

# Complacent Communication: Exploring Ubisoft's Issues Management

A master's thesis on Ubisoft's issues management and its effects on key stakeholders in relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadows.

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## Summary

This thesis is a hermeneutic consideration of issues communication in gaming, specifically the communication presented by the Canadian Ubisoft branch when they apologized for their handling of Japanese culture in the game Assassin's Creed: Shadows. To provide a proper understanding of the effect of this communication comments on this, on X, through responses to the apology. A post shared by the same Assassin's Creed account on X, about the status of the game and its accolades, which was posted approximately nine months after the apology is considered in order to understand how the communication shaped the relationship between Ubisoft and relevant stakeholders.

The theory applied in the thesis consists of stakeholder salience theory, to identify the key stakeholders that the situation concerns. The main focus, however, is issues theory, specifically the issues life cycle, which is a theory that through insights in communication to and from an organization rationalizes the severity of an issue. The purpose of the theory is to identify what stage the issue of Ubisoft's respect for Japanese culture is identified as at the point of the apology and subsequently if this has changed when the Assassin's Creed X account shares the post nine months later. The method applied in the thesis is document analysis as the empirical evidence being considered includes both text and imagery at times. Furthermore, the document analysis allows for a wide range of considerations, including rhetorical, discourse, structuralist-semiotic and interpretative analyses. This wide range of analyses allows for a hermeneutic approach to the documents gathered where relevant analyses can be applied and multiple fusions of horizons can occur between the author and the texts.

To allow for consideration of how the communication affected stakeholders the stakeholders it concerns must be identified which was done through a stakeholder salience analysis, it was identified that the stakeholders that held the most importance to Ubisoft, in relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadows, was their Japanese community and gamers. It was also pointed out how there are certain overlaps in interests between these two groups and therefore they can ally and affect each other.

With the key stakeholders identified, the documents gathered were analyzed with relevant analyses in order to achieve an understanding of the message, the language and the symbols that was used and how these affected the message being conveyed. This was then followed by an interpretative analysis where these findings were considered in relation to the issues life cycle and based on this the stage in the issues life cycle was identified. In more specific terms, a parent post, the apology by Ubisoft as an example, was considered and the issue's stage was identified. Then selected comments on this post were analyzed to gather their message, their language and symbols to understand how the parent post was received. These comments were then considered in a collective interpretative analysis in order to understand how the responses portrayed the positioning in the issues life cycle. This same approach was applied to the reposted post.

The importance of the goal in issues management being to reach the dormant stage of an issue and how Ubisoft's apology failed to achieve this, which was reflected in the post nine months later, were discussed. Furthermore, the author's growth through the project was detailed as the hermeneutic approach to science necessitates fusions of horizons of understanding, meaning that through his work with the thesis, the author's understanding of the issue changed and deepened.

It was concluded that the superficial approach to apologizing to the Japanese community and gamers did not aid the issue surrounding Assassin's Creed: Shadows in reaching dormancy in its life cycle. This was concluded on the basis that the development team offered no solutions, no path forward to ameliorate the issue and instead focused on things that they had already accomplished. The discontent towards this was made clear in the comments to the apology and this discontent was also identified in the reposted post, nine months after.

# Introduction

When releasing a video game, a game developer is expected to present fans of a genre, a studio, the developer or otherwise interested people with tidbits about the game in order to stir their interest and keep the fact that a game is upcoming in their minds. This means that there will inevitably be promotional campaigns or posts that do not end up with a great resonance with the intended audience, be it from the content shown being disappointing graphically, mechanically or design-wise or that it tries to play into contemporary topics or issues and does so poorly.

For this paper, the game developer Ubisoft has particular interest. In 2025 the game Assassin's Creed: Shadows was released. However, the material presented for this game, in 2024 and leading up to the game's release in 2025, has seen backlash. The criticism centers itself around one of the game's protagonists, a samurai of African descent and how he is perceived by the Japanese fanbase. Ubisoft released an apology to the Japanese community resulting of this but has not had much direct community engagement since. While there has not been communication directed at specifically the Japanese fanbase, the Assassin's Creed X account has continuously posted content related to Assassin's Creed: Shadows.

With this in mind, the interesting point is to try and understand if and how the communication by Ubisoft was received and how the communities reacted to it. With this strategy it is easy to imagine that the stakeholders would be affected depending on how Ubisoft handled the promotional material and release of the game following the initial apology.

Thus, the following problem statement was made:

***How has Ubisoft's communication about the issues in relation to Assassins Creed: Shadows affected relevant stakeholders?***

*How has the game's utilization of Japanese culture been received?*

*What approach did Ubisoft take when it came to the issues that it met and how has the gaming community and the Japanese community responded to these?*

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# Philosophy of Science

This section will introduce the author's approach to science and will therefore also allow for an understanding of how and why conclusions and interpretations are made in the research project. As the author operates philosophical hermeneutics, this affects his understanding of what knowledge is and how it is generated. To present this, this approach to hermeneutics will be introduced below and an introduction to the author will be made as a preamble to understand what may have led to his interpretations of texts.

In the philosophical hermeneutic approach to science the individual themselves is the imperative, as without an individual there can be no science. Hermeneutics is, in all of its forms, an exercise in interpretation. While Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is "an interpretation of interpretation, a prolonged mediation upon what "happens" to us within "hermeneutic experience" when we are challenged by texts and artworks, ancient and modern." (Davey 2006, 1-36) where it is in the meeting, or the fusion of horizons, between the individual and a text and the interpretation the individual creates that knowledge is formed. Gadamer writes in his book 'Truth and Method' that: "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there." (Gadamer 2013, 278-318), with which he explains that as soon as one starts reading a text, maybe even before, one performs an interpretation of the entire text and throughout the reading of the entire text this interpretation is everchanging and with the deeper understanding that is gained through the engaging with the text and the ever evolving understanding from this deepening understanding is what allows the individual to understand the meaning within the text. This highlights how Gadamer believes that the individual is the key to understanding and that it is only through the individual's lived experiences, prior knowledge, societal context and so on, that they may understand a text. As highlighted by the Danish author Albinus, and translated to English by this paper's author, on philosophical hermeneutics: "A text may be strange in its language and be characterized by a historical context that I do not recognize. However, it is not the author's thoughts or the period in which the text is written, that makes the text accessible to my understanding of it, instead it is the text itself." (Albinus 2012, 188-213), which in other words means that in philosophical hermeneutics, unlike classical hermeneutics, the essence of understanding does not come from delving into the time the text was produced or understanding the author's thoughts when he wrote the text, instead understanding is created through the fusion of horizons between a reader and the text itself. The understanding of the period of time the text was written and who wrote it for whichever reason may affect how the text is interpreted as it is a layer of understanding, however, this is not the final product. Gadamer explains



this as: "... the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, - i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates." (Gadamer 2013, 278-318). With this Gadamer presents his thoughts on the necessity for the individual to create the meaning of a text and how the text's meaning remains dependent on the circumstances in which it exists. An example of this might be considering one of Aristoteles' modes of persuasion, ethos, in which one appeals to the credibility as a mode of persuasion. If this was to be approached with the understanding that one must consider it through the context of which it originated one might consider a doctor to be someone who promoted healing through divine gifts from the gods as illnesses may have been considered divine punishments, a notion that is not uncommon to ancient human societies. However, if this understanding of the ethos of a doctor was then applied to the modern world, the definition would be an inadequate fit as modern doctors apply long educations and medical understandings of the human body to interpret illnesses and their causes and treatments instead of attributing it to divine will. Therefore, it is understood that the classical hermeneutics' idea of interpreting a text presents an issue when one accounts for texts that persist through time. An example that ties this line of thought to Assassin's Creed: Shadows would be to consider the appeal to ethos in the apology made, where the developer team expresses their collaboration with external consultants, historians, researchers, and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan to argue their adherence to an authentic representation of Feudal Japan. It is understood that these groups are referenced as they hold a certain meaning in the modern age of understanding, however, if one was to consider 'internal teams at Ubisoft Japan' in the context of ancient Greece, there would be no appeal to ethos to be found as this global enterprise concept would not have existed at the time. As the Danish author Pahuus writes on Gadamer's hermeneutics, which has been translated to English by the author: "... to understand a text it is to apply it to one's own life, to make the text one's own, to make the hitherto unknown and foreign text's understanding of life and the world one's own understanding, to add it to one's own horizon of understanding." (Pahuus 2022, 223-264). This means that in order for an individual to understand a text they need to read and understand the text deeply enough that they may apply the interpreted knowledge to their own life and the world they live in and thus the individual's and the text's horizon of understanding fuse to create deeper understanding.

As expressed by Davey: "For philosophical hermeneutics it is more important to remain loyal to an experience of language as opposed to the formal claims of philosophical method." (Davey 2006, 1-36) To researchers working in this theory of science it is more important to express one's experience when engaging with a text or art than it is to adhere to a formal method. In other words, it is more important to express the interpretations as they are made than it is to mold these to fit into a method as this would then lose the understanding that was originally achieved. This notion is shared by Albinus, translated from Danish to English, when he writes: "That which separates the hermeneutical question from the scientific questions is that its answers cannot be achieved through a method... Gadamer considers the philosophical hermeneutics on the linguistic terms, it primarily exists as a reflection of the conditions of understanding we constantly make." (Albinus 2012, 188-213). With

this Albinus expresses that, that which guides the philosophical hermeneutics' understanding is not the formal method applied to understand a text, it is the language itself and the reflections on why one interprets a text in the specific manner that one has, in other words, what context led one to interpret what was read in a specific way. This understanding of what leads one to interpret texts in specific ways and the understanding of what context has led to this in philosophical hermeneutics is also reflected when Davey writes: "Philosophical hermeneutics is philosophical in that it strives to discern objectivities within the subjective voice." (Davey 2006, 1-36). Davey expresses his belief that the philosophical aspect is from the purpose of identifying objectivities in the subjective voice. Translating this to the case of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, this is seen in the apology where it is written: "To our esteemed Japanese community...", where one may interpret this very formal way of addressing the Japanese community a show of respect. Then the philosophical aspect of this interpretation would be to express that this interpretation stems from an understanding that Japanese culture and society is more traditional than European and American, and the Canadian developer branch then utilizes this to show their respect for the culture they are borrowing for their game. Through this an objective assessment is made of what prompted the interpretation of the text in this way.

As has been highlighted, philosophical hermeneutics' focus lies in the interpretations made by individuals and the fusion of horizons of understandings that follow this. However, interpretation does not halt after one has considered a text once and a fusion of horizons of understandings has taken place. In the hermeneutical line of thought, even prior to Gadamer, understanding was considered a circular motion. This motion where one meets a text with a preunderstanding and through interpretation finds a new, deeper understanding then allows for a new consideration of the text with this deeper preunderstanding that will then allow for an even deeper understanding of the text. This is referred to as the hermeneutical circle however, Gadamer's hermeneutical circle may be understood as a spiral of sorts where each new interpretation brings one a deeper and more vast understanding of the text, such that the imagery is not that one remain at a fixed understanding as a circle would (Brier 2017, 305-320). This movement is also explained as the understanding of the whole of a text through the understanding of the parts and how these are reliant upon each other as the parts are impossible to understand without the whole and the whole is impossible to understand without the parts. In order to understand how one starts this process, it must be considered how one understands, in the context of philosophical hermeneutics, and how this is based on the individual's preunderstandings. To Gadamer this means that understanding does not begin once the individual cast themselves free of their preconceptions, instead these preconceptions are what allows for understanding. This means that one does not need an entry point into the hermeneutic spiral as one is already a part of it, the individual's understanding does not start once a text is read. The individual has a preunderstanding or ideas of the text before it even is approached, thus a horizon of understanding is present already. This means that the interpreter is an active part of the process of interpretation, which has been highlighted previously (Brier 2017, 305-320). The example presented previously: "To our esteemed Japanese community..." is an example of this, this interpretation is made based

on the author's preunderstanding of Japanese culture, the preunderstanding that in Japanese culture respect is shown between individuals on a general basis through bows and the use of titles. This understanding then provides the first new understanding from the initial understanding that the developers of *Assassin's Creed: Shadows* wished to make an apology. Now it is understood that the apology being made includes elements of the culture it apologizes to, to show authenticity.

It should be noted that as Pahuus writes, which the author has translated to English: "Through this gradual fusion that, mind you, it does not mean that one grows to be more in agreement with the text, that one's interpretation becomes more and more adequate." (Pahuus 2022, 223-264). This acknowledgement that Pahuus makes that understanding does not equal agreement is important, this allows for the understanding of texts that one may vehemently disagree with but without an understanding of the text itself one may not be able to demonstrate rationalizations for one's disdain or dissuade others from what the text promotes.

Brier highlights a critique of Gadamer's Philosophical hermeneutics by Habermas, which has been translated to English: "Reason should free man from both preconceptions and unfair relationships of power... Here Habermas criticized Gadamer for being too conservative and having too much faith in "tradition"." (Brier 2017, 305-320). This Marxist view on class is one that the author would argue still relies on preunderstandings in order to determine what constitutes different classes and even through the interpretation that the oppressed is oppressed by the oppressor and the equalizing of this power imbalance one does not attain this utopic existence where the classes, although equal, are free from preconceived notions. There will still be a lived experience or historical acknowledgement that one group used to be oppressed and the other the oppressor, meaning that although the reason that the two classes are equal, and the inequalities have been abolished the differences in culture that had been extant to that point, will still be grounds for differences in interpretation. Furthermore, this critique is based on the idea of what is just and how this comes from differences in classes, where the author would argue that based on history and lived experience a notion of what is just would also be obtained. This notion might not be based on class but if one considers the history of humanity, it is obvious to individuals that are part of modern societies that elements such as slavery, religious persecution, human experimentation, such as under the Nazis in the second world war, are all unjust behavior. Which the author would link to when *Assassin's Creed: Shadows* is interpreted to misrepresent the Japanese culture this injustice does not have to be observed through the scope of class for an individual to interpret that it is wrong.

Through this the ontological approach, in philosophical hermeneutics, is understood to be dependent on the individual themselves, as the individual is paramount to understanding. As without the individual and their experiences and preunderstandings no understanding can be made. Thus, understanding or knowledge, is interpretation based on the individual and their preunderstandings and learning through interpretations.

The epistemological approach is based on the idea that knowledge is not a finite entity. The production of understanding does not have a finality, there is no end. An individual may produce knowledge from

reexamining the same text indefinitely and it will only allow for an even deeper understanding to be made through further interpretation. In other words, understanding is a concept that only leads to more questions being raised to allow for further understanding.

Lastly, as the author believes that interpretation is based upon preunderstandings, lived experiences, culture, among other things, he believes that presenting a summary of himself is appropriate to allow for a deeper understanding of his interpretations. The author is a man in his late twenties, and he has completed a bachelor's degree in International Business Communication in English. He has worked with a philosophical hermeneutic approach to science almost his entire time of study both the three years of his bachelor's degree and his two years of study on his master's degree. The author has lived his entire life in Denmark, he has engaged with gaming for most of his life and thus has preconceptions on the communication being presented by Ubisoft. He has engaged with Japanese media as entertainment and thus has a preunderstanding of Japanese culture. He believes that it is important to highlight Davey's highlighting of Nietzsche's belief that: "... Philosophers should submit themselves to the laws they postulate... Gadamer should not be exempted from this maxim." (Davey 2006, 1-36), as this is the understanding with which he engages with science. That all the theories and methods are ultimately interpreted and presented in the author's own words and thus, his words will be read and interpreted by others.

As a final thought, the author must note that the interpretations, as they are based on his preunderstandings and findings through interpretations based on these and the fusion of horizons with the texts may not mirror those that individuals with different lived experiences may find but hopes that they may allow for a deeper understanding to these individuals.

## Ubisoft & Assassin's Creed: Shadows introduction

Ubisoft is a game developer that originated in France in the mid-1980s. It has since grown to a global scale with 45+ studios in 30 countries housing 20.000 employees (Ubisoft, Our People n.d.). Ubisoft has produced successful game series such as Prince of Persia, Tom Clancy's, Watch Dogs, Far Cry, Rayman, The Crew and Assassin's Creed. Multiple of these franchises span multiple games and multiple have 20-year long histories of releases. However, in recent years the company has seen disappointing results both with the reception of released games and subsequently financially. In March of 2025 this has resulted in the Chinese tech giant Tencent investing in a new subsidiary, where it will own a quarter of the business and Ubisoft holding the rest. This new subsidiary will focus on "some of the French firm's biggest franchises, including Assassin's Creed, Far Cry and Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six." (Hoskins 2025).

Assassin's Creed: Shadows focuses on the "... intertwined stories of Naoe, an adept shinobi Assassin from Iga Province, and Yasuke, the powerful African samurai of historical legend." (Ubisoft, A NEW CREED RISES n.d.). In other words, this latest installment to the Assassin's Creed franchise focuses on a Japanese ninja and an African samurai and the player will experience a stealthy playstyle where Naoe utilizes "...noise, light and shadows to evade detection..." (Ubisoft, A NEW CREED RISES n.d.) and Yasuke's direct approach where the player may "... strike your foes with brutal precision and power." (Ubisoft, A NEW CREED RISES n.d.). This duality is according to Ubisoft intended to allow for the player to play the Assassin's Creed game in the way that they desire and to "... approach quests with whichever character you prefer..." (Ubisoft, A NEW CREED RISES n.d.). This is a new development in comparison to previous Assassin's Creed games that have primarily focused on a single protagonist for their stories and these have all held a focus on stealth elements in their stories, whereas the more direct combat approach would have been an option in some cases and a requirement in others but also a cause for failure in some cases. Thus, giving the experience of an assassin operating in the shadows.

## Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence will at first be presented in no particular order in Appendix 1. It consists of multiple documents relating to Assassin's Creed: Shadows. The first document presented is the apology made by Ubisoft Canada's team working on Assassin's Creed: Shadows 1.1 (in appendix 1). The apology has been selected as the four-page reply address the concerns that this project centers itself around – the treatment of the Japanese culture. Furthermore, in 1.2 a selection of replies to the apology have been listed. These will aid in creating an understanding of how the apology was received and are therefore dated the same day the apology was made to not have later events skewer the understanding of the initial reception. (1.3) is a post retweeted by the Assassin's Creed X profile describing how Assassin's Creed: Shadows was the best-selling game in the US for March 2025 and second bestselling game of the year, when the post was made on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025. In relation to this 1.4 presents replies to this post in order to gauge how both the Japanese and gaming community reacted to the statement.

## Lit Review

This section will focus on introducing the literature adjacent to the selected theories and methods and provide a reader with an understanding of why these specific choices have been made. Firstly, the choice between issues management, CSR and Crisis Communication will be presented, afterward the decision on what approach is taken to stakeholder theory and lastly why the document analysis was elected in favor of other document or content analyses.

## Issues Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Crisis

### Communication

Corporate Social responsibility is defined as: "... the term CSR can be broadly defined as 'the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large'." by Cornelissen (J. Cornelissen, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Community Relations 2023, 273-294). From this it is understood that CSR is a practice that engages with how an organization engages with its stakeholders to improve their lives and society as a whole. While CSR may have been applied to try and understand why Ubisoft decided to have one of the protagonists in Assassin's Creed: Shadows be a samurai of African descent it does not consider the entire span of the entire problem that the Japanese community has had with this. CSR also does not present a way of understanding this issue that has arisen as the function is to understand social responsibilities of an organization and how it may change society or its stakeholders' lives for the better.

Crisis Communication spans over an array of different elements, that also includes issues management. Crisis communication is a practice where an organization first anticipates what may become a crisis, through elements such as considering its social responsibility, what issues that the organization may predict could arise from its work, surveying media on interest and opinions on the organization. Secondly crisis communication also presents frameworks and ideas on how to create a plan if an organization should find itself in a crisis. In other words, it is a proactive way of dealing with issues that may develop into crises or proactively plan an approach to eventual crises (J. Cornelissen, Stakeholder Management and Communication 2023, 231-248). Therefore, crisis communication goes a step beyond what is being researched, the question being posed aims to understand Ubisoft's response to the issue it was facing in relation to the mishandling of Japanese culture, it does not look to understand the inner machinations of the company's anticipation of the crisis, its plans for the crisis or what might have been learned from the crisis. The paper focuses on the issue and its course to understand this particular event and how Ubisoft engaged with this and the reactions to this specifically.

### Stakeholder Salience, descriptive-, instrumental-, and normative stakeholder approaches

Lewis explains: "The descriptive approach depicts existing relationships with stakeholders. In the instrumental approach scholars test claims about how organizational actions shape stakeholder relationships... In the normative approach, scholars focus on moral and ethical obligations of managers to various stakeholders."

(Lewis 2011, 85-115). From which it is understood that the descriptive approach engages with stakeholders by describing and understanding an organization's relationship with its stakeholders, meaning that it does not delve deeper into the engagement between the stakeholders and the organization, nor does it consider the elements that may change this relationship. The instrumental approach sees scholars testing claims about how the actions of an organization shape stakeholder relations, in other words this is a reflective approach to how implemented strategies are affecting the relationships between stakeholders and organizations. It is understood that a preunderstanding of the who an organization's stakeholders is present and that strategies have been implemented that scholars can reflect upon and formulate new strategies to test. The normative approach to stakeholder engagements deals with the roles of managers and how these are placed in focus. This school of thought focuses on elements such as Corporate Social Responsibility and how managers are executing this when engaging with stakeholders and maintaining the relationships between these and the organization. This line of thought also assumes a preunderstanding of an organization's stakeholders to produce an understanding of how these are being engaged with. These three approaches to stakeholders are all lacking an element that the stakeholder salience theory provides, they lack an element to distinguish between the importance of different stakeholders, furthermore, the stakeholder salience theory allows for consideration of elements of all these approaches.

## Document Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Document analysis can be approached in a large array of ways. The first thing that must be brought up is document analysis that utilize quantitative methods, in other words, styles of document analyses that focus on word frequencies numerically and consider words and data in documents statistically. While these methods would not be impossible to implement and work with, these are prone to lose deeper meanings in documents in the author's opinion. This is due to the generalizing nature of the quantitative style that would reduce the documents to numbers for interpretation, which might be seen as the interpreter attempting to remove themselves from the interpretation through the removal of deeper meaning that may be found in an individual text (Kuckartz and Radiker, *Conceptual Foundations of Qualitative Content Analysis* 2023, 1-32). In other words, this style of analysis presents issues with the author's theory of science, philosophical hermeneutics, where it is a requirement to engage with a text based on one's preunderstandings.

Alternatively, one may find the document analysis described as an practice that first assesses the authenticity of a document and if the source is a real individual or entity, then considers its trustworthiness and if this may lead the analysis in a specific direction, then one considers if the document is representative of the category it is understood to represent and then meaning will be drawn from the document through analysis (Lynggaard, *Dokumentanalyse* 2020, 185-202). This mirrors the execution of the document analysis selected to some extent

however, it does not provide a method that guides the researcher to what may be analyzed and how this is analyzed. Therefore, a document analysis that encapsulates identified methods qualitative analyses have been performed was selected as it presents this guidance to how one should approach specific elements in documents. In relation to this it should be noted that the narrative analysis described by Hijmans was found to not be needed in the document analysis as the documents considered did not build a story driven narrative and therefore the need to analyze these was not present.

An alternative to the document analysis could have been Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. Which presents a model that is: "... an analytical framework for empirical research on communication and society... The analysis should focus, then, on (1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)." (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 60-95). In other words, the text analysis focuses on the formal elements of the text itself, wording, grammar, structure, etc. Discursive analysis focuses on how authors "... draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text..." (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 60-95) which allows for an understanding of how the genre shapes the understanding of the text. Lastly the relationship between the text and social practice is considered, meaning that the social implications of language use are considered, this may be in relation to identities, cultural aspects, political aspects and so on (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). While this model would be able to consider the discursive elements of the documents gathered in depth the author believes that the document analysis provides a much broader scope of analysis by providing up to five different analyses that may be applied in order to deepen one's understanding of a text. The document analysis utilized allows for a semiotic analysis of symbols in the texts and an interpretative analysis that draws in the theory and what is expected from this, which the Critical Discourse Analysis does not offer.

## Theory

### Issues Management

To understand the communication and strategy deployed by Ubisoft, in relation to the release of the game Assassin's Creed Shadows and prior to this, this project will assess the communication by the developer as an effort to manage an issue as a lot of critique has been directed at the game. With this in mind, the project will be utilizing Richard E. Crable and Steven L. Vibbert's "Managing Issues And Influencing Public Policy" (Crable and Vibbert 1985, 3-16). In this article Crable and Vibbert explain how issues are created, which the



pair explain as: “An issue is created when one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived “problem.”” (Cralle and Vibbert 1985, 3-16), meaning that an issue occurs when a group of people assign meaning to a situation in which they hold an interest. Which, in the case of Assassin’s Creed: Shadows can be considered manifold, this may be gamers’ having an interest in the game being a fun experience with a good story and great gameplay mechanics, people of Japanese heritage or culturally interested individuals being interested in the game paying proper homage to the culture and history that it is borrowing. These two groups hold a particular interest in the project as gamers are the target audience as consumers and therefore, their opinions of the game should be key to Ubisoft. Individuals of Japanese descent or ones holding particular interest in the culture are also of interest as the culture the video game is borrowing is the Japanese one, so treating it discourteously may see these people upset. These two groups may also have overlapping interest, however, the most important reason that these two groups have been highlighted is that they are the ones with the most obvious and important stakes in the video game. Thus, if these groups’ interests look to be betrayed, either by presenting teaser material that showcase a lacking game or features that disrespect Japanese culture an issue can arise.

Issues themselves, as noted by Cralle and Vibbert, are not solvable problems. Issues are situations where a total solution does not exist. However, it might be possible to appease the parties that hold the issues (Cralle and Vibbert 1985, 3-16). However, it is also noted that not everything that receives attention from a group of individuals should be considered an issue, as the level of status an issue holds is to be interpreted by the issues manager which can be seen in the quote: “Issues have various levels of status or importance for the possible receivers. It is the task of the issue manager to understand the ‘perceived’ level of status that the issue holds for important publics and to move judges toward the ‘desired’ level of status by communicative intervention.” (Cralle and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

With this in mind, it is important to understand the group of individuals that holds this interest in what the organization is doing or communicating. As groups of individuals that hold an issue with an organization will be linked by a common goal. This goal shapes how a group operates and what they desire from an organization (Dunham, Freeman and Liedtka 2006, 23-42). In the case of Ubisoft’s Assassin’s Creed: Shadow, obvious groups that hold an interest could be gamers, that have an interest in the game, how it performs, how enjoyable it is, and so on, this group may then have overlaps with a different group that hold an interest in the aspects the game focuses on in Japanese culture and history. Understanding these two groups’ interests in the game then allows for the possibility of creating a win-win solution of the issue that the groups hold with the organization (Dunham, Freeman and Liedtka 2006, 23-42).

This importance of issues is something that can be seen as different groups consider Assassin’s Creed: Shadows from different angles. As highlighted, gamers might be more interested in the aesthetics and performance of the game than historical accuracy. This, however, does not mean that a subset of gamers cannot align

themselves with a group that hold a much larger interest in the historical aspect of the game, seeing as important Japanese characters such as Oda Nobunaga is portrayed in the game. Furthermore, when the game implements facets of the modern life into a scenario that portrays the past, it may create a disconnect between groups, this could be the introduction of romance systems that allows players to engage in same-sex relationships in a period where this would have been heavily frowned upon if not outright inconceivable. Thus, an issue about modern politics may activate another group that holds an interest in the game. In other words, the game would not only hold an issue about historical inconsistencies which may have been limited to a Japanese and a particularly interested gamer but the developer has also made the game a political statement in a sense. This may be interpreted in multiple ways depending on how one approaches the issue. If approached in a right leaning manner one may find issue with identity politics being introduced into a game that in this view is intending to let the player engage with a historical time and thus the modern politics may shatter this immersion. On the other side, on the left, there one may find an appreciation for the representation of different identities and sexualities as it may let people reflect themselves in the game better. As highlighted, this decision to implement this modern view into the game may activate a politically interested group and potentially also the sphere of it that is not usually interested in video games, however this may also have been the case had the game been much closer to a historical simulation. These issues are an example of what might be present, and the issues manager would have to assign status level to, to understand the urgency of each issue and address them to try and shape the public opinion on the issue.

As Robert L. Heath and Michael J. Palenchar explains how issues management can be applied in order to understand and adapt to situations in order for an organization to better function in the communities that it operates in: "It can foster the strategic use of issues analysis to help organizations plan and manage by making strategic adaptations needed to achieve harmony and foster mutual interest within the communities where they operate." (Heath and Palenchar 2009). This highlights the previously stated idea that it is vital to understand and engage with the concerns and issues that the communities an organization is dependent on in order to ensure that the organization can function in harmony with these communities and flourish.

Crable and Vibbert established 5 statuses of importance for issues (Crable and Vibbert 1985, 3-16), these five statuses are also called the issue lifecycle, meaning that an issue is not able to definitively be laid to rest, which was acknowledge previously. Even if an issue is identified to have reached the final status it may be reactivated. This will be further explained and listed with an example of how this could be related to Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed: Shadows below. However, before this it is pertinent to entertain the question, if it is possible to condense a thing as broad as issues into five categories. Whereas some may argue that by condensing entire issues to these categories one limits themselves from seeing the entire picture of the issue as the it will be identified and considered from the perspective of a particular category and thus important contexts and considerations may be lost. It is believed that despite the fact that some points of view may be obfuscated or lost through the

classification of the issue the classification also allows a more intensified assessment within the category. In other words, by discarding an all-encompassing view of an issue certain elements can be identified and the issue can be considered more thoroughly in the category that it is interpreted to fit into. This is another consideration that should be made when relating to the issues themselves, the interpretation is based upon the understanding of the author as he operated within the hermeneutic approach to science and therefore understands that he may be unable to assess the issues in certain ways due to his experiences, nurture, interests, sex and many more factors. However, despite the inability to understand the issue from all the possible angles the author firmly believes the project to be relevant as it presents a deeper understanding of the topic and through this may provide others with a point of view foreign to their own. With this in mind, the five different statuses are presented.

### 1. Potential status

The potential status is when an issue is demonstrated through interest by groups of individuals. This interest can be identified when interested parties are asking questions that could stir up an issue. The interested parties may also redirect their attention to specific details on a given issue that they believe to be more prevalent than other aspects. The interested parties may present their own answers to the issues they hold, in other words, they may present their own solutions to the issues at hand (Crabbe and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

For Assassin's Creed: Shadows, a potential status issue could have been before the game's release when many gamers voiced concerns over the focus on a samurai of African descent in a game set in feudal Japan. Where the interested parties voiced how the character might be inspired by a real person but that their role in Japanese history was near negligible giving rise to the idea that it was a politically motivated decision and how this may affect the story of the game and so on and what might have been solutions to this perceived issue.

### 2. Imminent status

The imminent status of an issue is characterized by an issue having grown to a size where a multitude of people have accepted that an issue is present. This may be seen through endorsement of the issue by parties outside the immediate interest sphere or by attaching a historical context to it. In other words, presenting the issue in a context where the issue is related to other identical or closely related issues and how they were or were not resolved. In simpler terms, this is the stage where an issue gains traction as more people start recognizing it (Crabbe and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

Assassin's Creed: Shadows have two major turning points that can be identified as when the issue transcended the potential status and became imminent. The first could be when the larger voices in the gaming sphere started voicing concerns over things shown in the promotional material for the game, thus endorsing the issue that had been identified as their shift in attitude to the game ensures that their follower-bases will consider the game in a much more critical way than previously. The second point that could have seen the issue go from

potential to imminent was when a member of the Japanese brought it up and the Japanese prime minister commented on the issue.

### 3. Current status

The current status of an issue is when the issue is current, or when it can be considered to have become a significant topic of conversation. This can be when mass media begins writing articles on the issue and/or groups that hold the issues. The issue will often be presented as two opposing sides, such that the issue presents itself in a more dramatic fashion, which in turn could spark further interest in the issue. At the same time, the increased interest the involvement of the mass media garners inevitably presents the issue to a larger audience that otherwise would have been unknowing of the existence of the issue (Crale and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

Assassin's Creed: Shadows can be interpreted to have reached the current status of issues based on the game's decision making, be it the more technical aspects or the cultural/political choices made when designing the game when games media outlets began writing and issuing stories on these topics. It could also be argued that when online personalities with large followings watch and react to content posted by Ubisoft or individuals who have an issue with the game that the issue is being brought to this large segment of individuals who would otherwise have been unaware of it. An example of this is the Youtube/Twitch personality Asmongold, who has presented his thoughts on the game and reacted to other individuals' issues with the game and presented it to his live audience on Twitch and his 3.5 million subscribers on Youtube.

### 4. Critical status

The critical status is when an issue is expected to be resolved by people who have accepted the most important arguments and adjusted their own position to those. These individuals will actively appeal the need to have the issue resolved by the ones involved. In other words, the issue has been accepted as important enough that people seek a resolution to the issue (Crale and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

In relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadows, the critical status could be when the Japanese government condemns that it is possible to destroy Japanese shrines in the game as it tramples upon the culture that the game is borrowing to tell its story and that this needs to be corrected so the issue can be resolved. Another critical status issue could also be when gamers questioned the motives behind the main character of the game.

### 5. Dormant status

The final status is the dormant status. This is when an issue is resolved, the parties involved have made a decision on the issue. The idea is that with this decision the parties that previously held the issue have lost the reason that they were originally interested. In other words, the issue would be dormant. The issue being dormant is used rather than dead or resolved as there is no guarantee that an issue remains resolved, the issue

may resurrect if the interested parties are not content with the resolution that has been made (Crabbe and Vibbert 1985, 3-16).

For Assassin's Creed: Shadows initially addressed the Japanese community about their concerns with the game in July 2024 and the issue was presumed dormant. However, as the release drew closer, in 2025, and more promotional material was released to the public the previously dormant issue voiced by the Japanese community resurrected and the concerns for historical accuracy was restarted.

The issues life cycle theory is a way to understand the life cycle of an issue. What may give rise to an issue, how this issue may then evolve as more people are activated and formulate their own opinions for or against the issue. To understand where an issue lies in the life cycle it is necessary to look at the communication by Ubisoft to the relevant parties, be it gamers, the Japanese community or investors or equally saying the lack of communication if this is the case.

Finally, an example of an issues lifecycle will be provided in order to promote a deeper understanding of how an issue may evolve, becoming a more relevant issue before ending up dormant, where it is not an active concern but may still be reactivated. An example that has already been presented, the cultural issue that has sparked debate over Assassin's Creed: Shadows, will therefore be presented. Lastly, it must be kept in mind that this example is based primarily on the author's preunderstanding of the situation and will be analyzed more in depth later.

The potential status for this issue was achieved with the release of the premiere trailer for Assassin's Creed: Shadows, where the game presents its setting in feudal Japan. The setting alone may have sparked questions of how much care and consideration would be given to making it authentic, however, it is unlikely that this would have been a big enough issue on its own to create an issue going past the potential status. However, in the trailer the two protagonists are presented to the audience, a kunoichi (in plain terms: a female ninja), Fujibayashi Naoe and Yasuke a samurai of African descent. The introduction of a samurai not of Japanese descent did spark interest in the game and the adherence to Japanese history and culture.

