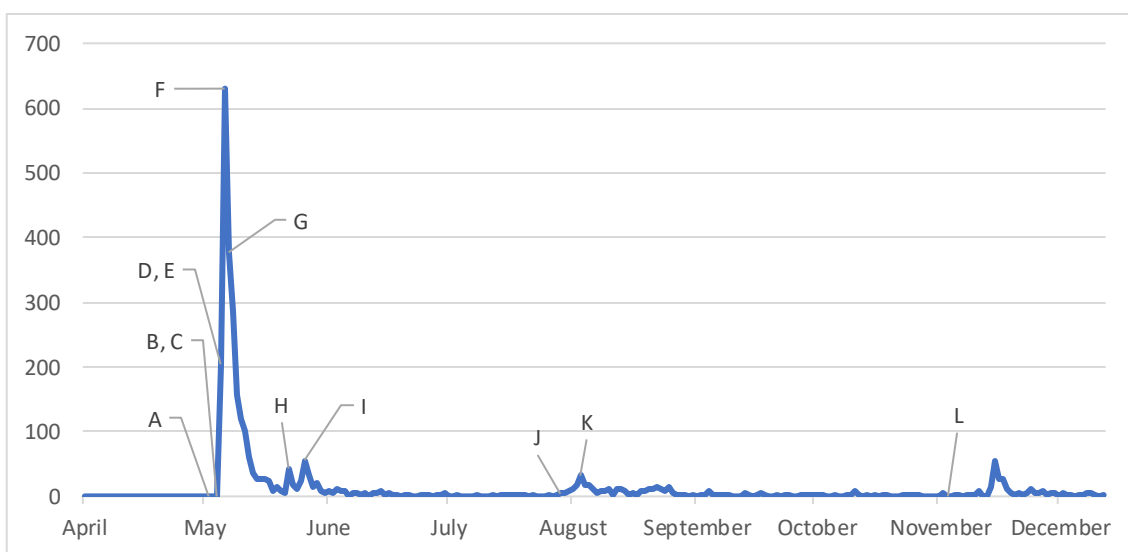
Figure 7. Daily frequency in use of #NotMyBattlefield on Twitter in 2018.

What the mapping shows is that the #NotMyBattlefield campaign was largely reactionary, only gaining traction and increased activity as a response to outside events. At no point in time did the content analysis and mapping show any indications of the campaign sustaining itself despite lack of outside encouragement or motivation to act or react.

The campaign quickly reached its peak influence and notoriety in the days immediate the release of the trailer and for the most part, died out just as fast. 75% (n=2,359) of the Tweets made in conjunction with the hashtag was posted within a month of the campaign's inception. In the months following, small increases in activity would occur when a media outlet would report on something related to the campaign or when something directly connected to the game happened. Nevertheless, as with the initial outrage, these increases in activity dwindled just as fast as they appeared.

It is worth noting that the campaign only showed increased activity in relation to specific media outlets, most notably the Verge and One Angry Gamer. However, no inferences can be drawn to major outlets, such as BBC or Metro's reporting on the topic. Research suggests that one of the goals of organised raids during Gamergate was to get major news outlets to report on the movement (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 42). In the case of #NotMyBattlefield, no proponent of the campaign could be found either mentioning or referring to this happening. This indicates that on this point, Gamergate and #NotMyBattlefield differs.

5.3 Failure as a Hashtag-Based Campaign

Reviewing the media sources related to the #NotMyBattlefield hashtag reveals that the campaign initially generated considerable attention. What research suggest is that the purpose of this type of activity is to get a reaction (Bergman, 2018, p. 3), which it succeeded to do. With Gabrielson and Söderlund from DICE, both taking firm stands against the campaign (Gamasutra, 2018; Twitter, 2018), as well as major media outlets, such as Metro, BBC and the Verge reporting on it (BBC, 2018; Metro, 2018; The Verge, 2018a). However, the initial outrage and loyalty to the campaign died out rather soon after its conception. A month after the start of the campaign, less than six Tweets were posted per day, and a month after that, that number was down to zero, see Figure 7. The hashtag only gained some newfound momentum when prolific websites reported on anything related to the campaign, be it positive or negative.

