Game Wikis for Clean Sweep and Raveling Dreams IMGD MQPs

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Abstract

Although previous research exists on fan-made game wikis as forms of participatory user culture, there is not a lot of research on the rhetoric and practice of game wikis. This project explores how digital rhetoric and web usability contribute to the persuasiveness of game wikis as a participatory online genre. First, I identified effective wiki rhetoric, writing, and design practices through rhetorical analysis of game wikis. Next, I applied these practices as I created two versions of a wiki for a game I am designing called *Clean Sweep,* both of which I user-tested. I recommend three practices for building the *Raveling Dreams* wiki, another game I am creating: 1) use the game's unique aesthetics on the wiki, 2) learn the wiki editor to create a visually distinct wiki, and 3) create a style guide for consistent content and tone.

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1. Introduction

Recent research on web usability and cross-cultural studies suggest that the specific cultures that the user is a part of will influence audience expectations for the appearance and functionality of websites (Moura et al., 2016; Page et al., 2010). Fandoms for video games illustrate this dynamic well. In general, fandoms for media have created a participatory user culture where they become involved in the media they consume (Jenkins, 2006). In video game fandoms, a common practice of their participatory fan culture is the building, writing, editing, and moderating of fan-made video game wikis. Fan-made video game wikis have gone on to be described as "sites of participation" that allow fans to gather digitally and build community through contributing to their favorite pieces of media together (Mittell, 2009).

Although there is extensive previous research into the cultural niche that fan-made video wikis fill and their significance to users within that culture, there is not a lot of research on the actual rhetoric of video game wikis and the practices of designing, building, and writing a game wiki. Building on foundational research on effective practices and heuristics for developing high web usability on websites in general (Nielsen, 1994; Nielsen, 2020) and previous research on wikis as effective information management tools (Bolisani & Scarso, 2016), more research is needed about game wikis in web usability and function. This project attempts to contribute to that niche by exploring how web usability and visual and digital rhetoric affect the persuasiveness of fan-made video game wikis as a participatory online genre.

Collaborating interdisciplinarily with the *Clean Sweep* and *Raveling Dreams* Interactive Media & Game Development (IMGD) MQP teams, both of whom I am also involved with on the IMGD side as a team member, we established mutual interest in developing a wiki for *Clean Sweep* and a wiki for *Raveling Dreams* as part of this project, though eventually much of the development time and user testing focused on the wikis for *Clean Sweep*. Through the process of building wiki drafts for *Clean Sweep* and receiving user feedback, however, I was able to establish a set of recommended practices for developing the wiki for *Raveling Dreams* and other video game wikis in general to meet user expectations of the function, content, and usability of game wikis.

2. Literature Review

Digital rhetoric is a longstanding field of study deeply intertwined with visual web design that analyzes how websites pull in audience members and engage with them. As the internet evolves, the theories and practices of digital rhetoric evolve with it. In 2003, Mary E. Hocks established a base understanding of visual rhetoric in digital communication environments, such as the internet. Hocks' research conceptualizes and analyzes visual rhetoric techniques as utilized on the world wide web to promote engagement with rhetoric through writing as design (Hocks, 2003). Hocks notes three key features of digital rhetoric that help describe how visual rhetoric operates in digital platforms: audience stance, transparency, and hybridity. Hocks describes "audience stance" as the ways in which the author invites audience participation and how they encourage or discourage different kinds of audience interaction with an online document. "Transparency" is described as the magnitude in which online documents relate to established conventions like those of print or graphic design. The more an online document borrows from familiar conventions, the more transparent it becomes. Finally, Hocks describes "hybridity" as the ways in which online documents combine and construct visual and written designs.

Although Hocks' concepts and applications are still relevant, the internet has evolved tremendously in the twenty years since Hocks' research. More recent research analyzes the same concepts as Hocks but with contemporary websites, providing recent examples and explanations of modern patterns. For instance, Paul Muhlhauser contrasts webpages, images, and web text with radically different designs to explain how design choices affect how the audience is invited to interact and how transparent the information becomes (Muhlhauser, 2023). Rayna Elizabeth Kittredge looks specifically at social media platforms to examine how the multimodal rhetoric of the #MeToo movement encourages certain audience engagement, specifically by using "hybrid" visual and written design (Kittredge, 2022).