The imminent status would then be identified when groups of Japanese people and gamers voiced their concerns over Yasuke's role in the game. This concern may at first glance seem racially motivated, and it cannot be ruled out that it may have been to some, however, the primary concern the author identifies with this issue is the concern of historical accuracy and game quality. In gaming there have been multiple games that have had a focus on diversity and inclusion that seem to have overshadowed the intention to create an enjoyable game. In other words, the games become a political statement promoting these ideas and this has often been seen to come at the expense of the quality of story, characters or authenticity in historical settings.

The current status is then achieved when the issue grows to a point where it is now in the interest sphere of the mass media. The mass media, in the author's opinion, is no longer limited to News shows on TV or newspapers

but must now also have internet personalities included as these have massive audiences too. An example that was highlighted previously is Asmongold, who has been commenting on Assassin's Creed: Shadows since shortly after the initial trailer was released and expressing and presented various people's viewpoints on Yasuke and also expressed a concern for the historical accuracy in comparison to the game being a vehicle for political messaging. Thus, bringing this concern to his following and other youtubers have done the same, meaning that through this a large audience of people are exposed to the issue and may themselves become activated.

The critical status can be interpreted to have been achieved when Legacy media, TV and newspaper/news websites, also picked up the issues that were being presented on the game's approach to Japanese culture and voiced their opinions. An example could be IGN, which is a games review website that has existed since 1996 and reviewed media throughout that time. IGN could be seen posting articles defending the choices made in Assassin's Creed Shadows, thus presenting counter arguments to the concerns that had presented themselves as an issue. However, ultimately the issue was cemented as critical when the X, formerly Twitter, account Assassin's Creed posted a message for the Japanese community where it was ensured that the developers of Assassin's Creed: Shadows had done extensive consulting with external consultants, historians, researchers and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan. However, it was also acknowledged that elements of their promotional material had offended the Japanese community to which they apologized but also emphasized that Assassin's Creed games are fictional works inspired by real historical events and figures. Lastly, the post promotes the idea of sharing feedback and thoughts about the game, indicating that the developer took the concerns seriously.

With this, the dormant status would be achieved as the issues that had arisen were addressed. With the statement that the developer valued the feedback and opinions of the interested parties along with the apology issued to the Japanese community it may have been assumed that the initial discord between the historical offset and the characters presented may not have been as big a wedge if the source material, Japanese history, was treated with respect. However, even if the initial issue had been settled, the issue would not remain this way as it was reignited through the increased skepticism that had arisen towards the game and Ubisoft's respect of Japanese history. Examples of what reignited the issue were further promotional material where armor and weapons were displayed despite not existing at the time the game was set and the Assassin's Creed: Shadows making use of statues and family crests that exist without clear permission to do so.

## Rhetoric Issues Management

As explained previously, Issues Management is the practice of noticing groups that may have issues and understanding what, in an organization's practice, has led to these issues. In other words, organizations are

assumed to consider threats and opportunities for public policy change. Organizations are to implement a high standard of corporate responsibility in order for the organization to seem credible, this means that the organization takes responsibility for its actions while also striving to do better where it falls short. While it is not explicitly stated previously, a key part of issues management is to monitor and analyze issues. An example of this would be the provided example of an issue lifecycle, where the author presents albeit superficially, what a monitoring of an issue and the analysis of it may constitute. It is analyzed how the issue arrives at the different statuses and what Ubisoft does to ameliorate the issues that the stakeholders have. This ties into the last part of issues management, which is for an organization to “Voice facts, opinions and policy positions that support collaborative decision making...” (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86), which is essentially what Ubisoft did when they released their apology to the Japanese community and explained their approach to creating Assassin’s Creed games (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86).

In this, the interesting part that Heath adds to issues management is the understanding that the response to the stakeholders that hold an issue with the organization is important and it is important how the organization shapes its response rhetorically. He argues that while it is impossible to ascertain an absolute reality, we must be willing to accept a relative truth as the standard of rhetoric and therefore people can “concur and share beliefs on various issues until more agreeable and accurate views on those issues become available.” (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86). In simpler terms, he argues that people can individually perceive reality and are able to shape their opinion of it based on what they see and with this they may shape others’ views on it, or others may arrive at the same view. When this view is formed it is then the organization’s responsibility to correct the view of the organization to a more correct one through its rhetoric (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86). When Heath writes: “The best form of rhetoric, in sharp contrast to those symbolic and manipulative ones, is devoted to using discourse to seek the best available truth...” (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86), he is explaining how he believes rhetoric is applied in the best manner, one where it is used to ensure the organizations understanding of the stakeholders issues, present their solutions or clarifications that may absolve the issues. This is in contrast to utilizing rhetoric as a symbolic and at times manipulative tool where an organization say what is acceptable and what needs to be said in order to appease the stakeholders without the organization actually changing its behavior or properly taking responsibility for its shortcomings (R. L. Heath 2006, 55-86). An example of the difference between these two would be comparing the apologies released by Ubisoft for Assassin’s Creed: Shadows to the Japanese community and CD Projekt Red’s apology to their gamer fanbase. Where Ubisoft apologize for their insensitivities to the stakeholder and presents them with their creative process and assures them that their feedback is appreciated, they create a rhetoric narrative that the issue that the stakeholder held will be corrected and the Japanese culture will be respected. However, at a later date the issue re-ignited over further insensitivity towards this community. In contrast, CD Projekt Red’s apology and promises in relation to the launch of their game Cyberpunk 2077, which was riddled with technical issues, poor optimization and public outrage was well received. This developer apologized for the lacking product and promised to improve

the experience. This promise may not have entirely appeased the upset stakeholders, however the developer's continued improvement and support of the game, as promised, did. With this example the author hopes to have illustrated why it is important to understand how the rhetoric used by an organization can appease the stakeholders and ameliorate their issues and how rhetoric without upholding the promises of remedies may be a source of an even larger backlash than simply ignoring the issue might have been.

## Stakeholder Theory

To understand the interested parties/stakeholders mentioned in issues management it is necessary to understand what a stakeholder is. While it is understood through the wording used, interested parties or stakeholders, that it is an individual or a group that hold an interest or a stake in an organization this does not explain how important the stakeholder is to the organization and how salient their voices are. Therefore, the stakeholder salience theory will be presented, explained and examples of how it may be applied to understand examples of Ubisoft's stakeholders in relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadows.

Stakeholder theory is at its core intended to explain and analyze the different groups of people who hold an interest in the organization. Lewis writes in 'Organizational change : creating change through strategic communication': "Stakeholder Theory is centrally concerned with how organizations allocate stakes and attention to various recognized stakeholders." (Lewis 2011, 85-115), where she highlights this key interest of understanding an organization's stakes and how much attention the organization pays to these. One may then pose the question of whether one should limit themselves to this idea of assigning stakes to categorize groups that may hold interest in an organization as it bears the risk of limiting the understanding of the interested parties. The author believes that in order to have any manageable comprehension of the interested parties a classification is necessary and even if some nuance between some groups should be lost it is the responsibility of the one to decide upon the grouping of stakeholders that this does not result in issues for the organization. In other words, when the author previously listed gamers as a stakeholder he understands that this is a very broad term and encompasses a multitude of different interests both in game genre, political beliefs, societal norms and so on. This multitude of differences in the stakeholder group may result in multiple branches of gamers being necessary for a more in-depth analysis but as an overarching category it allows the understanding of broad interests that may activate this stakeholder. With this, the author believes to have shown that even when limiting oneself to categorizing stakeholders it may still present an overwhelming amount of considerations within just one group of stakeholders and even if certain nuances that could be found if this limiting of the group analyzed had not been made, the limiting is critical to obtain an actual understanding of an organization's stakeholders. It is an essential acknowledgement in stakeholder theory that a stake's



importance to an organization is not necessarily based upon the expected profits for an organization should it appease the stake. In the quote “The neo-classical economic theory suggests that the purpose of organizations is to make profits in their accountability to themselves and shareholders, and that only by doing so can business contribute to wealth for itself as well as society at large. The socio-economic theory suggests, in contrast, that the notion of accountability in fact extends to other groups besides shareholders who are considered to be important for the continuity of the organization...” (J. P. Cornelissen 2011, 39-55), Cornelissen highlights this distinction, where a more economic line of thought may consider stakeholders primarily for their impact on an organization’s profit margin, whereas a more social economic view of a stakeholder acknowledges that there are elements that need to be appeased and respected that may not hold this economic value. To translate this idea to a more easily understood concept one may consider the economic approach one where an organization sees its stakeholders as inputs that it may turn to profit. In other words, investors, suppliers and employees are stakeholder groups that in the economic sense are important in order to provide a product that may garner revenue for the organization (J. Cornelissen, Stakeholder Management and Communication 2020, 65-90). Whereas in the socio-economic approach one may consider an activist for their ideological or political stake in the organization as activists are not generally perceived as a group that an organization appeals to in order to achieve a large sale. A group of activists are usually considered by an organization because of their scrutiny on the cause which they are invested, meaning that an organization that is not careful to take into account this cause may find themselves protested by groups of activists. Thus, the inconsideration of this stakeholder may result in an organization being perceived in a negative manner by general society, should the cause that was ignored hold a more widespread appeal, such as animal rights, equality, the environment or any such causes.

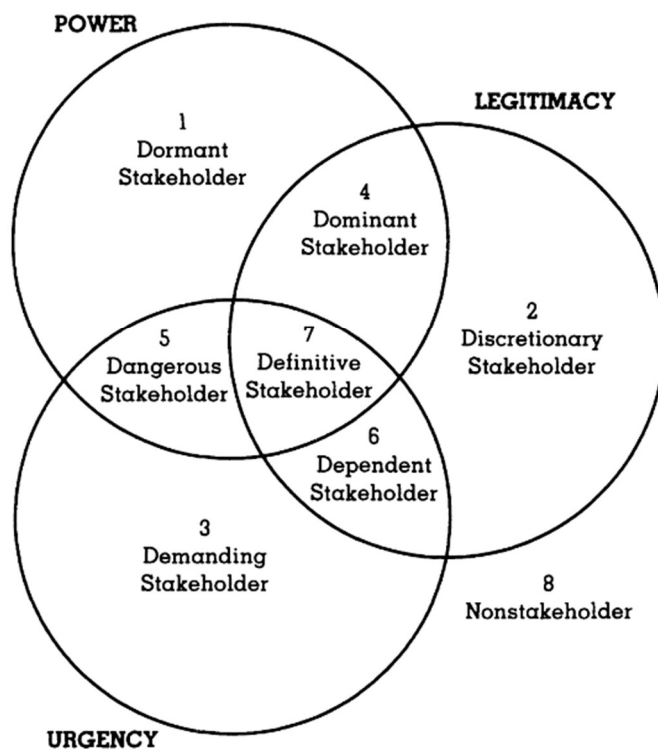
## Stakeholder Salience Theory

With this overarching understanding of stakeholders, the approach to considering stakeholders, stakeholder salience theory, will now be introduced and its application will be discussed alongside how it relates to other theories on stakeholders.

When Lewis writes: “Stakeholder Theory can be thought of as a family of perspectives...” (Lewis 2011, 85-115), she states that stakeholder theory is a theory where old theories are not necessarily abandoned when a new line of thought is accepted. Instead, stakeholder theory per design builds upon prior understandings of stakeholders. As was explained earlier, the neo-classical line of thought in stakeholder theory solely focuses on stakeholders that the organization needs in order to maximize profits, however, when a more modern socio-economic approach was adopted the idea of economic stakeholders being important to an organization was not abandoned, these remain important. Socio-economic stakeholder theory instead added another layer to stakeholder theory, where one must now consider more interests in an organization than just the economic.

This idea of stakeholder theory being a family of perspectives can also be identified when considering the applications of stakeholder theory, from the descriptive approach to the instrumental approach to the normative approach and the salience theory. Each approach, while it may focus different aspects of stakeholder theory, still focuses on how an organization “allocates stakes and attention to various recognized stakeholders.” (Lewis 2011, 85-115). The descriptive approach focuses on describing existing relations with stakeholders. However, without this the instrumental approach would not be able to test “how organizational actions shape stakeholder relationships.” (Lewis 2011, 85-115). Without these two schools of thought the foundations for the normative stakeholder theory, which focuses on an organization’s moral and ethical obligations to its stakeholders, would be lacking. Lastly, building upon these lines of thought the stakeholder salience theory allows for an assessment of stakeholders. With the understanding provided by recognizing the organization’s relationship, how it engages with a stakeholder and the organization’s moral and ethical obligations to it, one may consider the power, legitimacy and urgency of a stakeholder. The power of a stakeholder is the ability to impose its will on an organization. In the case of *Assassin’s Creed: Shadows* this could be when the Japanese government discusses the game and how Ubisoft is treating the Japanese culture that the Japanese community, as a stakeholder, can be considered to hold a larger power as there is a threat of legislation or other action based on Ubisoft’s approach to the stakeholder. Legitimacy is the understanding of how proper, desirable or appropriate a stakeholder’s claim is, in other words, does this particular stakeholder have a reasonable background for stating their claim. If this logic is applied to the same stakeholder, the Japanese community, one would present the idea that this stakeholder would be qualified to make claims on the topic of the Japanese culture. It can be assumed that the group both has lived it, but it also has resources to double-check more readily available than other communities. Lastly, urgency is the understanding of how time-sensitive the issue a stakeholder has is. The Japanese community’s urgency, prior to the launch of *Assassin’s Creed: Shadows*, could have been considered high as it could be theorized that with the promise of sensitivity and respect towards the culture changes and corrections would need to be made before more promotional material was presented or the game itself was released. Without the corrections the promise to the Japanese community would not have been upheld and it could be assumed that a backlash would follow, thus making the stakeholder’s issue have urgency (Lewis 2011, 85-115).

**FIGURE 2**  
**Stakeholder Typology:**  
**One, Two, or Three Attributes Present**



In ‘Figure 2’ from Mitchell, Agle and Wood’s ‘Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts’ (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886) these three attributes are visualized and the different stakeholder types are named. The dormant stakeholder, the discretionary stakeholder, the demanding stakeholder, the dominant stakeholder, the dangerous stakeholder, the dependent stakeholder and the definitive stakeholder. Outside of the figure the nonstakeholder is also visualized.

Mitchell, Agle, and Wood also list traits about the different stakeholder types.

The Dormant stakeholder holds power to impose its will on an organization but lacks the legitimacy or urgency to do so. In other words, unless something triggers this group of stakeholders, they will not engage with the organization (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The discretionary stakeholder possesses legitimacy but has no power to affect the organization and no urgency to do so, this could be Ubisoft’s shareholders, who do not act unless affected by other attributes. This stakeholder may have ground for legitimate issues but does not have the power to affect the organization nor do they have a need for the issue to be resolved. These may be historians who may point out inaccuracies in the history Assassin’s Creed: Shadows borrows (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

Demanding stakeholders hold only the urgency trait, they have no power over the organization, nor do they have legitimacy to their claims. A sole protester of an aspect of Ubisoft or Assassin’s Creed: Shadows may be considered a demanding stakeholder, as they demand change but does not hold power over the organization on their own nor do they hold legitimacy (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

These single attribute stakeholders are referred to as low-salience stakeholders, as they are not expected to raise large issues on their own or without gaining another attribute. The more salient group of stakeholders,

the ones holding two attributes, are called moderate-salience stakeholders as these are seen to be expectant as their dual-attribute leads them to take a more active stance compared to the mono-attribute holder who has a more passive stance towards the organization. Thus, these stakeholders also demand more responsiveness from the organization (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The Dominant stakeholders are stakeholders who hold both power and legitimacy. This stakeholder group has the power to affect the organization and a legitimate claim to act upon. The dominant group may, in keeping with the explanation that groups can gain attributes, be Ubisoft's shareholders. The shareholders may gain the legitimacy attribute if they as a dormant group are activated by historians that are presenting multiple issues in relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadow's story and respecting of Japanese culture as this may be seen as an indication that the game will have a backlash and the shareholder's investment into Ubisoft may be negatively affected, thus making this group take action (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The dependent stakeholder is a group that holds both legitimacy and urgency but lacks the power to affect the organization. This group is dependent as it relies on other parties to act out their interests. In the case of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, a dependent stakeholder could be gamers, as this stakeholder group is so broad that it encompasses historians who has legitimacy, alongside gamers of Japanese descent that hold legitimacy based on their heritage and residency in Japan. This group then has urgency as the issues presented when it comes to historical inaccuracies in an Assassin's Creed game, which takes heavy inspiration from real life history, must be resolved before the game's story is finalized and the game is published, however this stakeholder group does not hold the power over the organization to have it make these changes individually (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The last moderate-salience stakeholder group is the dangerous stakeholder. This stakeholder group holds the power and urgency attributes yet lacks legitimacy. This group of stakeholders is listed as dangerous because the power it holds comes from coercion and potentially violence. In Ubisoft's case, a dangerous stakeholder may have been a sub-group of gamers that held issue with creative choices in Assassin's Creed: Shadows and as a result organized boycotts of the game, thus presenting a threat to the organization (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The last and most important group of stakeholders is the definitive stakeholder. This group of stakeholders possesses all attributes and by definition has power, legitimacy and urgency forcing an immediate reaction from the organization. This could be gamers, as this group was identified as a dependent stakeholder group previously it could have gained definitive status through gaining the power of different entities. This obtaining of power may be through activating shareholders as a massive critique of Assassin's Creed: Shadows would threaten their investment. It could also be when the issue of respecting Japanese culture in the game became a big enough topic that the Japanese government was activated thus the threat of legislation or a ban on the game in Japan became a threat. In this way, it is possible for any stakeholder to become a definitive stakeholder by

gaining the missing attribute(s) and with this the causes require immediate response from the organization (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997, 853-886).