The campaign fits in with Clark's (2016, p. 1) description of 'hashtag activism' – a vast number of users protesting an issue using hashtags. It allowed for the gathering of multiple viewpoints on the same topic, and users were able to connect to a like-minded audience (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019, p. 1991). During Gamergate, members work together to manipulate Twitter's trending topics with repeated use of specific hashtags (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, pp. 26-35). In the case of #NotMyBattlefield, this behaviour was encouraged by users on 4chan. They set out on a goal to "kill the game and the leftist agenda once and for all" (4chan, 2018b).

In February 2019, EA stated that the game's sales failed to meet expectations, with 7.3 million units sold in the first two months, which was 1 million less than expected. The publisher blamed marketing, development delays and a highly competitive market for this failure (Variety, 2019). While, from the publisher's perspective, this might be perceived as a failure, the goal of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign to "kill" the game, is arguably a more significant failure.

In the case of Gamergate eventual demise, Buyukozturk et al. (2018, p. 598), attributes this to failure in achieving consensus and coherent framing, which in turn decentralized the movement (2018, p. 601). Similar factors might have contributed to the failure and short lifespan of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. As evident from the content analysis, apart from the claim of historical inaccuracies, there were few coherent viewpoints and no overarching consensus on what the campaign's main issue was. Moreover, within those claiming historical inaccuracy, 46% (n=274) stated this being due to the inclusion of a female character, and 54% (n=328) presenting diverging viewpoints.

Despite Gamergate's ultimate disintegration, for a while, it was a considerably successful harassment campaign. According to Marwick and Lewis (2017, pp. 8-9), three particular tactics can be attributed to the success of Gamergate: Organized brigades, networked and agile groups as well as retrograde populism.

Organized brigade is the process in which collectives engage in cooperative efforts to harm their victims. People worked together to plan and execute raids, hoaxes, and harassment. The planning had been done in plain sight, and the success or failure was discussed on the same platforms that hosted the planning. This was evident, from the issue mapping, to be the case with #NotMyBattlefield as well, which was encouraged and, in some manners, planned on 4chan. However, the post urging for this organization did only

receive ten replies. So, while there were indications of organizational efforts, the brigade was weak in numbers. This is possibly due to the narrow scope of the campaign.

Networked groups: Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 9) suggest that Gamergate shows that groups with different sorts of ideological conflicts and beliefs – such as white supremacy, anti-feminism, conservatism or just being a fan of video game – can and will come together to fight for a common cause. What the exact ideologies of those engaged in the #NotMyBattlefield were is beyond the scope of this study to determine. Nevertheless, what the content analysis showed was that users with different agendas did gather around the hashtag to fight for a common cause. However, as previously stated, the campaign did fail in broadcasting and achieving consensus on what the core underlying issue behind the cause was.

Retrograde populism: Lastly, Marwick and Lewis (2017, p. 9) explain that members of Gamergate assert that feminism and progressive causes are trying to stifle free speech. Their actions are painted out to be a reaction to what they perceive as the domination of multiculturalism and the rise of feminism. This also became evident from the content analysis, with 22% expressing disdain for contemporary politics and the way it is perceived to be affecting gaming culture.

What this shows is that the campaign, to a certain extent, did employ the same tactics which enabled Gamergate to succeed, yet it did not. What is different from Gamergate, on the other hand, is the way harassment and abuse were carried out and received. A key characteristic of Gamergate was the harassment of real people, especially women (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Todd, 2015, p. 65) and their responses and reaction was what fueled Gamergaters enthusiasm and engagement. Poland (2016, pp. 125-126) explains this using the concept of autotelic activity. Autotelic activity involves engaging in the same action repeatedly while simultaneously escalating aspects of the activity as well as receiving feedback that encourages certain behaviours. The harassment may start off rather mild, but when a group repeatedly encourages each other's actions, more severe types of abuse will become rewarded, which leads to the sort of abuse reported from the victims of Gamergate. The process has been described as a type of game by its proponents. This is highlighted by their sense of immersion and timelessness when putting in hours of work in planning raids, doxing, and harassment of women.