Beyond conceptualization, the growth and evolution of the internet has led scholars to research new rhetorical methods specific to studying digital environments. James E. Porter established one new rhetorical theory on how to communicate on a modern digital medium such as the web. Observing the relationship between conventions of digital rhetoric and oral or print rhetoric, Porter presents a theoretical framework consisting of five shared key topics: identity, circulation, access, interaction, and ownership (Porter, 2009).

This research area has also established new pedagogy specific to building content via websites. A free-to-use online textbook, *Writing and Publishing in Digital Environments: A Cross-Disciplinary Guide for College Writers*, is an extensive reference tool for students made possible by the rise in website building accessibility from Web 2.0 (Sheffield, n.d.). Ali Hamilton et al. posits that the growth of "digital storytelling" on the internet is a great tool to introduce more reflexive writing in the classroom. Their research shows a growing niche for studying and educating about the design and content of websites due to the rapid rise in users and developers as the internet becomes more accessible and easier to navigate (Hamilton et al., 2019).

An important branch of research related to digital rhetoric is website usability. Jakob Nielsen is a foundational name here with his publication *Usability Engineering*, explaining how to build a usable and accessible website in a methodical manner in the early days of the internet (Nielsen, 1994). Nielsen has also published a list of ten usability heuristics for user interface design as general guidelines developed from his book *Usability Engineering*. It is periodically revised and updated to meet contemporary expectations for web design (Nielsen, 2020). Research on web usability has progressively built on Nielsen's work in response to the evolution of web design and user interface design, expanding our knowledge base to match with such growth. For example, Anastasija Nikiforova and Keegan McBride build on this work in their analysis of 41 online open government data portals; to do so, they follow Nielsen's approach to user-centered website usability studies. With this approach, they found common usability weaknesses among open government data portals such as poor data visualization and poor handling of user requests (Nikiforova & McBride, 2021). Likewise, a recent study by Lucía Alonso-Virgós et al. evaluated how websites have put into practice Nielsen's guidelines on web usability and user interface. They found that the most important recommendations are to improve readability and usability, including making use of empty space to visually separate information and limiting options in any given menu (Alonso-Virgós et al., 2019).

With the introduction and spread of Web 2.0, the ease and accessibility of building websites greatly improved. With it, the visual design of modern websites has also evolved. A recent study by Antonio Palacios investigates the effects of modern web design on usability, conducting a usability analysis of modern websites that follow modern web design trends, notably a rise in "web brutalism" that has created an "ugly" minimalist web (Palacios, 2022). A related study by Kristin Arola evaluates the rhetorical implications of Web 2.0's template-based design that has built this "ugly" minimalist web. Arola argues that the rise of template-based design has negatively affected the rhetorical potential of websites due to a lack of freedom in design (Arola, 2010). With the advent of smartphones and tablets, websites need to become accessible and usable from mobile devices as well, leading to research on how to evaluate mobile web usability in comparison to web usability on a standard computer (Kostromins & Baltmanis, 2014).

As the research on web usability grows, new branches of study spring up that connect web usability studies to other fields of research. Most notably, the study of website usability has intermingled with cross-cultural studies, leading to recent research that shows user culture influences how we use websites and how we expect websites to look and function. For example, Rukshan Alexander et al. analyze how national culture influences expectations in website layout, writing, and functionality, in turn influencing perceptions of website usability, accessibility, and efficiency. (Alexander et al., 2021). Similarly, Francisco Tigre Moura et al. explain specific cultural influences on expectations of website features and how those features may differ from culture to culture (Moura et al., 2016). Beyond ethnic or national culture, Kelly Page et al. explore how cultural differences between age groups influence websites content and which

expectations the youth age group have for websites (Page et al., 2010). It becomes clear that many cultural factors affect how we evaluate website usability, emphasizing core principles such as designing for the user and employing effective user interface design strategies. To simplify the evaluation of website usability in respect to user culture and cross-cultural design principles, a Cross-Cultural Web Usability Model was developed (Alexander et al., 2017).