The author understands that issues management discusses interests in organizations and therefore almost demands the presence of stakeholder theory, this does not inherently explain why it is necessary to understand the salience of the stakeholders. The necessity to present the importance of a stakeholder comes from the paper focusing not on a large quantity of stakeholders and their relationships with Ubisoft and Assassin's Creed: Shadows. Instead, the paper focuses on a few select stakeholders who hold significant relevance to understanding how the communication on the issues that activated these select stakeholders was received. Therefore, it is imperative that the selected stakeholders are relevant to Ubisoft and this relevancy is ensured by identifying their attributes, the salience of their claims.

## Method

### Document Analysis

To analyze the empirical evidence gathered a method is required. The document analysis serves as a method to add structure to the gathered documents and allows for multiple analyses of the content of these, alongside an interpretative analysis considering the document in relation to the paper's theory.

The reason why the document analysis (Hani 2022) is vital to categorize and analyze the empirical data collected stems from the fact that this data is not limited to only text or only imagery. The method allows for multiple analyses that compliment each other when it comes to content that has both imagery, sound and text. Furthermore, the document analysis is hermeneutical in nature as one can analyze the content in a specific way, example being a rhetorical analysis before considering the content once more from a narrative point of view (Kuckartz and Radiker, Three Types of Qualitative Content Analysis 2023, 79-98). In this way, the initial analysis allows for a deepening of one's understanding, to which it follows that a deeper understanding must also be obtainable if one were to analyze the rhetorical aspects with this further understanding. This hermeneutical nature is also identified in the document analysis as the analysis is based upon hermeneutical ideas where one identify categories of documents and their subcategories based on a preconceived understanding of the document and then one delves deeply into the documents through one or more analyses, each analysis allowing for a deeper understanding of the document and thereby creating a fusion of horizons between the researcher and the document. Therefore, with each analysis and the deeper understanding of the document that has been achieved it is possible to return to previous analyses and delve deeper into these, thus creating the circular motion of knowledge creation that is so quintessentially hermeneutical.

According to Lynggaard the analysis of documents is guided by the research question (Lynggaard, Dokument Analyse 2020, 185-202), this means that posing a research question that focuses on issues management and stakeholders one must structure their approach to document analysis in a manner that harmonizes with these theories. Lynggaard explains that due to the fact that theory may not necessarily provide clear directions on how one should go about structuring a document analysis it might be up to the individual researcher to create their own approach (Lynggaard, Dokument Analyse 2020, 185-202). With this in mind, it is a relevant question to pose if the method itself can be considered a proper method when it does not explicitly direct a researcher to a method that they can apply to their research. This lack of direction might be considered an issue to some approaches to science, however, in the hermeneutical school of thought this would be a sensible idea. To present a method that is built upon one's understanding of document analysis and ways the method has been utilized previously in order to structure an analysis that best answers the question being posed is in the author's opinion a prime example of a hermeneutical approach to science. The approach to the document analysis will therefore be based on Hijmans' article in which she highlights five approaches to document analysis (Hijmans 2009, 93-108). These will be presented below where a structure for the analysis will be introduced alongside an initial work section based on Hani's writings on authentication of documents (Hani 2022) and Kuckartz and Radiker's writings on the initial work in a document analysis (Kuckartz and Radiker, Three Types of Qualitative Content Analysis 2023).

## Initial work

The first thing that must be done is, as Hani explains, that documents to be analyzed must be selected and that these documents must be verified. The documents must be considered for their authenticity; in other words, it must be ensured that the document is made by a real individual. As the research project works with content produced on the internet, this may be posts on X by Ubisoft or Assassin's Creed: Shadows and responses to these, the author must be authenticated. This authentication is done by accessing the accounts profile and considering the account's activity, does it post a lot, does it have pictures, etc. (Hani 2022, 64-77). Following this one must engage with the text, the content being analyzed - be it a written text or multimedia, where one attempts to read the text carefully in order to understand the subjective meaning. In other words, one should attempt to acquire an understanding of how the text was produced, what prompted the author, how well does the author understand the topic they are talking about, how does the author relate to it, etc. This is done to gain a basic understanding of the text itself and allow for a proper categorization of the text and what analysis may be beneficial in order to understand the text (Kuckartz and Radiker, Three Types of Qualitative Content Analysis 2023, 79-98).

## Organizing and managing documents

After the initial work is completed, for which it must be stated that the corpus of documents gathered does not have a predetermined amount. Hani explains that the number of documents gathered is not one that should be predetermined but it should instead be up to the researcher(s) to identify when a sufficient amount of documents have been gathered and the gathering of further documents would not allow for additional insights (Hani 2022, 64-77). To understand when this has been achieved one must look to Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory where they describe that: "The criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category's theoretical saturation. Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. He goes out of his way to look for groups that stretch diversity of data as far as possible, just to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category." (Glaser and Strauss 2017, 45-77), through which it is understood that a saturation point where no further understanding can be gained from additional texts must be achieved. One must then consider the hermeneutical approach to science once more where it is possible to indefinitely delve into the meaning of documents and further documents would therefore only add to this understanding. In this instance, the author believes that the hermeneutical approach would be to include texts to the point where it reasonably allows for the analysis to answer the problem statement and adding further documents would become redundant, as highlighted in the quote of Glaser and Strauss, a saturation must be achieved where adding further documents will not yield significant knowledge to answer the posed problem statement. The author must stress that in the hermeneutical approach to science a true saturation point cannot be achieved as knowledge can be expanded indefinitely but constraints such as the length of the paper, time constraints and relevancy of the gained knowledge presents limitations to this.

The organizing and managing of the documents are based upon the basic understanding acquired in the initial work and serve to present the documents in an organized manner to ensure that the reader and the author do not become overwhelmed with the number of documents utilized. This organization will be done by creating a table where the documents are listed based on the identified categories, topics of the document and then a sub-classification to identify the topics identified in the document in the initial work phase. These categories will be established based on the author's preunderstanding of the texts after the initial work has been completed and subcategories within the categories will be made in the same manner. This initial categorization will be made to structure the documents and present a preconceived idea of what analysis or analyses will be utilized to understand the documents. Therefore, the categories and subcategories might be altered or expanded upon as further understanding is achieved through analysis.

## Analysis of documents

With the organized stakeholder groups and their sub-classifications, the next step is to analyze the text which as Rapley states is: “Exploring a text often depends as much on focusing on what is said – and how a specific argument, idea or concept is developed – as well as focusing on what is not said – the silences, gaps or omissions.” (Rapley, *Exploring Documents* 2007, 112-123). With this it is understood that although a lot may be interpreted from what is said in a text one must also consider that which goes unsaid. An example for *Assassin’s Creed: Shadows* is the apology being made to the Japanese community where the development team states that they greatly appreciate the feedback and thoughts being shared. The context of this statement has the reader interpret it as the team wanting to fix the issues that have been identified and the critique from the Japanese community being taken very seriously. On the other hand, when one looks at the section on authenticity as a whole, in the apology, the developers do not present a clear plan to remedy the issues. The developers instead assure the stakeholders that they are doing their utmost to ensure the quality of the game and its adherence to Japanese culture and history. While this may be read the way that was pointed out previously, this may also be interpreted as the developer team stating that they will continue in the same direction they had already been working. These thoughts about what is stated and what is left as a gap in the documents that have been highlighted as an introduction to the analysis would be part of one of the five analysis approaches identified by Hijmans, in this case with the considerations being made of what is said and what is not, it would fall under a rhetorical analysis. The other four analyses that Hijmans identified are narrative, discourse, structuralist-semiotic and lastly interpretative (Hijmans 2009, 93-108). In the following section four of these will be introduced, and examples will be provided of their use-cases. Furthermore, these different analyses allow the researcher to focus on specific elements of a document, this might be a text document where one would first consider the rhetorical elements to understand what is being presented in text how the text argues. This could then be supported by the discourse analysis where one considers the word choices and how these may affect the understanding of the text, if a softer language is being used to describe one element compared to another, what might a specific synonymous word achieve compared to another. A structuralist-semiotic analysis could then be performed in order to consider the use of signs and symbols in the document; this may be applied if the author uses a symbolic language or utilizes idioms or other such elements. Lastly, the interpretative analysis which utilizes the researcher’s preunderstandings, and the theory gathered in order to create new knowledge on the topic. This may be used if the researcher has a certain understanding of a document that may not come to light through the other analyses and thereby complement them. Through this the different analyses allow a researcher to consider a text from five different angles and through working with these will be able to delve deeper into each subsequent analysis based on the knowledge gained from previous analyses.



### *Rhetorical Analysis*

As Hijmans explains: "... rhetorical analysis is the question how the message is presented visually or textually." (Hijmans 2009, 93-108), in other words, the rhetorical analysis is the interpretation of the document's message. It is the interpretation of the information being presented to the audience from the words being read or heard. This may include elements such as "composition, form, use of metaphors and structure of argumentation or reasoning." (Hijmans 2009, 93-108). An example being when the apology by the Assassin's Creed: Shadows development team write: "We would like to address a few points to clarify our intentions and creative decisions:", it suggests to the reader that the composition of the text is argumentative as instead of acknowledging that which is being criticized and presenting a way to improve on this, the development team presents their case as to why the issue should not be considered an issue. While these elements may not all be present in the selected documents all the elements may be considered for analysis, however it should be noted that in many of if not all documents analysis of the form becomes irrelevant as a comment on the social media X follows a uniform form, therefore analyzing the form will achieve no actual insights in the document. The understanding of the text is based upon close reading of the text and interpreting the directly observable message and how the language is being used. Considerations that might be made could take offset in elements such as what message is being presented, who is the speaker, who is the audience, how have they decided to convey their message, what do they base their argument on – ethos, logos, pathos? Furthermore, as was highlighted previously, Rapley identified the importance of considering the gaps in what is being said. In other words, are there things in the texts that appear to have intentionally been left vague or blank for a specific interpretation to be more prominent or elements that could have elaborated on solutions, messages or ideas that are not present and what might this tell the observant reader (Rapley, Exploring Documents 2007, 112-123)? This understanding of what is not being said is based on Rapley's statement that: "Exploring a text often depends as much on what is said – and how a specific argument, idea or concept is developed – as well as focusing on what is not said – the silences, gaps or omissions." (Rapley, Exploring Documents 2007), where he explains that one must also consider what is not being said. The author acknowledges that this may seem like a limitless scope but hopes that the example highlights how this idea of analyzing that which presents a gap in a text may be used to understand the message when used in context to infer relevant information.

As an example was already presented of the rhetorical analysis it will be summarized for the sake of the sake of structure and simplicity. The team of developers made an apology to the Japanese community of the Assassin's Creed franchise. This apology stated that the developers were taking their concerns seriously and they were presenting ways they were ensuring that this issue would not be prevalent in the full game. However, the message also left it unclear what specific steps were being taken, outside of what was already being done prior to the apology, to ensure the adherence to Japanese culture and history.

### *Discourse Analysis*

The discourse analysis focuses on analyzing the text and the semantics of language or the signs that are used. In this analysis one may consider the communicator's intentions and conventions that can be read from the textual properties of the message. This interpretation of the intentions may be explored through word choices used by an author and what these might indicate. This might be considerations that could be made when the development team of Assassin's Creed: Shadows start their apology by writing: "To our esteemed Japanese community...", where one find increased interest in the word 'esteemed' as this might be seen as abnormally formal in regular communications in Canada. In other words, this analysis considers the message in the context that surrounds it both socially and culturally, hence why the use of a more formal wording becomes interesting (Hijmans 2009, 93-108).

The example that was already presented, the use of the word 'esteemed' is considered from the point of view that this is a Canadian branch of an organization that is making an apology to an Asian country, specifically Japan, that might be seen as a more formal culture. Thus, adopting a more respectful wording could be interpreted as the organization respecting the Japanese culture and thereby attempt to soothe the concerns that this stakeholder group has.

While the discourse analysis may seem reminiscent to the rhetorical analysis these two differ as discourse analysis focuses on textual elements that may be used to aid the author's intentions, as the example highlighted, presenting oneself as respectful of a different culture by adopting elements of it into one's communication, whereas the rhetorical analysis focuses on the full message that is being presented and how this is structured. This means that the rhetorical analysis aims to understand what arguments are being presented when Ubisoft apologized to the Japanese community in relation to Assassin's Creed: Shadows and how they argue their resolution where the discourse analysis may delve into text elements that support this but are not considered in the rhetorical analysis. The author also acknowledges that a full analysis of each word used would be an incredibly large undertaking and would ultimately present a lot of needless interpretations on commonplace language, therefore he wishes to clarify that the words considered are selected from the text due to them standing out. In other words, the analyzed words will be ones that catch the attention of the author as they considerably shape the meaning of the text or otherwise have important connotations.

### *Structuralist-semiotic analysis*

This style of analysis is especially concerned with the meaning of the message. As is implied when something is semiotic, there is a clear interest in signs and symbols and the interpretation of these, and these are therefore the focal point of this analysis. The message must be considered for elements that can be considered as signs or symbols and are therefore interpreted based on their context, be it cultural, scientifically, socially or

otherwise interpreted signs. In other words, when a sign is interpreted it will be done through certain contexts such as the letters 'WASD'. In one context, this might be a seemingly random string of four letters, it might be recognized that these are positioned closely on a keyboard. However, if these are considered from the point of view of a PC gamer it is understood that these four keys are the most common keys when it comes to controlling a character in a video game, W means forward, S means backward, A means left and D means right. In this way a specific context that might not be available to all is needed to understand the sign/symbol.

An example is when one considers Assassin's Creed: Shadows, to some this may be nothing more than a video game as their point of reference for understanding it does not include further insight into the content. However, to others it is a symbol of disrespect, be it from the point of view of a gamer who sees technical issues with the game or from a cultural point of view where the game might be considered disrespectful to the culture that it borrows in order to tell its story.

### *Interpretative Analysis*

The interpretative analysis is a more social scientific analysis and the researchers draw "... upon their own experience as a resource and thus are part of the research instrument..." (Hijmans 2009, 93-108), meaning that the researcher works in a hermeneutical way and utilizes their own precognitions about certain elements in order to formulate their understanding and through this fusion of horizons between the researchers' prior knowledge and the text and new deeper understanding is formulated through the analysis. The researcher poses questions with the aim of discovery and formulating a theory. For this analysis data serves to discover new findings and the procedure is "such that in the end one knows more than at the beginning." (Hijmans 2009, 93-108). The interpretations are guided by theory, however, it does not guide the interpretations as the aim is to create new knowledge.

In the case of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, this could be utilizing issues management theory in order to classify the stage that the identified issue is located at in the issues life cycle based on the findings in previously performed analyses. In other words, this analysis is used to consider the findings of the other analyses with the issues life cycle theory in mind and present a reasoned placement of the issues stage.

In relation to the research project, the author acknowledges that these four different styles of analysis in document analysis will not be utilized equally and will not be applied to all issues the same. As was highlighted, these analyses may be better structured to understand some issues better than others and for some issues multiple analysis may complement each other to provide a deeper and necessary understanding of the issue. The decision of which analyses will be utilized for each document and will be decided in the organization phase of the document analysis where the documents are categorized based on the author's preunderstandings.

In the same manner the author will present his preconceived assumption on which analyses will be used to interpret the document. In the event that a document requires further analyses than initially anticipated this will be noted and these will be performed. An example would be the apology made by the developers where the overarching message would be analyzed through a rhetorical analysis, the cultural aspects may be analyzed through discourse analysis and signs and symbols present in the message might be highlighted and interpreted through the structuralist-semiotic analysis which would serve to complement each other to form a deeper understanding of the message and how it might be understood.

### *Method of Analysis*

To ensure a concise and easily understandable method to the analysis is clear, a three-step process will be described. The first step in the analysis will be to identify which analyses will be utilized and present these with a short summary of what elements make these necessary. The second step will be to perform the analysis or analyses in chronological order to how they were presented above. Lastly, in the third step an overview of the findings will be presented in a succinct manner to ensure the analysis' findings are easily understandable.

In other words, this will be executed in the following manner: The first step consists of the initial work is completed as the documents are gathered. The documents are verified to be posted by real accounts and in doing so an initial understanding of the documents as texts is achieved. This initial understanding is then utilized to organize and manage the documents in a table that will list the document as it is named, the initial categorization it is labeled, the initial sub-categorization, then due to the hermeneutic nature of the author's work a revised categorization and sub-categorization will follow, lastly the table will hold an initial analyses and an revised analyses, where the author's preunderstanding of what analyses will be applied is listed and a revised listing based on what was found to be necessary during the analysis. The second step will then be to perform these analyses of the document and during this consider if further analyses are needed to achieve a proper understanding of the text. Lastly, the findings in these analyses will be summarized. Outside of the initial work and categorization, which is executed during the gathering of documents, this process will be executed in full on a text-by-text basis. Meaning, that the analyses, revising and summarizing will be carried out before the same process is initiated with a different text. The structure of this will be as follows, a section at the start of the analysis will be dedicated solely to the table categorizing the documents. After this a stakeholder analysis is performed, based on the author's preunderstandings of the stakeholders to recognize the most important stakeholders and ensure that the analysis of the communication is considered in relation to these. Following this, a section where all individual analyses are present will follow. Lastly, a section will hold all the summaries of the analysis, this section is separated from the analysis itself as it is not intended to present further interpretation or information that is not already present but serve as a succinct text detailing the findings.