This kind of behavioural pattern was not detected in the analysis of the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. This could be due to, unlike Gamergate, there was no single person at which the harassment could be aimed. This meant that individual reactions and responses could not be observed, which in turn resulted in a lack of encouraging feedback for those engaging in the abuse. When DICE and their employees no longer responded to the critique, the campaign came to a halt.

6. Conclusion

In light of this study, the #NotMyBattlefield campaign does, in certain ways, bare resemblance to Gamergate. The most telling sign is the indications of the Alt-Right's involvement. What the content analysis revealed is that 22% (n=340) of the Tweets explicitly referred to progressive or left-wing politics in a critiquing manner, using phrases such as "feminazi" and "SJW crap." According to research, this is the same kind of rhetoric and critical stance to political correctness that is characteristic of the Alt-Right. Furthermore, of those 22 %, only 1% (n=4) expressed any sort of critique of the game, indicating that with the actual game is not where their concern lies. Similarly, out of the 21% (n=326) opposing the trailer's choice of inclusion and who was represented, only 2% (n=6) expressed any critique of other parts of the game's aesthetics, features or gameplay.

Furthermore, the most significant thematic overlap, excluding the theme regarding historical inaccuracy, is between the theme regarding contemporary politics and the one opposing inclusion. With 27% (n=63) of the latter theme making explicit statements critical of feminism, SJWs and political correctness. This further illustrates the campaign's similarities to Gamergate, where members pushed back against SJWs, claiming they were invading and ruing their culture with feminism and political correctness, only to push a political agenda (Blodgett, 2020, p. 191; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3)

Another clear indication of the Alt-Right's involvement is the posts made on 4chan's /pol/ board, which is one of the common denominators within research on the Alt-Right and Gamergate (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Greene, 2019, p. 36; Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24; Poland, 2016, p. 124; Todd, 2015, p. 64). The threads on 4chan regarding #NotMyBattlefield expressed similar anti-SJW rhetoric, disdain for multiculturalism and

bitterness toward feminism as reportedly used by the Alt-Right (Bergman, 2018, p. 2; Marwick and Lewis, 2017, p. 28). Furthermore, one of the threads, titled "Operation Donner Strum" displayed an explicit attempt to organize and strategically attack the game. This is the same kind of organizational efforts and planning that has been reported on the Alt-Right (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 24; Poland, 2016, p. 156). Nevertheless, "Operation Donner Strum" was met with very mild excitement, generating no more than ten replies.

The campaign also employed similar tactics to the ones used during Gamergate – organized brigades, networked groups, and retrograde populism. However, only in terms of execution were these campaigns similar, in levels of success is where the differences between the two campaigns become the most apparent. Gamergate as a campaign found its success in longevity and outside support, something which was lacking in the #NotMyBattlefield campaign. What the issue mapping shows is that the campaign was remarkably short-lived. Only minor increases in activity were seen when outside media reported on the topic, which just as quickly diminished.

Furthermore, when it comes to the campaign's set out goal - to force DICE to go back on their decision to include women as playable characters by boycotting the game - no changes were made by the developers in response to this critique. The game shipped with the option still featured and sold over 7.3 million units in its first two months.

An important aspect where the #NotMyBattlefield campaign differs from Gamergate and the Alt-Right is the lack of reported abuse and harassment of women and minorities. According to Bergman (2018, p. 3), the Alt-Right employ harassment techniques such as doxing, swatting and gaslighting as a means to abuse and intimidate people online. No signs of any of these techniques can be seen from the analysed data, nor can any signs of the rape and death threats which occurred during Gamergate (Blodgett, 2020, p. 185; Todd, 2015, p. 64).

So, how then can we understand online engagement in #NotMyBattlefield as an online harassment campaign and a continuation of the Gamergate controversy?