My project focuses on one specific user culture: media fandoms. Fandoms can be global and expand across national cultures, unifying vastly different cultural groups under the shared passion for a piece of media and developing its own identity across borders (Gray et al., 2007). With this passion and community-building, fandoms have created their own participatory culture in which they become involved in the media they consume and bring the fictional world into the real world. This is especially true for video gamers. In his foundational book *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins shows how fandoms have become synonymous with participatory culture, creating a unique fan culture that revolves around fan-made content and community-building (Jenkins, 2006). Related research by James Newman looks specifically at how participatory culture comes out in video game fandoms, including the different mediums that fan content can take and how that influences engagement with the primary media piece of the fandom (Newman, 2005). Additional computer language research from Cornell University attempted to build a natural language model based on the ever-popular role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* and offers insights into how specific fan cultures (domains) utilize specific terminology and ways of writing and talking about a piece of media (Peiris & de Silva, 2022).

A common and modern practice of online participatory fan culture is the building of wikis for their chosen piece of media. These wikis aim to be exhaustive, collaborative encyclopedias of all notable topics pertaining to the fandom's chosen piece of media. These fan wikis are completely designed, written, and edited by fans around the world and are often catered specifically toward fellow fans of said chosen piece of media. Because wikis are entirely run by fans, the size and quality of contributions can vary greatly. The wiki for a large franchise such as *Grand Theft Auto* has had countless contributors to their over 19,000 pages of content that are heavily edited and monitored to meet quality expectations (GTA Wiki). In comparison, the wiki for tiny franchises such as *Acchi Kocchi* only have a few core contributors to their 87 pages, some of which have not been quality controlled and do not meet quality standards for a notable article topic (Acchi Kocchi Wiki).

Despite the significance of fan-made wikis to fandom culture, much of the existing literature on wikis focuses on the influence of wikis on information management and human collaboration, mostly through a professional or educational lens. Ettore Bolisani and Enrico Scarso analyze wiki utilization as an information management tool, establishing important factors to consider when designing a wiki whose main purpose is to manage and organize sets of information (Bolisani & Scarso, 2016). Relatedly, Anja Ebersbach et al. investigates how wikis promote collaboration as part of participatory culture; this study also provides information on

how wikis are built and designed for collaborative writing and information management (Ebersbach et al., 2008).

Although the above scholarship provides valuable insight on the usefulness and cultural significance of a well-designed wiki, there is not a lot of research on how the wiki genre has evolved in respect to digital rhetoric and web usability. There is, however, prior research on fandom wikis that we can use as our specific user culture when designing based on general research on web usability above. Articles from the journal *Transformative Works & Cultures* prove especially relevant due to its focus on researching fan culture and participatory culture. For instance, Jason Mittell analyzes how fandom culture and wiki writing are interlinked in the example of Lostpedia, with important considerations for participatory culture, community-building, and the distinction between canon and fanon for article writing. Notably, Mittell describes fan-made wikis as "sites of participation" (Mittell, 2009). In another wiki-focused study, Andre Magpantay investigates Fandom, a very popular template-based wiki builder for media fandoms, and identifies certain strategies for how fans build effective wikis for their favorite franchises in Fandom (Magpantay, 2022). The aforementioned *Grand Theft Auto Wiki* and *Acchi Kocchi Wiki* are both built and hosted by Fandom.

3. Methodology

My primary goal for this project is to use rhetoric and writing strategies to build comprehensible and navigable wikis for two IMGD MQPs I am involved in: *Clean Sweep* and *Raveling Dreams*. To meet this goal, I pursued four main objectives:

1. Identify effective and ineffective wiki writing practices in existing fan wikis for large and small media franchises.
2. Identify notable topics within the *Clean Sweep* game to be written as categorized, interlinked articles.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness and usability of the latest wiki draft through user testing.
4. Revise my wiki to expand and refine written content as needed and to improve comprehensibility and navigability.