# Analysis

## Organizing of Documents

### Categorization and Analysis table

Document	Initial Categorization	Initial sub-categorization	Revised Categorization	Revised Sub-Categorization	Initial Analyses	Revised Analyses
1.1: Apology by Ubisoft Canada to the Japanese Community	Public Relations Social Media Post	Apology Quality assurance Authenticity Community	Public Relations Social Media Post	Unapologetic apology Quality assurance Issue quelling	Rhetorical, Discourse, Structuralist-semiotic, Interpretative	Rhetorical, Discourse, Structuralist-semiotic, Interpretative
Replies to apology						
1.2.1	Supporting Ubisoft	Historical fiction Disclaimer	Supporting Ubisoft	Historical fiction Disclaimer	Rhetorical, Discourse, Structuralist-semiotic, Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative
1.2.2	Critical of Ubisoft	Japanese Protagonist	Critical of Ubisoft	Japanese Protagonist	Rhetorical Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative
1.2.3	Critical of Ubisoft	Historical accuracy	Critical of Ubisoft	Historical Accuracy	Rhetorical	Rhetorical

				Distaste of DEI	Interpretative	Interpretative
1.2.4	Critical of Ubisoft	Japanese history belongs to the Japanese	Critical of Ubisoft	Japanese history belongs to the Japanese Critical of Yasuke	Rhetorical Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative
1.3	Supporting Ubisoft	Game Metrics	Supporting Ubisoft	Game Metrics Positive interpretation	Rhetorical Structuralist-Semiotic Interpretative	Rhetorical Structuralist-Semiotic Interpretative
Replies to Genki's post						
1.4.1	Critical of Ubisoft	Game Metrics	Critical of Ubisoft	Game Metrics Transparency	Rhetorical Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative
1.4.2	Supporting of Ubisoft	Game Metrics Success	Supportive of Ubisoft	Game metrics Success	Rhetorical Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative
1.4.3	Critical of Ubisoft	Game Metrics Mario Kart	Critical of Ubisoft	Game Metrics Mario Kart	Rhetorical Interpretative	Rhetorical Interpretative

## Stakeholder analysis

### *Shareholders*

Shareholders have been identified as a stakeholder for Assassin's Creed: Shadows, this stakeholder is one that has invested in the publicly traded company, Ubisoft, which produces the game and therefore, the performance of the game will be reflected on their investment. It is understood that this stakeholder has the power to impose their thoughts and ideas on the creative process if they feel that it does not appear to aid in the company's growth. Furthermore, this financial incentive also provides this stakeholder legitimacy to act upon. This stakeholder is therefore interpreted as dominant, as it has power and legitimacy but without an outside force it does not have urgency.

### *CEO*

The CEO is considered a dominant stakeholder as they have power to direct the developing process and affect the creative decisions being made. The CEO also has legitimacy stemming from the position at the company where they are in charge of the organization. The CEO is not assumed to hold urgency unless outside forces are forcing them to desire change or they are otherwise motivated to seek change. The urgency could be achieved through backlash that would threaten the sales of a game or through political or ideological beliefs that the CEO feels strongly enough that a need to affect the creative process exists.

### *Politically motivated Individuals*

Politically motivated individuals are interpreted as dangerous stakeholders as these hold power through the sway that they may achieve with like-minded people and through this create a movement that seeks to change elements in a game and the creative process surrounding it. This stakeholder is understood to hold urgency as the interest in promoting its own political belief, be it right-, left-wing or centrist beliefs, the stakeholder wishes to affect the game being developed.

### *Employees*

The employees hold legitimacy as they are part of the creative process or part of overseeing the process. This legitimacy is based upon the experience the group holds in creating games and based on the understanding that changes being made to a game that truly change the course of it would have to be presented to management this stakeholder group is interpreted to not hold power. This stakeholder group, like the CEO, does not hold urgency to make these changes unless they are affected by outside forces or are heavily invested in a cause that they wish to see promoted more than they wish to create a piece of art. The employees are therefore discretionary stakeholders.

### *Gamers*

Gamers have been identified as definitive stakeholders. This group of stakeholders holds power through collaborating voices, being able to affect stakeholders that hold power, if the group is motivated to do so. Which can be seen in the case of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, where the game was critiqued based on its promotional material. The group has legitimacy from the position itself; gamers are the consumers of videogames and therefore a game developer's earnings are dependent on gamers buying their products. The urgency arises from the gamers desiring good games that present the world they create in a respectful manner, doubly so if this fictive world borrows elements from real life or real history. The desire is to have games that they can immerse themselves in and experience a world that stands on its own and does not necessarily comment on real life or real-life politics, unless this fits the game's world.

### *Japanese community*

The Japanese community has a reasonable overlap with gamers and therefore these two stakeholder groups can be assumed to have a certain sway with each other. Therefore, the Japanese community is interpreted as a definitive stakeholder. This stakeholder holds the same power gamers do - to gather as a community and present their discontent as a group, which can activate dominant stakeholders to join their cause. This stakeholder's legitimacy is based on their culture and history being borrowed by Ubisoft to create Assassin's Creed: Shadows, which is set in Feudal Japan. In this line of thought, the stakeholder achieves urgency when they perceive that their culture or history is being misrepresented.

### *Legal entities*

Legal entities, such as the governments in countries that Assassin's Creed: Shadows is being sold or entities as the EU that may impose rules and regulations on games can be considered dominant stakeholders. These stakeholders have the power to change, through legislation, what is allowed to be distributed in their respective regions/countries. Furthermore, this stakeholder holds legitimacy through its status as a governing body, meaning that if Ubisoft wishes to do business in the areas that these legal entities govern Ubisoft must adhere under the laws and regulations these entities have put in place. This stakeholder does not hold urgency unless it is affected externally, in other words, the Japanese government does not have a motivation to act against Ubisoft unless a massive public outcry against Assassin's Creed: Shadows had happened, as an example.

### *Partners/platforms*

The partners Ubisoft work with, such as Sony for Playstation, Steam or Epic Store for PC, and Microsoft for Xbox, can be interpreted as dominant stakeholders. This dominance is based on the stakeholders' power to allow or restrict games' access to certain parts of the market. Examples of this include when Cyberpunk 2077 was removed from the Playstation store and all customers were offered a full refund because of the poor launch the game had. Another example is Valve, the company behind Steam, updating the instructions for



requirements for games to be published on their service stating that the company refuses to sell any game that has in-game advertising or have elements that give in-game advantages through the viewing of ads (Walker 2025).

With these stakeholders having been identified it is understood that the most important stakeholders are the gamers and the Japanese community. It is also understood that these two hold a certain amount of interconnectedness, which will be the basis for interpretations made should an insufficient amount of Japanese speaking individuals have posted on the posts in English that are analyzed, as the apology, for example, also exist in Japanese and the author cannot read or write Japanese and machine translation could change the nuances of the comments without the author's knowledge.

## Document Analysis

The documents selected will be analyzed below and unless stated otherwise the quoting of appendixes, example: (1.1 – line 20), refers to appendix 1 as this is the appendix containing the documents being analyzed.

### Analysis of 1.1: Apology by Ubisoft Canada to the Japanese community

#### *Rhetorical Analysis*

The first element to consider in the apology is the composition. While it may be considered as an image, not much will be gained from doing so. The visual elements are limited to a red background with shapes that are reminiscent of the Assassin's Creed logo, thus tying the message to that franchise. Delving into the composition of the text, it is understood as a cross between an exposition and an argumentation. The elements that point to it being an exposition are when lines such as: "We would like to address a few points to clarify our intentions and creative decisions:"(1.1 - line 20), "... Our intention has never been to present any of our Assassin's Creed games, including Assassin's Creed Shadows, as factual representation of history, or historical characters." (1.1 – line 26), "We also want to clarify that while we have been consulting with many people throughout the development process, they are in no way responsible for the decisions that are taken by the creative teams..." (1.1 – line 48). Through this it can be understood that the development team is presenting its understanding of how their work with the historical elements which have received backlash over is performed, that they might believe that if this process is brought to light the readers of the text might be more understanding. At the same time, while there are elements that present the team's interpretation of their work and attempts to explain this it is overshadowed by argumentative elements in the apology. Examples of these are: "We have put significant effort into ensuring an immersive and respectful representation of Feudal Japan." (1.1 – line 23), "... We aim

to spark curiosity and encourage players to learn more about the historical setting we get inspired by.” (1.1 – line 29), “Assassin’s Creed Shadows is... designed to be an entertaining video game that tells a compelling, historical fiction set in Feudal Japan.” (1.1 – line 33), “Our team extensively collaborated with external consultants, historians, researchers, and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan to inform our creative choices.” (1.1 – line 36), “From its inception, the series has taken creative license and incorporated fantasy elements to craft engaging and immersive experiences. The representation of Yasuke in our game is an illustration of this.” (1.1 – line 59), “While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai in Assassin’s Creed Shadows, we acknowledge that this is a matter of debate and discussion. We have woven this carefully into our narrative...” (1.1 – line 66). These quotes present argumentation that can be interpreted as “We understand your criticism, but we have already taken steps that we believe takes this into consideration.” when it is explained that the developer has put “significant effort into ensuring an immersive and respectful representation of Feudal Japan.” (1.1 – line 23). This is also seen when it is explained that Yasuke being a samurai is a point of contention that this has already been considered and through the weaving of their narrative this would resolve the issue that players have. Furthermore, when the text reads: “Our team extensively collaborated with external consultants, historians, researchers, and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan to inform our creative choices.” (1.1 – line 36) it is interpreted as an argument that the groundwork has already been made to ensure that the game is respectful towards Japanese history and culture. The other argumentation that is present is interpreted as: “Our work with history and historical figures inspire fiction.”. It is seen multiple times that an appeal is being made to consider the game as a fictional work set in a real setting, for example when it is written that: “... from its inception, the series has taken creative license and incorporated fantasy elements... The representation of Yasuke in our games is an illustration of this.” (1.1 – line 59) or “Assassin’s Creed Shadows is... designed to be an entertaining video game that tells a compelling, historical fiction set in Feudal Japan.” (1.1 – line 33). As highlighted: this can be interpreted as an argumentation that the individuals that hold issue with this do not fully comprehend how the game is constructed and are considering the narrative elements through the wrong lens.

The form of the text is interpreted to be of a Social Media video game update post, more specifically, an apology in this category. This is based on the author’s understanding of how it is commonplace in gaming for developers to present images with text in order to personalize messages or statistics to their particular studio or franchise. Other examples of this include but are not limited to CD Projekt Red’s apology on behalf of Cyberpunk 2077 on X and their consecutive updates on the game on the same platform (@CyberpunkGame 2020). Another example of this is Grinding Gear Games’ update on the statistics and player choices of the second season of Path of Exile 2 on the X (@pathofexile 2025). Through this, it is understood that this style of form presents a message with a personalized touch, which is seen as a way to connect to the community surrounding a game deeper, as it promotes the understanding that the posts are more than just updates. The posts are important to the game studios to present in an interesting way that grabs the attention of the player

and presents the idea that they care for the game just as much as the players and therefore even small updates or statistics reflect the game visually.

With the text by Assassin's Creed's X profile being identified as an argumentation, it then is relevant to consider the reasoning behind the argument. In other words, what is being appealed to, to make the argument. On the authenticity efforts the team writes that: "... our intention has never been to present any of our Assassin's Creed games, including Assassin's Creed Shadows, as factual representation of history, or historical characters. Instead, we aim to spark curiosity and encourage players to explore and learn more about the historical setting we get inspired by." (1.1 – line 26). This is interpreted as an appeal to logos, as Assassin's Creed games have always held the disclaimer that they are fictional works based on real people and events, that it logically follows that the intention of the games are not to present a historically accurate tale, instead it is to present a fictional tale based on this history. Later, on the same page of the apology it is written that: "Our team extensively collaborated with external consultants, historians, researchers, and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan to inform our creative choices." (1.1 – line 36), which is interpreted as an appeal to ethos. This interpretation is based on an appeal to the team's cooperation with organizations or individuals who have experience with Japanese culture or hold credentials that should allow them to guide the creative choices to be respectful towards the culture. Furthermore, it is highlighted how the Japanese Ubisoft team was consulted, which further appeals to ethos as it is assumed that this team would largely be comprised of native Japanese people and therefore a lived Japanese experience would be allowed to guide the development. On the third page of the apology an appeal to ethos is made, based on Ubisoft's reputation and experience as a game developer when it is written: "Based on the constructive criticism we have received, we will continue our efforts until we put this game into your hands – and beyond." (1.1 – line 45). It argued that the feedback has been heard and through this it can be interpreted that the development team will work with this in mind as they finish the development of the game and support it post-launch. However, one might also consider this in a different manner as there is a gap in the argumentation, the text does not present a direct plan of action to remedy the issue that the Japanese community has, therefore, the author considers this interpretation the more apt. This quote may therefore also be interpreted as a dismissal of the concerns based on the developer's credentials, this may be understood when the text reads: "... we will continue our efforts until we put this game into your hands..." (1.1 – line 46), as this can also be interpreted as a way of stating that the team will go about business as usual when one considers the full context that it finds itself in an admission that there will be no changes. On the fourth page of the apology the team writes: "While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai in Assassin's Creed Shadows, we acknowledge that this is a matter of debate and discussion. We have woven this carefully into our narrative and with our other lead character, the Japanese shinobi Naoe, who is equally important in the game, our dual protagonists provide players with different gameplay styles." (1.1 – line 66), which also is an appeal made based on ethos. The development team acknowledges that there is contention on Yasuke's depiction as a samurai and argues that their experience when it comes to writing games based on historical characters and

history allows them to weave a tale that considers this and addresses it in the game. The supporting argument to this is the highlighting of Naoe as an equally important protagonist in the game and providing different gameplay styles, which might be interpreted as Naoe and Yasuke's stories having an interplay that remedies this issue of Yasuke being a samurai of African descent. On the other hand, this is interpreted as a sign that the development team does not have a clear plan that would allow them to alter their course and address the issue. This interpretation is based on the relevance of Naoe and differing playstyles are to the issue being addressed. Considering that the issue being addressed is that the game depicts a samurai, a status that holds significant importance in Japanese history and culture, the argument that there are two protagonists and therefore more than one gameplay style does not provide a path towards solving the issue and it is interpreted as merely an excuse that attempt to appease the parties that hold issue with the creative decisions by Ubisoft. In other words, this is another example of a gap in the argument, and it leaves the course of action to ameliorate the issue vague at best.

### *Discourse Analysis*

As was highlighted as an example of a discourse analysis, it is interesting to consider the implications when the apology begins with: "To our esteemed Japanese community..." (1.1 – line 1). As it was highlighted this formal way of addressing a community, by the use of the word 'esteemed' can be interpreted as a way for the development team to begin their apology in a respectful manner that promotes the idea that they understand Japanese culture. This is interpreted to be done as a way to attempt to soothe the concerns that the team behind Assassin's Creed: Shadows are not developing a game that respects the culture that it borrows. On the other hand, if one was to consider this critically, after having read the entire apology, one may interpret this use of formal language as a language tool being applied to attempt to quell an issue. This interpretation is based on the understanding that the apology does not present a plan of action to ameliorate the issue that the Japanese community has with the game or the promotional material that was released at the time. The author believes that this is a more realistic interpretation, based on the argumentation presented.

The next element that made us of interesting language is when it is written that: "... creating an Assassin's Creed game set in Feudal Japan has been a long-cherished dream." (1.1 – line 11). In this sentence the wording: 'long-cherished dream' guides a reader towards an interpretation that the developers of the game hold the Japanese culture in high regard, almost revere it. This is based on the understanding that something being 'long-cherished' implies that this dream has been a creative wish for a long time, one where the development team would be allowed to explore a culture and write a tale set in it that they have longed to do for a long time. This way of describing the ambition to create a game set in a Japanese setting thus promotes the interpretation that the development team is handling the culture that they are borrowing with the utmost care. However, when considering this in the context that the apology itself become superficial based on the lack of promises this is

understood as an emotional attachment to the source material highlighted to present a care that is not necessarily being followed through on.

“We share your passion for history and deeply respect your care for the historical and cultural integrity of your rich heritage.” (1.1 – line17) is the next sentence that proved interesting. This is twofold as ‘deeply respect’ and ‘your rich heritage’ both can be interpreted as ways to deepen this understanding that the development team is very respectful and almost reverent of the Japanese culture. The developer deeply respecting the Japanese community’s care for historical and cultural integrity might be interpreted as the developer acknowledging that they have made a misstep and that this was truly unintended and because they respect the community of the culture, they are borrowing they are happy that this is being pointed out to them. This understanding can be seen as being supported when Japanese heritage is being complimented as being ‘rich’. In other words, the developer is acknowledging the depth of Japanese culture, and this supports the understanding that the Japanese community has a deeply interesting culture that they care about and that the developer cares about it and its representation too. This reverence is interpreted as a hollow PR response when one considers that no plans are presented as to how the issues that the Japanese community hold will be addressed. This interpretation is supported by the argumentative composition identified in the rhetorical analysis where a lot of effort is being invested into arguing how the game is not a mirroring of actual history, but a fictional tale inspired by. In other words, this ‘deep respect’ is considered as insincere as the argumentative nature of the apology promotes an understanding of the apology almost being dismissive of the concerns of the Japanese community.

