

ALL ABOUT TIME: TEMPORAL PRACTICES & PATTERNS IN DIGITAL PLAY AND DESIGN



INTRODUCTION

This project investigates temporal patterns and practices in video game design and play. By looking beyond the metric of time-spent-playing, this project addresses the qualitative value of temporal dimensions of user experience and game development.

OBJECTIVE

This project aims to contribute to a broader understanding of time in digital entertainment and interactive technologies, emphasising the socio-techno relationship between players and the gaming industry.

METHODOLOGY

Across three settings: digital storefronts, development studios, and player environments, exploring various qualitative methodologies:

- Content Analysis
- Developer Interviews
- Web Scraping
- Thematic Analysis

STUDY 1 ANALYSIS

This study highlights the use of **time-centric language** across **marketing** and **user reviews** on **Steam**, revealing patterns of use recognised as **Historic**, **Projected**, **Interval**, **Development**, **Tangible**, and **Commercial** themes.

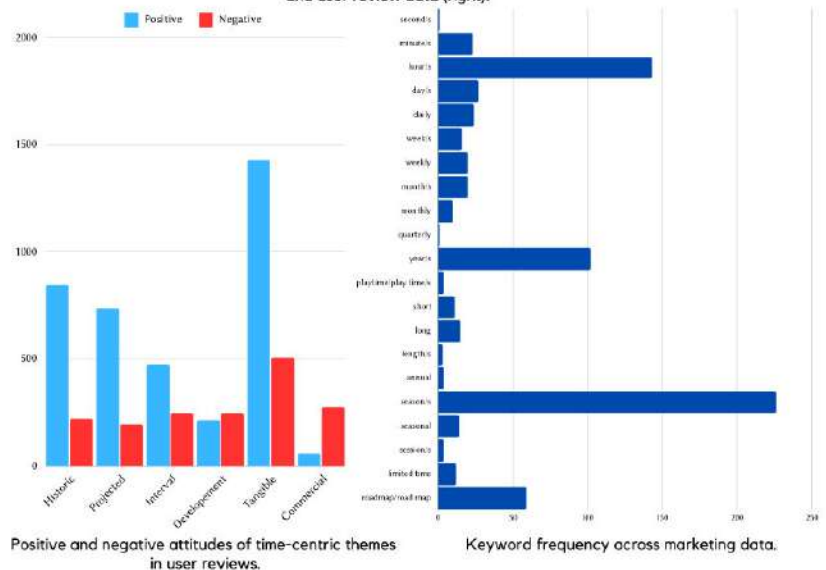
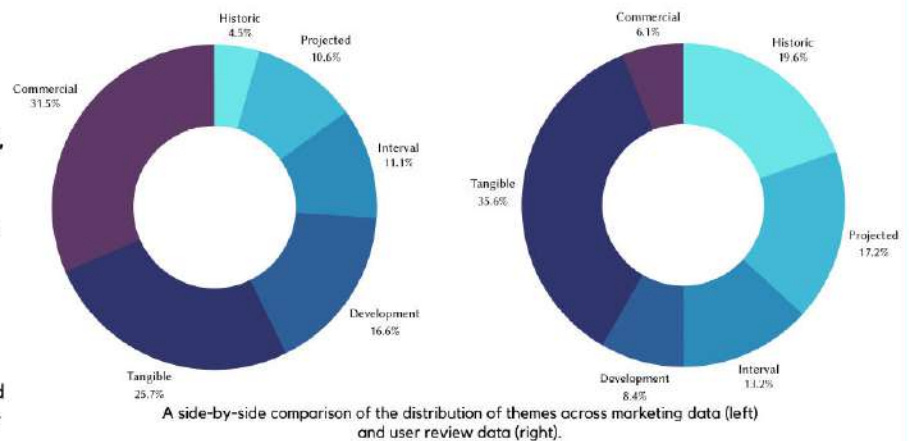
Playtime is a key factor in user reviews for **recommending** or **warning others**, with **quality of play** and **marketing** framing being significant.

5,423 user reviews explicitly used time-centric language, showing higher quality and length than average reviews. Lin et al. (2019) in their empirical study of user reviews noted that most reviews had a median length of 205 characters or 30 words. While not an intended branch of this study and a smaller sample, the average length of characters in coded user reviews from *Lethal Company*, *Counter-Strike 2*, and *Cyberpunk 2077* is 274.33 and the average words 81.37. While not a comparative statistic, the observed **quality** and **length** of all reviews from this study indicate an **earnest value** in communicating these **temporal concepts** beyond simply posting for the sake of it.

Under a third of Steam's "relevant" games use temporal language relating to **player time**.

Interval-based use of language regarding play length is **underutilised in marketing**, except for additional content, suggesting a **marketing** or **development** norm.

Temporal language in reviews helps create **timelines** or **archives of customer satisfaction** and **player experience**, with **shifts in attitude** linked to specific events.



RESULTS

This study reveals the importance of time-centric language in over 5,000 user reviews, showing that players use temporal themes to express their gaming experiences. Time is not just a metric but a key factor in player satisfaction, influencing how they view and engage with games. The findings suggest that better understanding and integrating these temporal values can enhance game design and user experience.

CONCLUSION

This project redefines time in game design and user experience as a qualitative resource, aiming to inform development practices that enhance learning, mental health, and ethical design. It shifts the focus from measuring playtime to understanding its quality, addressing research gaps in addiction and problematic play. This cross-disciplinary study seeks to deepen understanding of long-term player engagement and satisfaction.

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Ideas, questions, collabs?
Email via the QR Code!



TL;DR

- **3 Studies** - User Reviews & Marketing, Design, and User Experience.
- Exploring the patterns and practices of time and temporality in digital play and design beyond established constructs.
- **Qualitative** – The emotional, experiential, and relational aspects of time and temporality in user experience and design.
- **Constructive** – These patterns are emerging and distinct from historical experiences and accounts.

AUTHORS

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