Identify effective and ineffective wiki writing practices in existing fan wikis

To understand the expectations of users who commonly browse other game wikis on their own, I distributed a survey at Alphafest to investigate how users browse game wikis or wikis in general (Appendix A). Alphafest is an annual IMGD showcase event where IMGD MQP teams and other students with interactive projects share their current prototypes to receive playtesting and user feedback. I distributed my survey to this audience because they are video game players who are familiar with video game fan culture, thus I can assume they have at least some experience or interest in fan-made video game wikis.

Based on the results of this survey, I then analyzed four wikis of popular media to continue identifying effective and ineffective wiki writing practices, such as comprehensive writing, article organization and formatting, and website design. The four wikis I analyzed were:

- *Wikipedia*;
- *Terraria Wiki*, built with Wiki.gg;
- *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki*, built with MediaWiki;
- *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*, built with Fandom.

I chose these four wikis because they are hosted on different wiki builders, vary greatly in number of pages, cover different genres of popular media, and attempt to cover different levels of informational scope. I then analyzed the following categories in each wiki: visual design, webpage content and organization, and navigability. From there, I identified each specific wiki's practices, patterns, and themes and I categorized them as "strong" or "weak" design choices according to usability heuristics and visual engagement.

Because the *Clean Sweep* wiki will be publicly available documentation of the game, the content should only contain publicly available information, such as what is explicitly shown or

explained in-game based on the player's experience or observations. The niche that this wiki fills is not so much an internal exhaustive wiki of all our production materials, but more like a fan who is documenting what they can see and/or hear, explain, and infer from the game itself. As a developer instead of a fan, I hold a completely different point of view while creating this wiki than a fan who is creating a fan wiki.

Identify notable topics in Clean Sweep to be written as interlinked articles

Notable topics in the game *Clean Sweep* that deserve their own articles, individual webpages that make up the content pages of a wiki, will include all characters, items, and locations. Generally, a topic within the game is deemed "notable"—following the guidelines set by *Wikipedia* in their page on notability requirements (Wikipedia:Notability, n.d.)—if it is a unit, mechanic, or feature within the game that contributes to the direct gameplay and narrative as explicitly experienced and/or observed by the player. Once I identified notable topics, I then designated each article into a topic category, with each category having their own article template to be followed. Example categories include characters, items, and locations. Articles are limited to topics within the game. Although many fan wikis dedicate pages to real-life major contributors to the source media, this is outside my scope for the *Clean Sweep* wiki, which is limited to documentation of the units, mechanics, and features found in *Clean Sweep*.

The first draft of the *Clean Sweep* wiki was built with Fandom. This wiki builder is the most commonly used for game wikis, and it includes many resources for getting started, designing a wiki website, and writing articles. The tradeoff for using Fandom is that it will display disruptive ads on the wiki site, though this can be counteracted by ad-blocking software. Some notable fan wikis built on Fandom include wikis for *League of Legends*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Hollow Knight*.

Because the *Clean Sweep* wiki is built and hosted with Fandom to emulate fan wikis, the wiki writing, editing, and moderation will eventually be public. If our game gains traction, then I must stay true to a fan wiki's intended design and allow fans to freely write, edit, and moderate our game's wiki. If a third party pulls up information about our team members and turns them into articles on the wiki, then that is the natural course for a fan wiki.

Evaluate the effectiveness and usability of the latest wiki draft

To evaluate usability, I received IRB approval to conduct user-testing of my wiki drafts. Specifically, I conducted user-testing with participants who are current WPI undergraduate and graduate students. I conducted user testing asynchronously; I distributed a hyperlink to the current version of the wiki and the user survey, and participants who volunteered to user-test the wiki could complete the survey on their own time. I distributed the survey online in different

WPI-affiliated public Discord servers, including the WPI main server, the WPI IMGD server, and the WPI SASE server. In each Discord server, I asked users to navigate the wiki for 5-10 minutes and to fill out the user survey. The total time to browse the wiki and complete the survey should be 10-20 minutes.