This duality of understanding can also be found when the development team writes: “We have put significant effort into ensuring an immersive and respectful representation of Feudal Japan.” (1.1 – line 23). In this sentence it is interesting to consider the wording: ‘We have put’, ‘significant effort’ and ‘immersive and respectful representation’. The first element of interest is that the team ‘have’ put effort into ensuring the representation, in other words, this has already happened prior to the apology to the Japanese community. This wording is interpreted as promoting the understanding that the development team is not as sorry as it claims to be as this already having put in the effort could be read as implying that the issues that the Japanese community has with the game are not worthy of altering the course of the game for. This may then be considered in a more positive manner when one considers that ‘significant effort’, in other words, a lot of work has gone into ensuring the ‘immersive and respectful’ representation of Japanese culture. This wording allows for the interpretation that the topic of Japanese culture is being handled with the utmost of care, and it further solidifies the belief that the development team holds the culture in great respect. However, as highlighted this may be a generous interpretation when one considers that ‘have’ implies that there will be no changes to remedy the issue the developer is facing.

“Our team extensively collaborated with...” (1.1 – line 36) is the next sentence that holds a significant interest. Once again there is a duality to be found in the sentence, where one may find positivity in ‘extensively’ and negativity in ‘collaborated’. The positive interpretation promoted by ‘extensively’ is that the development team is serious about their work with Japanese history and culture. Therefore, this extensive work with ensuring authenticity can be interpreted as a way of presenting the team’s competency, that they ensure that the work being done is throughout and their extensive work with outside sources and their Japanese team ensures that the product they are making is one that is culturally aware and respects it. However, the negative element identified in ‘collaborated’ mirrors the same as the previous wording analyzed: ‘have’. ‘Collaborated’ implies the work is not one that is going to take place because of the acknowledging of the issue that the Japanese community holds with the developer, it promotes the interpretation that this work has already taken place and therefore it can be interpreted that no course correction will be made for the game.

When the team writes: “...we will continue our efforts until we put this game into your hands and beyond.” (1.1 – line 46) this same duality of interpretations is present. The word ‘continue’ is the cause of this duality. The team continuing their efforts can be interpreted as the team’s willingness to keep improving and bettering the game, ensuring that anything that may present further issues is corrected as it is stated that this effort continues beyond the release of the game. However, when this is considered in relation to the previous examples where the wording can be interpreted as argumentative and promoting the idea that the team is not interested in altering the course of the game the messaging seems hollow. The ‘continued’ in this case is interpreted as the team stating that despite the feedback and critique that has been received on Assassin’s Creed: Shadows, there are no plans to make changes to ameliorate these issues, nor does the development team see this post-release of the game.

The words ‘unique’ and ‘mysterious’, when used to describe Yasuke and how he is an ideal candidate in the sentence: “His unique and mysterious life made him an ideal candidate...” (1.1 - line 63) can be interpreted as a reasoning as to why this particular character is a good choice, as Ubisoft has consistently chosen characters without clear recorded histories as protagonists. Thus, a very niche individual in Japanese history may be interpreted as a good candidate to write a story for. On the other hand, when one considers that prior to Yasuke the protagonists of Assassin’s Creed games, like Naoe, are original characters, this choice to include a person that has historical evidence of their existence as a protagonist seems contradictory to the developer’s *modus operandi*. It is interpreted as a deliberate choice based on outside influence that the choice to make a man of African descent one of the protagonists in a game set in Feudal Japan has ulterior motives. Thus, this unique and mysterious origin is interpreted as an excuse to force diversity into a game that otherwise would not have many grounds for this protagonist.

Lastly, the sentence: “While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai...” (1.1 – line 66) is interesting as the word ‘depicted’ is being used. This promotes the interpretation that Yasuke might not actually be a samurai in his

recorded history and that the cause for contempt with the game has some merit to it. One may also consider this in relation to the rhetorical context identified, where the solution to the issue being presented by Ubisoft is interpreted as shaky. As ‘depicted’ promotes the understanding that there is merit to the issue the Japanese community holds with Assassin’s Creed: Shadows, the remedy being presented does not address this acknowledgement nor does it present an actual plan to remedy the concerns presented.

### *Structuralist-semiotic Analysis*

When considering the symbolic meanings found in the apology the first thing of significance is when it is highlighted that the Assassin’s Creed series spans 20 years: “Assassin’s Creed series... spanning 20 years.” (1.1 – line 5). When this is considered in the context of a creative work of art, where multiple entries have been made, a twenty-year lifespan can be considered as an accomplishment. However, this may also be interpreted, through the lens of business communication, as a way for Ubisoft to present their experience and competence with creating games that follow the design decisions that characterize an Assassin’s Creed game. The highlighting of the lifespan of the franchise then becomes a symbol for the success of the developer with this style of game but also a testament to their competency as a developer for successfully managing the series for as many entries as it has. When considering the argumentative nature of the apology this interpretation of it representing competency is more likely.

In the context of the apology holding a “...long-cherished dream.” (1.1 – line 12) of making an Assassin’s Creed game set in Feudal Japan can be interpreted as a symbol of respect and admiration, which was also highlighted in the discourse analysis, as it urges the reader to understand that the development team has long wanted to work with this setting and that it means a lot to them. However, when one considers this symbol with the understanding that the apology is interpreted as primarily an attempt to calm an upset audience as was found the interpretation in the rhetorical analysis where it was found that the majority of the apology was interpreted as argumentative and in the discourse analysis that a lot of the suggested solutions were elements that had already been achieved. Therefore, this symbol can be interpreted as a positive manner, in that it shows the developing team’s respect and admiration for the culture that they work with, but a more likely interpretation is to consider it a disingenuous tool to try and relieve the developer of the issue they are facing. When one considers the game through from the point of view of a gamer one might find that although there are cultural elements that have created issues in the Japanese community, the promotional material that was criticized was visually impressive. Therefore, in this line of reasoning it is not unreasonable that the development team does have some respect and admiration for the culture that is being borrowed but this can be interpreted to be overshadowed by other decisions and therefore made to seem disingenuous.

The sentence: “We share your passion for history and deeply respect your care for the historical and cultural integrity of your rich heritage.” (1.1 – line 17) can be considered a symbol of acceptance by Ubisoft, as it is in relation to the criticism received from the promotional material. In other words, in the context of the apology this may be interpreted as Ubisoft agreeing with the Japanese community that has taken issue with the treatment of their culture. However, when one considers this symbol through the context of what is written and the findings in the rhetorical analysis and the discourse analysis and the fact that this agreement that there is an issue is followed by the sentence “We would like to address a few points and clarify out intentions and creative decisions:” (1.1 - line 20) this is interpreted as performative. The symbol, while intended to show that the developer is listening to the game’s audience is interpreted as an attempt at quelling the issues the developer is facing without adjusting the creative decisions in the game.

When the development team writes: “... an immersive and respectful representation of Feudal Japan.” (1.1 – line 23) the words immersive and respectful can be considered as a symbol in the context of gaming. In this context the word immersive means that the experience that a player can expect from the game will be fitting to the world that the game has crafted to the point that the player will be able to immerse themselves in the game’s world. The respectful element would then be interpreted as the world that is built for Assassin’s Creed: Shadows being respectful towards the culture that the game is borrowing and the customs and history that this culture carries with it. This, when considered from the context of the Japanese community was cause for issue as one of Assassin’s Creed: Shadows protagonist is inspired by a niche figure in Japanese history and this character, Yasuke, is considered to have been handpicked for his African heritage. This interpretation is made if one considers that a game about Feudal Japan, a time where the world was less culturally intertwined, focuses heavily upon an individual that most Japanese people might not be able to identify with and feel misrepresent their culture. In other words, to the Japanese community Yasuke playing a role that prior to Assassin’s Creed: Shadows had been reserved for entirely fictional people, who were therefore “blank sheets” that could be crafted to fit the world can be considered immersion breaking. This hyperfocus on Yasuke may also be interpreted as the Japanese culture having to concede its spotlight in favor of diversity, although it is, in Ubisoft’s words, being held in high regard and respect. On the other hand, Yasuke may also be considered through the context of diversity, where he could be considered a great achievement as the game is being developed in North America. In this context, the diversity can be interpreted as a way of including individuals of all ethnicities, shapes and sexualities for the individual gamer to have characters that they can easily relate to. The author found that the interpretation where the Japanese culture is made to concede its importance in favor of diversity is the more likely interpretation as this is supported by the dislike of Yasuke being expressed.

Immediately after this focus on immersion and respectfulness the apology reads: “... Our intention has never been to represent any of our Assassin’s Creed Games... as factual representations of history, or historical characters.” (1.1 – line 26) which can be interpreted through in an artistic context where it is understood that



in order to create an Assassin's Creed story the historical elements are a guideline that are used to craft a story that may include real historical events and people does not reflect real history. However, when this is considered in the context of the apology, this is interpreted as a dismissal of the critique that the game is not being respectful of the Japanese culture as the argument being made is that while the game finds inspiration in real history and culture it does not have to reflect this. In other words, the expected immersion does not necessarily come from characters and history reflecting real life but the tale that these are present in. One might consider a previous title: Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, where Leonardo da Vinci plays a key role in the story, however, a key difference is that Leonardo is a supporting character that reflects the time and setting the game takes place in. Therefore, when this is intention of Ubisoft's is considered through the history of Assassin's Creed games it can be interpreted to be at odds with previous creations and their implementations of historical figures. The precedence was that historical characters would be drawn in as supporting characters to a fictional protagonist, when they fit the time and place that the game takes place, they were not implemented as leading characters.

When it is written that: "Our team extensively collaborated with external consultants, historians, researchers, and internal teams at Ubisoft Japan..." (1.1 – line 36) it can be seen as a symbol of competence and thoroughness. When this is considered through the context of research and respectfulness this claimed expansive engagement with experts in the fields and individuals that have lived experience with Japanese culture and history presents an understanding that the development team is being thorough when it comes to crafting the narrative and world of the game. On the other hand, when considered in context of the argumentative nature of the apology it is interpreted as a dismissal of the issues that the Japanese community holds with Assassin's Creed: Shadows as it is argumentative towards the idea that the game is being disrespectful towards Japanese culture by presenting arguments that this respectfulness is ensured through the developer team's collaborations with experts.

When the sentence: "... until we put this game into your hands – and beyond." (1.1 – line 46) is considered in the context of video games this can be interpreted as a promise, by the developing team, to support Assassin's Creed: Shadows not just until the development is complete and the game is released but also to support it past the launch of the game. This can then be seen as a symbol of dedication as it is not a guarantee that games receive support and updates from the developer after the games have launched, it is the expectation that they will but not the rule.

Lastly, when the development team writes: "While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai..." (1.1 – line 66), it is seen as a symbol, in the context of the game, that Yasuke is indeed a samurai and that gamers can expect that he will be written with the historical benefits and status that this title would imply. When this is then considered in the context of the Japanese community's critique of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, it is interpreted that Ubisoft does not intend to change the game to ameliorate the issues that this community has with the game. This is

because a primary complaint that was seen about Yasuke was that he was not historically a samurai and therefore this representation would present historical inaccuracies and raise a historical figure far above his actual standing in Japanese history. This is, as highlighted previously, seen as Japanese culture playing second fiddle to diversity as the importance of a diverse character is raised to make him fit the role that he plays in the game, which could have been filled by a samurai of Japanese heritage. This decision to make Yasuke a samurai could however have been an important decision in the story if one considers this in the creative context. However, when it is stated in the apology that the remedy to this issue that people have with Yasuke being a samurai is to play as the Japanese Naoe, his significance is interpreted to not be as substantial as the player can experience the entire story from Naoe's perspective. This then is then considered in the context of diversity, where one may pose the question if Yasuke's role is a true victory for diversity or if his role has been inflated to achieve this idea of diversity.

### *Interpretative Analysis*

In this analysis the apology will be considered in relation to the issues lifecycle theory in order to present an understanding of what stage the issue can be considered. With a basis in the understanding acquired through the previous analyses the apology indicates a critical stage of an issue. As explained in the theory segment: the issue has been accepted as important enough that people seek a resolution to the issue (Cable and Vibbert 1985). The fact that Ubisoft Canada, the developer of Assassin's Creed: Shadows found themselves needing to address the concerns of the Japanese community indicates that the issue itself has reached the stage where it is widely accepted and therefore demanding a response from the developer. Furthermore, in the apology itself the issue at hand is being directly addressed: "... we have received many positive reactions, but also some criticism including from you, our Japanese players." (1.1 – line 15). In this quote the Japanese community is being addressed directly indicating that the issue that this community has identified with Assassin's Creed: Shadows and has created enough noise about that other communities have aligned their positions and accepting that this perceived disrespect of the Japanese culture and history is a worthy cause for complaint. This alliance between different communities is interpreted from Ubisoft's addressing the Japanese community as 'our Japanese players' and stating that the criticism does not only stem from this community. In other words, it is reasonable to interpret this wording as the developer acknowledging that the community that surrounds their games has aligned themselves with the issue that the Japanese community has with the game. Another element in the apology that supports the interpretation that the issue is at the critical stage is that the developer feels the need to explain their stance on their creative process: "... our intention has never been to present any of our Assassin's Creed games, including Assassin's Creed Shadows, as factual representations of history, or historical characters." (1.1 – line 26). This, as highlighted previously, can be seen as a way of trying to quell the issue by reminding people that the games produced are works of fiction that are inspired by real events and

people from history. However, as it was found in the structuralist-semiotic analysis this is interpreted as an attempt at downplaying the issue that the Japanese community has with the game, as it directly follows a segment where authenticity and respect of Feudal Japan was claimed to be very important to the developing team. Through this it was proposed that an interpretation of this part of the apology presents it as superficial as the developer claims to respect the culture that it is borrowing but in the same breath tries to dismiss the critique being directed at them and the game. This argumentative nature, which was found in the rhetorical analysis, is an indication that the apology will not achieve the goal of resolving the critical issue and achieving dormancy. Another element that indicates this is that it was found in the discourse analysis that the wording in the apology allows for the interpretation that the developer believes that the efforts that have already been made address the issues that the Japanese community has with Assassin's Creed: Shadows. An example of this is the consideration of the sentence "We have put significant effort into ensuring an immersive and respectful representation of Feudal Japan" (1.1 – line 23), where it was interpreted that the use of 'have' indicated this already having been done and therefore it lead to the understanding that there were no plans to change the game and through this address the issue being faced. The interpretations made of the apology's statements on Yasuke also adds to this interpretation that the apology will not achieve the intended results of a dormant issue. This is based on the interpretations of Yasuke is being presented as a 'unique' and 'mysterious' historical character, who is therefore ideal for an Assassin's Creed game, which goes against the *modus operandi* the game franchise has operated under previously. In previous titles the protagonists are original characters, like Naoe, these would therefore not have connotations from history and therefore would allow for them to lead these fictive stories while also fitting into the world being crafted. Through this understanding it was found that Yasuke is interpreted as a disregard of Japanese culture in favor of diversity. Finally, as it was highlighted in the discursive analysis, where the word 'depicted' is considered from the sentence "While Yasuke is depicted as a samurai..." (1.1 – line 66) it was found that this word allows for the interpretation that Ubisoft acknowledges the critique that Yasuke does not reflect the role that he would historically have held but the remedy being presented about Naoe being an alternative playable character does not present plans to remedy the issue nor does it address this understanding that there is merit to the issue that the Japanese community holds with Assassin's Creed: Shadows. This understanding of Yasuke, based on this sentence, is also considered in the structuralist-semiotic analysis where Yasuke being depicted as a samurai is considered as a symbol. The interpretation was that Yasuke can be expected to hold the role of samurai in the game and that this will carry the historical benefits of this stature. This interpretation then further supports the interpretation that Ubisoft does not have intentions of ameliorating the issue that the Japanese community has with the character and his being a samurai. As was highlighted, the issue is considered to be critical based on the need for the development team to respond to the criticism and this response is interpreted to be unlikely to remedy the issues that are being addressed and therefore dormancy of the issue as a result is deemed unlikely. This unlikeliness is based on the understanding that a plan for how the development team intends to address the

critique must be clear. In the sense that had the game been riddled with technical issues the plan forward would have been to address these and ensure the game become playable and enjoyable to the audience. In this instance no clear resolution or addressing of the issue is presented. In other words, Ubisoft accepts that an issue is present but through their apology it is interpreted that they do not claim accountability of this, as the apology argues against the critique being directed at Assassin's Creed: Shadows instead of presenting a plan of action or alterations that would be made to the game as a result of the acknowledgement of the issue.

## Analysis of reply to Ubisoft's apology on X

For these documents it is noted that the interpretative analysis will be presented as a collective analysis for the four posts, as it is intended to present an understanding of the stage in which the issue can be interpreted to be and therefore all selected replies are relevant and may not provide a full understanding alone.

### 1.2.1

#### Rhetorical Analysis

The reply to the apology by Synth Potato (@SynthPotato) is interpreted as argumentative in its composure. This is based on Synth Potato presenting the argument, which is also seen in the apology itself, that Assassin's Creed games are works of fiction. Furthermore, this is supplied with the disclaimer that plays during the startup of any Assassin's Creed game that the game is inspired by historical events and characters. It should however be noted that the disclaimer being presented by Synth Potato is likely from a later game in the Assassin's Creed series as it has the added note that "... this work of fiction was designed, developed, and produced by a multicultural team of various beliefs, sexual orientations and gender identities." (1.2.1 – line 5). In older titles the disclaimer did not focus on gender identity in the same manner, as it highlighted it being a multicultural team of various faiths and beliefs. While this then does argue that the franchise has always presented itself as a work of fiction based on real events and characters one may also interpret this updated disclaimer as Ubisoft, as a company, adopting identity politics. In the gaming community this focus on identity politics are often met with skepticism as a decent portion of gamers are of the belief that Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) incentives in video gaming tend to remove the focus on creating an enjoyable piece of art in favor of including as many elements of modern politics as possible to appeal to as large an audience as possible. A rejection of this and the effects it is believed to have has been seen with the boycott of consulting companies specializing in DEI incentives such as Sweet Baby Inc. which was singled out as it had consulted on multiple major games that received backlash over poor writing, optimization and immersion breaking characters/politics among other things.