Certain aspects of the #NotMyBattlefield are arguably expressions of Alt-Right ideologies and attempts to further a political agenda. In its use of anti-SJW and anti-feminist rhetorics, this is the most apparent. An evident conservative and excluding stance is made within gaming and gaming culture. Members of the campaign express an

unmistakable desire to keep political correctness out of gaming, which in their view is an attempt to revise history. This is the same logic adhered to by proponents of Gamergate, who saw SJWs as agenda pushers with intent to ruin gaming culture (Blodgett, 2020, p. 191; O'Donnell, 2019, p. 3). Hence, this means that in terms of ideological motivation, #NotMyBattlefield can be understood as a continuation of Gamergate and an expression of Alt-Right rhetorics.

However, this is where the similarities end. 75% (n= 2,389) of the Tweets on the topic of #NotMyBattlefield had been posted within a month of the start of the campaign. Between the few events and articles which provided the campaign with new vigour, the daily average frequency of Tweets including the hashtag ranged between zero and six. The campaign seems to have lacked both the momentum and the motivation needed to sustain itself from the very beginning. Perhaps this is due to the narrowness of the cause to exclude women from a specific game. Gamergate had a more universally engaging goal regarding ethics in gaming journalism, and a unified cause to combat feminism and political correctness.

#NotMyBattlefield may have been too anchored in gaming and a specific instance of a particular issue within gaming to garner the support of the entire Alt-Right, prominent Alt-Right figures and the gaming community as a whole. One of the reasons why Gamergate became a success was because it received support beyond gaming, with online personalities such as Milo Yiannopolous and Phil Mason capitalizing upon the controversy (Salter, 2018, pp. 254-255).

It could also be the case that it was not a justifiable or convincing enough cause to gain proper support. What the content analysis and mapping showed was that the cause was quickly met with vast opposition and ridicule. Furthermore, the developers took a firm early stance opposing the campaign, stating that the option to play as a female character was there to stay (Gamasutra, 2018; Twitter, 2018). It is possible that this depleted many of the campaign's members motivation to continue the fight.

All in all, the online engagement in the #NotMyBattlefield campaign manifested itself as a reactionary and mostly passive response to what was perceived as an attempt to revise history as a result of a politically correct agenda. The campaign can certainly be understood as a continuation of Gamergate. This study indicates that Gamergate and the ideologies associated by no means has perished. In the absence of a controversy, it is

merely lingering, waiting to strike and call to action by the slightest notion of SJWs or feminism interfering with gaming culture. Which reveals the #NotMyBattlefield campaign to be a manifestation of a politicised gaming culture.

This thesis has provided a case study of the online campaign #NotMyBattlefield. What the study shows is how Gamergate can lie dormant and instantly mobilize and act against a perceived issue. However, it also shows just how quickly it may disappear again. The study's finding suggests that the campaign followed the following structure: An immediate call to action in response to an event or perceived issue; flooding of social media in order to make the cause and campaign known, this is done by deliberately spamming a hashtag to get it trending and by actively disliking the subject where applicable to distort the ratio in the campaign's favour; followed by media reporting on the topic and response from developers; members of the campaign responding to the media reporting; developers making one final statement opposing the campaign; further response from the proponents; no more response from neither the media or developers, at which point the campaign mostly came to a halt.

This study also offers an example of how members of the Alt-Right can appropriate a seemingly gaming-related issue. It reveals how the #NotMyBattlefield campaign was a successful attempt to politicise video games and gaming culture. It shows how attempts can be made to disguise a campaign as a legitimate issue, while in fact, it is an attempt to push an anti-SJW and anti-feminist agenda. Furthermore, this is also worthy of concern as the campaign rises to prominence and gain the interest of mainstream media. Mainstream media then offers the Alt-Right with significant opportunities to frame current issues, set agendas and spread messages to a larger, more diverse audience (Lewis & Marwick, 2017, p. 18).