The user test asks users to navigate around the *Clean Sweep* wiki for 5-10 minutes, starting from the homepage. After this period of time, I asked users to complete a short, voluntary user survey that should take another 5-10 minutes (Appendix B; Appendix C). The survey asks users to rate certain aspects of the wiki's design and writing on a scale from one to six, with one generally meaning "very poor" and six generally meaning "very satisfactory." Sample factors to be rated include article readability, article consistency, educational value, and navigability from article to article. For each factor, users can expand on their rating by providing optional comments. The final survey question asked for any additional comments or feedback.

The user test did not ask for any identifying information from the user. This includes name, contact information, and any demographic information. As such, any specific observations and individual comments or responses to the survey cannot be traced to any specific user. In addition, all observation and survey data are private and were not shared with anyone else. The user survey responses are stored in a private spreadsheet available only to me; only I have access to this data.

Revise my wiki draft to expand written content and improve navigability.

After participants completed their user testing of my wiki's first draft, I analyzed the survey results I received. To do so, I identified patterns and themes in the user ratings and open responses. Based on these feedback patterns and themes , I identified where editing is needed in any specific area of the wiki. I revised the wiki based on the results of this analysis, addressing areas for improvement in the wiki design and article writing. When developing a wiki, each revision should not only address concerns of readability, navigation, organization, and consistency, but should also expand on the content of the wiki until it becomes comprehensive documentation for our entire game, as built and distributed to the public.

Although I planned on building the full wiki with Fandom, if other wiki builders such as MediaWiki or GitHub Wiki better address the feedback from user testing, then a switch would be made and tested again as soon as possible. Although each wiki builder has its own pros and cons, wiki designers should decide on a builder early in the process based on user usability. Based on what I learn about designing and building game wikis through the Clean Sweep wiki draft built with Fandom, I also prepared an "ideal" mockup of an informational and navigable wiki to address user problems that currently available wiki builders like Fandom cannot adequately overcome. With this mockup, I repeated the iterative design process described in this section;

this includes evaluating its usability through an anonymous asynchronous user survey, as described in the previous objective.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary User Survey at Alphafest

The preliminary user survey distributed at Alphafest, an IMGD showcase event, returned valuable information on how respondents interacted with game wikis, including how familiar they are with certain wiki hosting bodies, the reasons that they use game wikis, and a high-level quantitative rating of a chosen game wiki (Appendix A). Because Alphafest is an event catered toward students with an interest in video games, especially students in the IMGD program, I can expect survey respondents to have at least some familiarity with video games and video game culture.

Which wiki bodies are you familiar with? Please check all that apply.
12 responses

Wikipedia	11 (91.7%)
Fandom (i.e. League of Legends Wiki, Hollow Knight Wiki, Gran…	11 (91.7%)
MediaWiki (i.e. Minecraft Wiki, Bulbapedia, Smash Wiki, etc.)	6 (50%)
GitHub Wikis	4 (33.3%)
Wiki.gg (i.e. Terraria Wiki, Sea of Thieves Wiki, Arknights Wiki, et…	3 (25%)