The argumentation in Synth Potato's (@SynthPotato) reply to Ubisoft's apology is interpreted as being based on logos. This is due to the highlighting of how Assassin's Creed games have historically been written and

developed with real historical events, places and individuals as inspiration and part of the settings of the games and therefore the same should be expected of Assassin's Creed: Shadows. In this line of thought Synth Potato (@SynthPotato) highlights how they believe that people have forgotten what the disclaimer means, in other words, that there is a belief that the critique of Assassin's Creed: Shadows is misguided as it ignores the fact that the games are works of fiction. On the other hand, as was highlighted when Ubisoft's apology was analyzed, this line of thought does not include the change that one of the protagonists of Assassin's Creed: Shadows is based on a historical figure, whereas in previous titles the protagonists were original characters. Therefore, this argumentation is interpreted as having a gap where the connotations of the changes Ubisoft's creative method of creating Assassin's Creed games and the connotations of this are not being addressed.

### 1.2.2

#### Rhetorical Analysis

Kangmin Lee | 이강민's (@kangminjlee) reply to the apology made by the development team of Assassin's Creed: Shadows is interpreted as argumentative in its composition. This is interpreted when Kangmin Lee writes: "Imagine if you just stuck with a Japanese main character..." (1.2.2 – line 1), that he believes that the approach Ubisoft Canada has taken when developing Assassin's Creed: Shadows is not the correct one. This idea of telling Ubisoft to imagine having made different choices presents the opinion that the developer should have foreseen the outcome of the decisions they made and how they would inevitably upset the community whose culture they are borrowing for their game. The argument being made in the post is interpreted as appealing to a reader through the use of logos, as Kangmin Lee indirectly presents the idea that a game that takes place in Feudal Japan would logically center around a Japanese person. While this tweet shows a distaste for Yasuke as one of the protagonists in the game, Naoe is not mentioned and this leaves a gap that can be interpreted in multiple ways. One interpretation may be that Naoe being an alternate protagonist would render the argument less valid, as there is an option to play the game as a Japanese character. This might however be less likely as the promotional material that existed at the time and the apology both present Naoe very clearly, meaning that it is likely that this consideration has been made and dismissed in favor of focusing on Yasuke. In other words, Naoe being of Japanese origin does not outweigh the issue that arise from Yasuke being of African descent in Assassin's Creed: Shadows according to this reply.

### 1.2.3

#### Rhetorical Analysis

The reply by DarkMesyah (@Dark\_Mesyah) is interpreted as argumentative in its composition. This argumentative nature is identified when DarkMesyah writes: “i imagine a world where you made a game based in japan but without a DEI character and where you made it historically accurate at least...” (1.2.3 – line 1) where he presents his distaste towards Yasuke being a protagonist in Assassin’s Creed: Shadows. Furthermore, he argues that Yasuke is a result of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion incentives as he refers to the character, without mentioning him by name, as a “DEI character” (1.2.3 – line 2) as he calls for a game that does not have a protagonist that he views as a result of this. DarkMesyah also addresses the point being made by Ubisoft and Synth Potato that the games are a work of fiction and should be viewed as such when he writes: “sure some fantasy here and there but stick to the script.” (1.2.3 – line 2). This is interpreted as him understanding that the Assassin’s Creed franchise are works of fiction however, he believes that this should not come at the expense of historical accuracy in the way that Yasuke is perceived. DarkMesyah’s reply is seen applying an appeal to pathos, to emotion, as it appeals to the understanding, in gaming, that the introduction of DEI into the writing and creative decision making in videogames has been seen to be applied superficially and thus the game’s stories or characters suffer. While this is not the rule, as very successful games have implemented elements of DEI, such as Baldur’s Gate 3, these games have had stories and worldbuilding where these elements fit in and did not create a break in the gamer’s immersion in the game’s world.

### 1.2.4

#### Rhetorical Analysis

Disparu’s (@disparutoo) reply is also identified as being argumentative as it presents the argument that “Japanese history belongs to the Japanese.” (1.2.4 – line 1) which clearly presents the Disparu’s belief that Ubisoft’s creative liberties taken when writing Assassin’s Creed: Shadows are not welcomed. This is further made clear when Disparu writes: “You should have a Japanese samurai.” (1.2.4 – line 2), which is interpreted as a direct complaint that Yasuke, one of the protagonists in the game, is of African heritage. This distaste for the creative decisions being made by Ubisoft can be seen as an appeal to logos, as Disparu claims that Japanese history belongs to the Japanese it is being asserted that Yasuke represents outsiders as he is interpreted as a forced choice, mirroring an interpretation that was presented in the discursive analysis of the apology where Yasuke’s being referred to as ‘unique’ and ‘mysterious’ was interpreted as an excuse for implementing a character who otherwise would not have been a logical choice given the historical inspiration of the Assassin’s Creed games. Disparu then presents the logical solution that “You should have a Japanese samurai.” (1.2.4 – line 2), where he appeals to logos once more, in relation to his statement that Japanese history is for the Japanese, it logically follows that Assassin’s Creed: Shadows should have a Japanese samurai.

#### 1.2.1-1.2.4: Interpretative Analysis

Through the rhetorical analysis of the messages in the four replies to the apology made by Ubisoft it was identified that the response to the apology is not unanimously positive or negative. Post 1.2.1 aligns itself with the appeal to logos that is being made by the development team in the apology that Assassin's Creed games are works of fiction and that this is clearly stated during the bootup of the games. Therefore, these games and the creative choices being made should be treated with this in mind. It was however noted that the example of the disclaimer being presented to the reader in the reply was updated to include sexual orientations and gender identities on top of the original multicultural team with various beliefs. Through this it was presented that the developer's adoption of these identity politics may aid in the interpretation that has been applied to critique Assassin's Creed: Shadows, that Yasuke was selected based on Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity (DEI) incentives. This positive response to the apology was not mirrored in replies 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4, where a disapproving response was found. The opinion that Yasuke is the wrong choice as a main character in a game that is set in Feudal Japan is present in all three replies. Furthermore, claims like: "Japanese history belongs to the Japanese." (1.2.4 – line 1) are presented indicating a distaste for the creative choices being made granting Yasuke his role in Assassin's Creed: Shadows. With this in mind, the stage of the issues life cycle is interpreted to still be at the critical stage despite Ubisoft making a public apology. As is highlighted, the response to the apology, while not unanimously negative, does not indicate that the apology addressed the issue well, nor did the lack of a plan going forward, which was identified in the analysis of the apology, aid in remedying the issue.

### Analysis of 1.3 reposted X post by Genki

#### *Rhetorical Analysis*

In the post, reposted by Assassin's Creed's X account, Genki (@Genki\_JPN) presents statistics on how Assassin's Creed: Shadows is performing on the US market and globally. This post is interpreted as an argumentative. While it does not present a direct line of argument, it does present the understanding that Assassin's Creed: Shadows was a successful game on the merit that it is the best-selling game in the US for March 2025 and the second-best selling game of the year at the time. The argumentative element is interpreted to be present in the repost by the Assassin's Creed X account, when this is considered with the understanding that the game faced backlash over the creative decisions this repost is seen as the developing team and Ubisoft presenting their success to the groups who held issue with the game. The structure of the argument, while not directly stated, is interpreted as being based on logos. When Genki presents the statistic that the game was "the #1 best selling game in the US for March" (1.3 – line 1), it has the unwritten logical conclusion that a game

that is the best-selling game in the US cannot be an unsuccessful game, despite what critical voices may state. In other words, the success of the game becomes an indirect argument against the critique and issues that the development team tried to address, approximately nine months prior. This line of argument is supported by Genki's presenting of the fact that the game was the "#2 best selling game of the year..." (1.3 – line 3), where the appeal to logos again presents the unwritten argument that a game which was as bad or insensitive as some claimed would not be as big a success. While the argument is that Assassin's Creed: Shadows is a vastly successful game and it may have been in comparison to competing games at the time, taking a look at the statistics of the game presents a different interpretation. When one considers the Steamdb chart for players of Assassins Creed: Shadows (1.1 in Appendix 2), a story of mediocrity, at best, is found. It is acknowledged that the PC exclusive platform, Steam, does not paint the entire picture of the game's performance but it does show the overall trend. Assassin's Creed: Shadows saw its peak of players two days after the release of the game, which is a normal occurrence, however, for a game being hailed as a massive success a peak of approximately 65.000 players is quite disappointing. Furthermore, the player retention of the game is quite underwhelming and may be something one would expect from a much older game. In comparison, one may consider the game Baldur's Gate 3 (1.2 in Appendix 2), which to some is considered a cultural phenomenon, that has an all-time peak of more than 875.000 players and almost two years after its full launch still has between 60.000 and 100.000 players daily. The author acknowledges that this can be considered an unfair comparison as Ubisoft is an AAA developer and Larian Studios, the developer of Baldur's Gate 3, is an AA developer. Thus, Larian Studios had a lower budget for their game. The point being made is that claiming Assassin's Creed: Shadows was a massive success was only a reasonable assessment when it was considered in comparison to other games released in the first three months of 2025, as the only other truly notable title that had released, which comes to mind, was Monster Hunter: Wilds. This also highlights a gap of knowledge in the post, as it is understood that it is not presented to the reader what being the best or second-best selling game means numerically or how this compares to games that are considered massive successes in previous years. This comparison would not necessarily have to be made to Baldur's Gate 3, as developers have claimed that the level of detail and care put into that game is an unrealistic standard, comparisons could be made to older but beloved games such as Red Dead Redemption 2, in order to allow for a better understanding of the success of Assassin's Creed: Shadows.

### *Structuralist-Semiotic Analysis*

When the post is considered for symbolic meaning, one may consider elements already touched upon in the rhetorical analysis, the best-selling in the US of March 2025 and second best-selling game of the year 2025 at the time. Both these statements become symbols that indicate the success of Assassin's Creed: Shadows. This is based on the understanding that in a vast market of competing games the assumption is that for a game to



be the best selling in an entire region and the second most of the year the game must be successful. This symbol of success is interpreted as an attempt at disproving of the critique the games faced and the games being held in contempt for failing to address the issues that the Japanese community and the gaming community had with Assassin's Creed: Shadows. While this can be interpreted as the developers presenting their success in the face of adversity, it may also be interpreted as an element of a culture war. The success of a game that has been scorned for having an African protagonist on the grounds of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, being successful could be seen as a cultural victory. It may therefore be important to some to present Assassin's Creed: Shadows as a success, even if this success must be viewed in the context of a specific situation. This focus on the success of the game could also be shared by the Assassin's Creed: Shadows' development team in an attempt to appease stakeholders and investors to prove that the game was a success.

### *Interpretative Analysis*

On the surface this post may indicate that the issue faced by Assassin's Creed: Shadows has achieved the dormancy status as the game is being presented as a success. In this line of thought the issue would have had to have been resolved for the game to achieve the success that is being presented to the audience. However, the stage in the issues life cycle is interpreted to still be critical when one considers the points brought up in the rhetorical analysis, that when the game is compared to an example of a massive success the statistics present a different understanding. When one considers this and the fact that the post does not present numerical values on sales or comparisons to previous successes it is interpreted that despite the rhetorical message being that of a successful game this might not be the case. Furthermore, in the semiotic analysis the intention behind the post presenting the game as a success was considered and multiple avenues of reason were presented. With the understanding that the game did not achieve success to the level that one might interpret from the accolades being presented, it is questioned if the statement was politically motivated or a way of appeasing Ubisoft's stakeholders.

## **Analysis of 1.4: Replies to Assassin's Creed's repost of Genki's post**

### *1.4.1*

Bunburyōdō (文武両道)拳's (@bunburyoudoujp) post reads: "So how many copies did they sell?", which is interpreted as this reply, to Genki's post, being argumentative. Bunburyōdō points out that the tables displaying the rankings among the bestselling games do not present the number of copies that have been sold. This was also highlighted in the rhetorical analysis of Genki's post (1.3), this lack of transparency on what it means to have the bestselling ranking being presented leaves it up to the reader's interpretation whether or not the message is truthful or intended to sway their opinion. Bunburyōdō's appeals to logos in his argument by asking the question of how many copies were actually sold presents an unwritten argument that the game might not have done as well as is portrayed. If the game had sold incredibly well it would logically follow, in this line of

thought, that the number of sales would have been presented as a supporting factor to the game's success. It should be highlighted that during the ensuring that Bunburyōdō is a real person it was noted that he is a British man who claims to have lived in Japan since 2006. Therefore, it is believed that Bunburyōdō has an understanding of the Japanese culture's point of view on Assassin's Creed: Shadows and the language skills needed to present these outside of the posts directed at Ubisoft's Japanese audience, which are written in Japanese.

#### 1.4.2

The reply to Genki's post by Oita (@Oitajpn) reads: "This game deserve it !" (1.4.2 – line 1), and in contrast to Bunburyōdō's reply considers the statements on Assassin's Creed: Shadow's performance in a more positive light. Oita's reply can still be considered argumentative as it supports the idea that Assassin's Creed: Shadows performed well, which as highlighted in the structural-semiotic analysis of Genki's post (1.3), can be interpreted as a game focusing on diversity succeeding. Therefore, this praise for the game, whether intended to or not, can be considered to argue in favor of the game being deserving of success and that the issues that has led to a critical issue to the Japanese community and a group of critical gamers might have been exaggerated. In other words, Oita presenting a supportive interpretation of Genki's post indirectly presents an appeal to logos that the game is good enough to warrant the bestselling accolades it is being ascribed. It should be noted that despite Oita's X account being @Oitajpn, it was found when verifying that Oita primarily posts in French and the 'jpn' in their username may therefore be an appreciation of Japan and not an indication of their Japanese heritage.

#### 1.4.3

"Both about to be crushed by Mario Kart" (1.4.3 – line 1) writes Nicolás (@nk\_616gr), in his reply to Genki's post on the metrics of Assassin's Creed: Shadows. Nicolás' post is interpreted to be argumentative as it considers the argument being made by Genki, that Assassin's Creed: Shadows is performing well at the time. This performance Nicolás points out will be 'crushed' by Mario Kart (Mario Kart World), which releases June 5, 2025. Nicolás' argument is interpreted to be that once a better game, in his opinion, releases the metrics that are used to indicate Assassin's Creed: Shadows' success will pale in comparison to Mario Kart World's metrics, this is interpreted as an appeal to logos. The appeal is that if Assassin's Creed: Shadows' statistics and rankings are easily crushed by the upcoming Mario Kart game it proves that it logically cannot be as big a success as it is being presented as. A gap in this line of argument that one may consider is that Assassin's Creed: Shadows may be considered a more niche franchise as it appeals to gamers who have an appreciation for story driven games that also have a focus on elements of combat and stealth whereas a game like Mario Kart World is intended as more of a party game, where it is possible to pick up the game with friends for one or two races. In other words, the demographics for the two games are very different and the investment of time and more

specific interest sphere may also be reflected in the games' metrics. However, a comparison of the two games is still a comparison between two games by two AAA developers, meaning the comparison still is interpreted as relevant.

#### *1.4.1-1.4.3: Interpretative Analysis*

Through the analyses of the replies to Genki's post, which was reposted by Assassin's Creed's X account, it was found that the messaging is not unanimously positive or negative. The critical posts present arguments about how there is a lack of evidence supporting that the game is performing as well as is implied by the titles of bestseller or 2 bestselling game. Whereas the supportive voices argue that the game is deserving of the success it has found. It is interpreted that Assassin's Creed: Shadows is still at the critical stage in the issues life cycle. This is based on the fact that when positive news is being shared by the Assassin's Creed X account these are still met with critical responses that point out elements that are lacking in the posts, indirectly suggesting that the posts are presenting a reality that does not necessarily mirror the actual facts. This was also considered in the rhetorical analysis of Genki's post where the Steamdb charts (Appendix 2) were considered to gauge how successful Assassin's Creed: Shadows actually was. In other words, in spite of positive responses to the posts by the Assassin's Creed account a fair share of negative responses presents doubts and disdain for the game. It should be noted that the replies to Genki's post are not as disapproving as the ones directed at the apology by the development team, which might be a sign that based on the time between when the issue was "new" and at the forefront of gaming interested parties on the internet the focus has died down a bit and the people engaging are primarily individuals with an interest in Assassin's Creed games or a deeper relationship to Japanese culture.

## Summaries

### *1.1: Apology by Ubisoft Canada to the Japanese community*

In the rhetorical analysis it was found that the visual elements do not hold quintessential information, however, it does function as an element that ties the message to the Assassin's Creed franchise. It was found that the composition of the text is primarily argumentative as a lot of the apology is used to argue the choices made by the development team. The argumentation in the apology utilizes logos by presenting how previous Assassin's Creed games were all fictive tales inspired by history and historical characters and therefore Assassin's Creed: Shadows will follow this trend. The argumentative form that is primarily being utilized is ethos as the apology presents how the development team has engaged with multiple experts on Japanese culture and has many years of expertise writing and producing Assassin's Creed games.

In the discursive analysis it was found that specific wording is being utilized in order to present an understanding that the development team understands Japanese culture and that they hold this culture in high regard. However, when this is read in the context of the apology where it was also found that multiple sentences were worded in a manner that through interpretation indicated that the development team show no interest in changing the game to address the critique from the Japanese community, the claimed respect of the culture was seen as a hollow statement. This is evident when the solutions to the issues held by the Japanese community are all thing the developer has already done and the acknowledgement that Yasuke is depicted as a samurai in the game, which indicates that the critique by the Japanese community is being ignored.