As the Alt-Right refines their media manipulation literacy and continuously recruit new members, they grow to become a force of global significance (Salter, 2018, p. 259). There is a need for research to address this topic from more angles in order to be able to explain and understand the politicisation of gaming properly. Much of the research on Gamergate and the alt-right is done from the outside, disconnected from the involved actors. There is a lack of research that engages first-hand with these movements. While scholars have been reported to sustain abuse and harassment during Gamergate (Todd, 2015, p. 65), interviews and inside-reports would allow for further insight on the motivations and

ideologies present. Research should also address how these movements and campaigns may be perceived by other members of gaming communities, not aligned with the expressed beliefs and ideologies. Previous research (Howe et al., 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 8) and this thesis demonstrate an excluding and regressive subsection of actors present within gaming culture. It would, therefore, be of interest to study how this possibly affects those whom these movements aim to exclude.

Research should also focus on how the politicisation of gaming affects the development of games and the industry at large. There are questions present regarding how these phenomena possibly affect publishing, production, and communities. It would also be of interest to examine measures taken by developers to address or circumvent campaigns such as #NotMyBattlefield. Addressing such factors would allow further research to examine the effectiveness of both the campaign's themselves, as well as the preventative measures.

As the gaming industry has, in terms of global revenue, grown to be larger than both the movie and music industry combined (Forbes, 2019; Ejinsight, 2019), there is a need to consider gaming as a global cultural establishment – and address it accordingly. While gaming has not been free from public scrutiny, research needs to continuously assess and study the socio-political aspects of this industry and culture critically.

Gaming culture, much like any other culture, is not apolitical and reflects the ideologies of actors involved (Crooks & Magnet, 2018). Examining these different facets of gaming culture – the motivations of those engaging in campaigns, how it affects and is perceived by the rest of the communities and developers, and gaming's intrinsic position within contemporary culture – could facilitate research aiming to understand what it means to be a gamer and part of gaming culture, as well as gaming's role and position in society.

Beyond providing an understanding of how Gamergate can manifest itself post the events in 2014, this thesis also argues for the Alt-Rights capability to appropriate a controversy as a means to push political agendas. This indicates the potential of this phenomena to reoccur within other facets of society as well. It would, therefore, be of interest of future research to study other instances where Gamergate and the Alt-Right may have manifested itself, beyond gaming.

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Appendix A

Codebook

A HIS: Claiming, mentioning, or referring to historical inaccuracies:

a: Due to the tone.

b: Due to the choice of inclusion and representation

c: Due to lack of realism

B INC: Resentment or antipathy expressed toward inclusion of women, minorities, or persons with disabilities

a: Use of derogatory language toward women or the inclusion of women

b: Use of derogatory language toward trans-people or mention of the phrase's transvestite, tranny, transsexual or transgender

c: Mention of or alluding to the character's prosthetic arm

d: Use of derogatory language toward minorities or the inclusion of minorities

C SJW: Resentment or antipathy expressed toward contemporary politics

a: Mention of the phrase SJW

b: Mention of or alluding to feminism; Mention of the word's feminism, feminazi or feminist

c: Mention of or alluding to woke-culture; Mention of the words woke or woke-culture.

d: Mention of or alluding to political correctness; Mention of the terms: politically correct, PC or political correctness.

e: Mention of or alluding to agenda-pushing or the politicizing of games

D SENT: Nostalgia or reference to previous instalments in the Battlefield franchise

a: Mention of or referring to Battlefield 4

b: Mention of or referring to Battlefield 3

c: Mention of or referring to Battlefield 1

d: Mention of or referring to Bad Company

E GAME: Critique of the game itself

    a: Explicit critique of the presented gameplay

    b: Explicit critique of the presented graphics

    c: Explicit critique of the games tone/Setting

    d: Explicit critique of the presented features

F OTHER: Reference to or comparison to other franchises

G DEF: Opposing or ridiculing the hashtag and campaign

Examples

A: Because it's 100% historically accurate; NOT. #NotMyBattlefield

Aa: "We don't want casual flashy looking soliders for WWII; where is the war vibe? #notmybattlefield

Ab: Hey DICE; you forgot to add a midget besides the transgender handicapped punk non existing in ww2 soldier #NotMyBattlefield

Ac: @Battlefield Is it too much to ask for the soldiers in my WWII game to actually look like soldiers from WWII? Fuck me right? What happened to immersion? #NotMyBattlefield