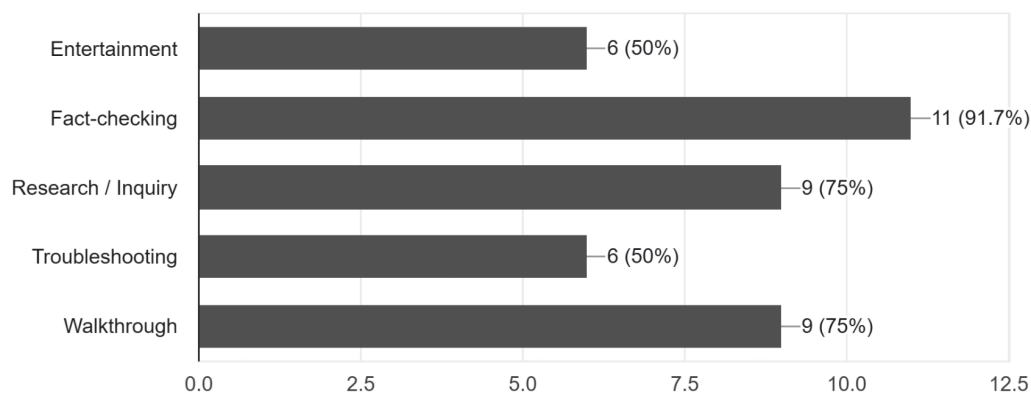(x-axis: 0.0, 2.5, 5.0, 7.5, 10.0, 12.5)
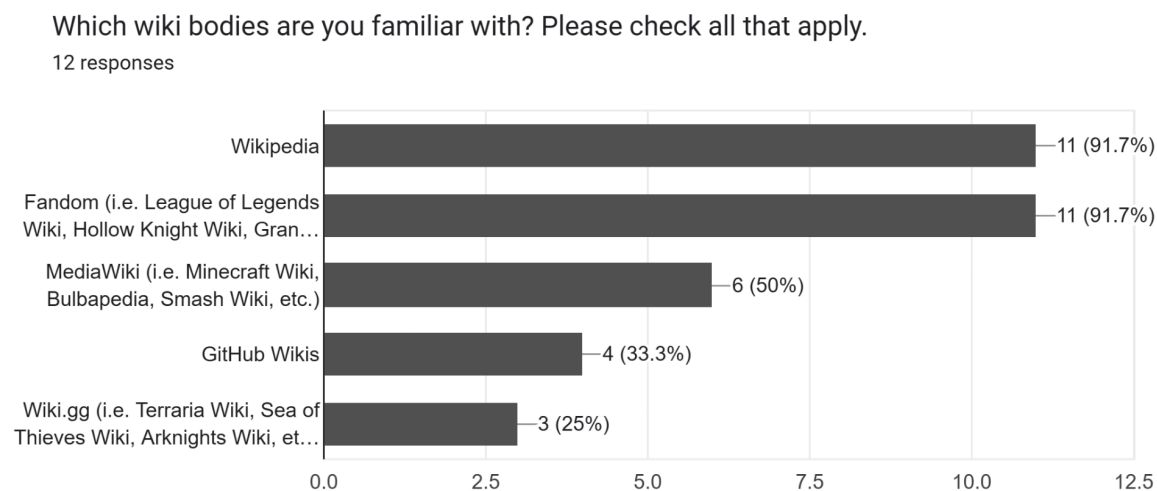
Figure 1. Survey responses indicating which wiki hosting bodies users are familiar with.

Results from Figure 1 suggest that most users familiar with video games are familiar with *Wikipedia* as a wiki website and the Fandom wiki hosting body. Some users may be familiar with the MediaWiki hosting body as well, though not as much as *Wikipedia* or Fandom. From these results, I can generally expect users to have prior knowledge on how to navigate fan-made video game wikis built with Fandom. The high-percentage of familiarity with *Wikipedia* also suggests that users generally will have prior knowledge on how to navigate wikis built with MediaWiki, as *Wikipedia* itself is built with MediaWiki (MediaWiki). The lower percentage of familiarity with MediaWiki on the survey compared to Fandom may be due to wikis built with MediaWiki not being clearly indicated on the homepage or in the URL as using MediaWiki. Meanwhile,

wikis built with Fandom will include "fandom" in the URL and display a sidebar with the Fandom logo.

What did you use these wikis for? Please check all that apply.
12 responses

Entertainment	6 (50%)
Fact-checking	11 (91.7%)
Research / Inquiry	9 (75%)
Troubleshooting	6 (50%)
Walkthrough	9 (75%)

Figure 2. Survey responses indicating reasons why users browse game wikis.