It was found in the structuralist-semiotic analysis that the apology makes use of wording that symbolize the development team's respect towards Japanese culture and history. Furthermore, symbols are also being utilized to highlight Ubisoft's experience with developing Assassin's Creed games. However, it was interpreted that these symbols were being used performatively when they are considered in relation to the previous analyses. Yasuke can also be interpreted as a symbol of diversity, which allows for more than one interpretation of him as a symbol. If he is considered through the context of diversity he may be seen as a positive as he represents a minority. On the other hand, this diversity, if considered through the context of Japanese critique of Assassin's Creed: Shadows Yasuke represents the Japanese culture having to step aside to allow diversity to shine in a game about Feudal Japan.

The interpretative analysis found that the apology was a response to an issue that had reached the critical stage, in the issues life cycle. This was supported by the apology existing in the first place and how it highlights the critique being directed at Assassin's Creed: Shadows by the Japanese community multiple times. The apology was also interpreted based on the findings in the prior analyses to be a poor apology as it is combative of the critique being made of the game and the creative decisions and that it offers no future plans that address the issues at hand, instead it presents elements that have already been implemented prior to the apology and

therefore do not address the critique aimed at the game. Therefore, it was found that the apology is unlikely to bring the issue into dormancy.

#### *1.2.1-1.2.4: Replies to apology*

The analyses of the replies to the apology found that despite some replies to the apology agreeing with the premise that Assassin's Creed games are written with the understanding that they are works of fiction and one should consider them through this lens, the apology was overall not responded to positively. In the positive reply analyzed, it was also found that the disclaimer from the bootup of Assassin's Creed games had changed from explaining that the games were fictional pieces made by a multicultural team of varying beliefs and religions to a multicultural team of various beliefs, sexual orientations and gender identities, which was interpreted as Ubisoft having adopted identity politics, which was then considered if this might indirectly present an argument against the idea that the games being work of fictions are separate from the criticism that Yasuke was given his role on the basis of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity. This criticism, while not based on the disclaimer, was found in the negative replies to the apology that all presented criticism directly or indirectly aimed at Yasuke and Ubisoft's treatment of Japanese culture. It was highlighted that Japanese history belongs to the Japanese and that it would make more sense to have a Japanese samurai as the protagonist of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, since it is set in Feudal Japan.

With this understanding of the messages in the replies it was then interpreted that the issue was at the critical stage, in the issues life cycle. This was grounded in the reasoning that the majority of the replies to the apology were found to be negative and since it was found in the analysis of the apology that Ubisoft did not present any actual plans going forward. In other words, the apology did not manage to ameliorate the issues faced by Ubisoft and therefore the issue did not become dormant.

#### *1.3 reposted X post by Genki*

The rhetorical analysis of Genki's post found that Genki is presenting Assassin's Creed: Shadows as a success based on appealing to logos. This appeal is based on the game being presented as the best-selling game in the US for March 2025 and it being the second bestselling game of the year 2025. However, it was also considered if this idea of success was a result of the circumstances surrounding the game, there having not been many competing titles released at the time and the fact that the game was not compared to previous successful titles as its metrics on Steamdb (Appendix 2), a website that keeps track of the player bases of games on Steam, presented a much different story compared to the claims being made by Genki. This tied into the structural-semiotic analysis where the titles of best-selling and second best-selling were considered as symbols. Multiple interpretations of these were presented, that Genki's presentation of these symbols were to highlight the success

of the game, which was noted in relation to the findings of the rhetorical analysis and the Steamdb charts (Appendix 2). The symbols were also considered with a political lens as the DEI elements that some have pointed out in Assassin's Creed: Shadows makes the game inherently political and therefore it might be interpreted as having a political motivation for appearing successful. Lastly, it was considered if the post was reposted to try and calm Ubisoft's stakeholders and have the game appear more successful than it may have been. In relation to this it was found that despite the post presenting the game as a success the issue is still at the critical stage as the issue has not been addressed, and it can be interpreted that the game's performance reflects this.

#### *1.4.1-1.4.3: Replies to reposted X post by Genki*

The rhetorical analysis found that the replies to the post by Genki are split between people who believe that Assassin's Creed: Shadows is deserving of the success that Genki is expressing that it experienced by highlighting it being a bestseller and a second bestseller. The other group of people are asking for specific numbers to justify this success as their posts indicate an amount of distrust in the game being as successful as is being claimed. Others have brought up other games, like Mario Kart World, that they expect to outperform Assassin's Creed: Shadows easily, in turn also indicating that the game might not have performed as well as it is claimed. When this was interpreted alongside the idea that a post about Assassin's Creed: Shadows still garner active and as divided replies approximately 9 months after the apology by the development team, it was interpreted as the issue still being at the critical stage of the issues life cycle. This interpretation is based on the understanding that it was found that Assassin's Creed: Shadows' success may have been exaggerated when Steamdb's charts (Appendix 2) were examined in the rhetorical analysis of Genki's post and that critical voices are present even with as much time having passed since the apology. Furthermore, it was noted that the ones still replying to the posts on Assassin's Creed: Shadows must be considered dedicated critics or fans of the franchise, as the issue was not as hot a topic in gaming at the time. This may indicate that through Ubisoft's refusal to engage with critical voices since the apology the issue might have been moving towards dormancy with time but that the cost of this could be interpreted as lower player numbers and worse player retention.

## Discussion

When it comes to issues management the ambition is to ameliorate that which has upset one's stakeholders for the issue to reach dormancy and without further action affect an organization. It is understood that once an organization recognizes an issue as being on the critical stage in the issues life cycle, that the course of action is to address the issue and present a course of action that will calm the groups that hold this issue. In the case

of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, it has been identified that the development team, who are making an apology because of a critical issue, fail at this. The apology was interpreted to be argumentative and instead of truly accepting that there might be some merit to the critiques being raised at the game as the apology spends most of its time arguing how Assassin's Creed games are designed and have been designed historically to justify the design choices made in Assassin's Creed: Shadows. In the apology the development team refer to elements in their development process that they have already accomplished, such as collaborating with external experts and their Japanese branch in order to ensure that the game is authentic and respectful of the culture that it is borrowing. This focus on what the team had already done in order to remedy the issue was interpreted as a way of stating that while Ubisoft understands that there is a critical issue that needs to be addressed, the development team do not have any intentions to make actual change to the game as a result. If changes to the game had been the identified remedy to the issue that Yasuke was a point of contention plans detailing changes and possible course corrections would have been detailed in the apology. In relation to this the apology reads as inauthentic when the development team talks about their respect of Japanese culture and how big a dream it has been to make a game in this setting while at the same time ignoring the criticism stemming from their Japanese audience, which was echoed in a large part of the gaming community. A response to an issue such as the one by Ubisoft would theoretically be assumed not to change the discourse on the topic and therefore not quell the issue and lead it towards dormancy as the apology is interpreted as superficial and at best an attempt to quell an issue without making any alterations to Assassin's Creed: Shadows. This understanding is seen mirrored in the responses that were analyzed where a large share of voices is presenting arguments on how Ubisoft's depicting of Yasuke, who is of African heritage, being depicted as a samurai is insulting to Japanese culture. While not all voices argue against Ubisoft, the issue remains that a large portion of gamers wish to see the Japanese culture reflected in the protagonist. Furthermore, a protagonist being based on a real-life individual is also a break compared to the usual *modus operandi* when Ubisoft design an Assassin's Creed game. This could then be interpreted as Yasuke's place in the game is not only a result of creativity. It was highlighted how the disclaimer of Assassin's Creed games being fictional stories based on real life events and characters having been changed in order to include more identity politics in comparison to previous titles, meaning that a reasonable interpretation is that Ubisoft has an increased focus on this. In other words, while the response is primarily negative, the game itself also becomes a political point of contention, and the responses may also have reflections of this.

With this understanding that a superficial apology was made, a post detailing the success of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, by Genki, that was reposted by the Assassin's Creed X profile and selected responses to this was analyzed to understand the evolution of the issue and what results the apology had earned. The post was identified as being a positive interpretation of Assassin's Creed: Shadows' rankings at the time, however, it was also pointed out that if one considers the success of the game in comparison to a very successful game such as Baldur's Gate 3 the claimed success pales in comparison. This symbolic success was then considered

and it was interpreted that with Assassin's Creed: Shadows having been identified as politically charged, when it was considered in relation to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, making the game seem a success in the face of the pushback this had garnered might be a motivation for the post. The responses to this, when one considers that the original issue had not been resolved would presumably still mirror the responses to the apology. It was found that this was the case as a split between praising Assassin's Creed: Shadows for its accolades and calling out the lack of statistics being provided when making the claim of the game being a bestseller was identified. While it was found that the issue is not as relevant as it once was, the truly invested parties still cared about it, even 9 months after the apology. With this in mind, it is reasonable to say that the apology, by Ubisoft, which fails to meaningfully address the issues and provides a course of action to ameliorate the issues could have been predicted, based on issues management theory, to be ineffective and not lead the issue to dormancy. It should be noted that the issue is slowly heading towards dormancy as Assassin's Creed: Shadows' place in the spotlight is taken by newer game releases, however, the issue itself was found to be reflected in the player statistics on Steamdb's charts (Appendix 2). In other words, the failure to address the issue was interpreted as having a meaningful impact on the success of the game itself and the disregard of the culture the game borrowed is seen as a cause for the game's less impressive player numbers.

As the project is hermeneutic in nature, it is fitting to disclose how my interpretation of the issues surrounding Assassin's Creed: Shadows has changed through the fusion of horizons between my preunderstanding of the situation and my work interpreting the gathered documents. When I first started my work on the project my understanding of the issue was that Ubisoft had presented Assassin's Creed: Shadows with Yasuke as one of the playable protagonists and that this had garnered a backlash from the Japanese Assassin's Creed fanbase. My understanding was that this sent ripples through the entire community surrounding Assassin's Creed games making a lot of people question the authenticity of the story and game and its respecting of Japanese culture. I had heard that an apology had been made but was otherwise not aware of much communication on the topic, outside of videos having started appearing on Youtube where creators were watching and reacting to promotional material. In other words, I was under the impression that the apology had been moderately successful in quelling the issue and that it had been at a dormant stage until the point where I started seeing content being made on it again. What I have found in my work with the documents was that the apology itself did not ameliorate the issues as it did not address them as if the development team truly believes that the creative direction chosen is an issue and I interpreted their view of the backlash as something that merely needed to be calmed down, for the game to release and prove its worth. This is based on the apology focusing on what had been done prior to the development team addressing the concerns from the Japanese community and not by providing a path forward. With this interpretation that the apology was mainly a statement that the creative direction would not change my understanding of the issue had changed through a fusion of horizon between my preunderstanding and the apology. Therefore, I was not surprised to find that the response to the apology was largely negative. I realized through a fusion of horizon between my understanding at that point



and the work with the responses that even if it was shrouded in a corporate language the people responding to the could assess that plans to change what had upset people in the first place were not going to be changed. As a result, responses focused on how the a game set in Feudal Japan did not have a Japanese protagonist and even with the positive reaction that pointed out the franchise's disclaimer, elements that could support the criticism of Yasuke were identified through analysis.

In my analysis of the reposted X post I was not surprised to see the accolades presented of Assassin's Creed: Shadows as my understanding of the year 2025 in gaming having been pretty uneventful at the time, as the only big releases having been Assassin's Creed: Shadows and Monster Hunter: Wilds. I knew before my work that Monster Hunter: Wilds was not a throughout success and suffers from optimization issues and therefore I had my doubts on the claims that Assassin's Creed: Shadows was as big a success as was implied. Through my work, where I brought up the statistics on the game and this fusion of horizons of understanding, I interpreted the positive reporting on it as a way of presenting a situation that would ordinarily look bad in a more positive manner, be it on the basis of political belief or to calm stakeholders, such as investors. I was not surprised to see that the responses to this reposted post were mixed as I had previously identified that the critical issue had not been addressed in a manner that would lead it into dormancy and therefore, I expected to find that people were questioning the post and pointing out that it did not disclose sales numbers. At the same time, it also did not surprise me that the post had positive responses as it was found that Assassin's Creed: Shadows could be considered a part of a political strife on identity politics or that art is a subjective matter, meaning that some people might truly enjoy the game for what it is. However, it did shape my understanding that even nine months after the apology the issue had not been forgotten, it was not in the limelight anymore but truly invested voices were still critiquing Ubisoft for their choices.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Ubisoft applied a superficial solution to the issues that were interpreted to having reached the critical stage in the issues life cycle. This superficial solution was to post an apology on their X account, where the development team apologized for the elements in Assassin's Creed: Shadows that upset their Japanese fanbase. The apology did not present any plans moving forwards to ameliorate the issues that the development team understood the Japanese community and the Assassin's Creed fan base in general held with their creative decisions in Assassin's Creed: Shadows. Instead, the development team focused heavily on elements of the design process that had already been accomplished and was intended to ensure the authenticity and respect for Japanese culture that the stakeholder felt was being violated. This nonsolution was received by the relevant stakeholders, the Japanese community and the gaming community, that it is intertwined with which also share concerns on the quality of the game based on the creative decisions, with skepticism. This skepticism was identified through the analysis of the responses to the apology which found that despite Ubisoft's attempt to

justify Yasuke's role in the game people still did not appreciate him and were asking for a game set in Feudal Japan to represent the time by having a Japanese samurai as the protagonist. It was found that the stakeholders did not react well to Yasuke and how he can be seen as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion being more important than respecting Japanese culture and history.

A post on the success of Assassin's Creed: Shadows, posted approximately nine months after the apology, was also considered to understand how Ubisoft's approach of not solving the issue had affected the game and its fanbase over time. It was found that despite the game being claimed to be a success this was only in the very specific circumstances that it existed, without much competition and without presenting statistics on sales or concurrent players. When one considered the concurrent players, on Steamdb's charts (Appendix 2), it became apparent that the game being a massive success was overstated as the player numbers paled in comparison to Baldur's Gate 3, a game which was and is a massive success. The comments on the post that were analyzed mirrored the skepticism that was found in the comments to Ubisoft's apology, it was pointed out that the claimed success did not inform how many copies were sold or that the game would be overtaken in rankings as soon as a good game was released. In other words, the issue remained at the critical stage as the apology did not solve it, even if enough time had passed that a lot of the focus on it had died out the heavily invested individuals still commented and criticized.

As a final note, it should be mentioned that not all voices were negative in the comments and that the post on Assassin's Creed: Shadows being a bestselling game was a reposted post, the Assassin's Creed X account reposted a fan's (Genki's) post. It must be acknowledged that art and enjoyment of it is subjective, that to some the game is a good game. However, it should also be acknowledged that Yasuke's role in the game is equal to taking a political stance on DEI in comparison to authenticity and respect of the borrowed culture and this will affect the game.

With this in mind, it is concluded that Ubisoft's communication to the relevant stakeholders and the refusal to present any solution and instead attempting to appease the stakeholders with claims of respect and authenticity did not remedy the issues held by the stakeholders and lead them towards dormancy. The lack of accountability in the communication and lack of acknowledgement of the critique after the apology did however seem to drive the issue towards dormancy at loss of a solid part of the series fanbase, which is reflected in the player numbers. In other words, the communication by Ubisoft seems to have driven away the relevant stakeholders.

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## Problem based Learning Reflection-sheet

Problem based learning is what quintessentially defines studying at Aalborg University. It is a line of thought where students are encouraged to pose their own questions and identify theory and methods that may aid them in answering these questions. This thesis is no exception to this and as has been reflected upon in the lit review multiple avenues have been considered to identify the best method of answering the posed question. The inspiration for the question posed was a resurgence of the issue that Assassin's Creed: Shadows' promotional material was causing turmoil in spite of my preunderstanding that the issue the gaming community and the Japanese community had had with the game had been addressed in the apology that was made.

In the work with the thesis, I found that the issues lifecycle theory allowed for a deeper understanding of the issue at hand. I realized, in hindsight, that based on the source texts used to understand and present the theory that the response to the apology was almost guaranteed to indicate that the issue would not have become dormant, as it was explained how a superficial response to an issue would not remedy it. In my work with the document analysis, I found that the interpretation of the document analysis that I based on Hijman's findings when she analyzed how the document analysis was used allowed for an approach that reflected my hermeneutic approach to science well. In applying the document analysis as an encapsulation of the different analyses she identified it having been used with allowed for the reexamining of the documents multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the texts.

Through my work I learned that to properly apply myself to my work it was necessary to do this as the first task of my day. If I engaged in other activities, I would not be able to find the discipline to carry out the work I needed to accomplish in spite of having the motivation to do so. This was not an issue when I did not have to change from the mindset of leisure to one of work discipline. This solution to the issue I faced with a lack of discipline towards my own work was one that I discussed with my supervisor and we came to the conclusion to try and remove myself from the headspace of leisure, be it through a change of scenery or approach to my work. In other words, that I would have to try and change how I approached work, if that meant needing a space away from home to write, which could have been the university campus or what ended up being the solution – a consistent time before I had distracted myself where I would work. This had not previously been as much of a problem to me as most of the larger projects at Aalborg University are usually done in groups. This responsibility towards another and their work is usually a strong enough motivation that these issues with discipline would not impede my work.

The initial scope of the thesis, as I initially had planned it out ended up being much too large as I had hoped I would be able to analyze part of a Youtube video by a large content creator as their coverage of Assassin's Creed: Shadows and their critical approach to it can be traced all the way back to the critique of the game following the initial announcement. This analysis could have served as the third point on a timeline when

considering the evolution of the issue. I realized not too long into the analysis that this would be too large an undertaking and that I would have to narrow the scope of the thesis. I decided that in spite of the longer timeframe that this had from the initial apology the inherent nature of a community surrounding a content creator and the extra work with detailing which segments of an approximately 30-minute-long video that would be used would further challenge me in keeping within the constraints set for the thesis.