B: @Battlefield How dare you talk to us like trash by telling us that if we don't want to accept this LGBTQ invasion of WWII history to not buy your game. I ain't buying your stupid game now! I'll go play better WWII representations by respectable developers! #NotMyBattlefield

Ba: #notmybattlefield Stand together and Boycott Battlefield Vagina!Less than 7% of women play FPS and BF will always be a 99% male player base. EA has paid a couple of women to play BF to push SJW. - Calls the fan-base uneducated- Tells them to accept it or don't buy it

Bb: Transgender Womans In WW2 WRONG #notmybattlefield

Bc: #NotMyBattlefieldI can't wait to play as a 6'2" transgender bionical women! Can't wait to kill mecha Hitler everyone knows a Hitler was killed by a strong female

Bd: #NotMyBattlefield Genuinely offensive that @EA_DICE and @EA are pushing minorities as war heroes again; did they even do research?Prosthetics werent used in combat and women didnt fight on the frontlines except in the Soviet Union; where even then they were mostly snipers

C: #NotMyBattlefield It's not only the woman that stands on the front cover. It's that EA and dice were more concerned about politics than their fans and what their fans wanted.

Ca: #BattlefieldV Wow Im disappointed today. SJWs back at it again with changing history. Here is history lesson for all you dumbasses that don't know a thing about WWII; women didn't fight on front lines; also if you lost any limb in combat you would be sent home. #notmybattlefield

Cb: Just watched the @Battlefield V trailer. Saw a female soldier and instantly disliked the game for being historically inaccurate and putting 3rd wave feminist and sjw moments in the game trailer. Sorry but I'm gonna throw up some hashtags. #NotMyBattlefield #EA #FuckEA

Cc: And they think pushing back BFV one extra month will improve sells; people will forget about them attacking customers and forcing agendas down our throats. #NotMyBattlefield #GetWokeGoBroke

Cd: Stop pushing your SJW/Political Correctness bs on your paying customers; then go and paint it like were in the wrong. Appalling. #NotMyBattlefield

Ce: #NotMyBattlefield sjw agenda forced down our throats again more about pretending there was as much women on the front line then men were gonna have transgender snipers next its a far cry from the old bf games battlefield inclusive will be next years title**.**

D: Battlefield franchise has died in front of my eyes. RIP#BATTLEFIELDV #NOTMYBATTLEFIELD

Da: So; guess that means another 2 years of #Battlefield4 for me; since apparently we get 2 times #CallofDuty this year.#NotMyBattlefield

Db: #BattlefieldV has a chance of not being bad it actually might be good but not as good as BF3 #NotMyBattlefield anyway anyone down yo squad up for some #Battlefield1

Dc: #NotMyBattlefield What a disappointment. And what is up with the graphics this time around? BF1 was amazing in that department but BF5 looks like GTA4 level graphics... extremely cartoony.

Dd: I've been a battlefield fan since bad company 2. I always felt it was the closest I could get to a real war experience. That's why I chose it against COD. Now #battlefield5 looks COD and Fortnight had an ugly baby. I really wanted a brutal ww2 experience #notmybattlefield

E: #notmybattlefield i don't like the setting but i love the new game mechanics

Ea: I knew I won't like #BFV but decided to give it a chance. It turns out I was right and will gladly return it for a refund! Basically a combination of unfinished product; lack of content; lots of bugs & stupid UI decisions. Kinda sad this franchise is dying #NotMyBattlefield

Eb: I am seriously disappointed with that Battlefield V trailer. Did they seriously put a HUD over an animated clip? There is no way that this was actual gameplay. That was all rendered animation! And ngl; it looks exactly like BF1. #NotMyBattlefield

Ec: #NotMyBattlefield. I have mixed opinions about this game. First impressions is totally bad. Trailer looks like a hollywood film.

Ed: #notmybattlefield seriously limiting class progression to a forced match type seems crazy and unfair to people who do not want to play death match with flags.

F: No; most people will watch trailer and think it's just a Battlefield : Fortnite Edition. #NotMyBattlefield

G: I can't believe #NotMyBattlefield is a legit hashtag. How pathetic can people be? Imagine playing Battlefield for "historical accuracy"