Results from Figure 2 suggest that users open and browse fan-made video game wikis for a specific purpose and thus have certain expectations from the website. Users primarily expect game wikis to be reputable sources for fact-checking information, researching and answering an inquiry, or receiving guidance about the wiki's primary source. These expectations suggest that an effective game wiki must be highly informational in nature, and users will expect the wiki to be highly detailed in order to answer any questions they may have about the primary source. As a walkthrough source, specifically, users will expect guided information such as end-to-end descriptions of a level's layout, including all possible points of interest, and step-by-step explanations of quests and/or puzzles.

Secondarily, users expect game wikis to be sources of entertainment or troubleshooting for the wiki's primary source (i.e., the game). Although "entertainment" is very broad, for a game wiki I am referring to how a wiki presents information visually and verbally to engage users. The visual design elements of the game wiki must be interesting or appealing to the user, and the information on the wiki must be fun, interesting, and/or thoughtful. The wiki may automatically meet entertainment expectations for some users when it provides information because those users simply enjoy learning new information. However, the wiki can supplement this level of entertainment with a "fun facts" section on each topic. As a troubleshooting source, users will expect the game wiki to document known issues, bugs, glitches, exploits, and points of

frustration about the primary source. They may also expect the wiki to cover possible solutions to overcome fairly disruptive bugs, glitches, and points of frustration in gameplay.

The final section of the preliminary survey at Alphafest asks respondents to rate a fan-made video game wiki of their choice in how it met their expectations for an effective game wiki. Respondents rated their wikis of choice based on how quickly they found the information they were looking for, how well the wiki answered the question(s) the respondent had, how easily the respondents understood the wiki's articles, and how easily the respondent navigated from article to article. Generally, the survey respondents chose wikis that they favored, as the lowest rating on any of the questions was a lone "2" from one respondent. Almost all answers to any of the questions were at least a 4 out of 6 for effectiveness. From these results, I chose three favored fan-made game wikis to rhetorically analyze in the Discussion section below: the *Terraria Wiki*, the *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*, and the *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki*.

4.2. User Test Survey - *Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki

I distributed my first draft of the *Clean Sweep Wiki*, which I built with Fandom, for user testing once I had drafted over thirty articles with at least some written content and/or images (Appendix B). The user test survey returned valuable feedback on the level of content and organization, navigability, and visual design of the Fandom wiki as a whole. For each quantitative feedback question, the user had the chance to expand on their answer in an "open response" space. Many took advantage of this option and provided some reasoning for their answer or detailed critique of a specific section of the wiki.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to understand were the articles?
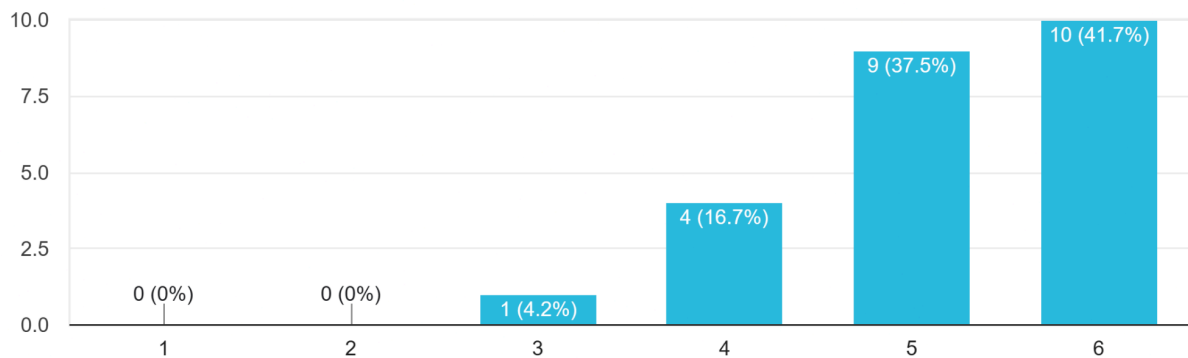24 responses
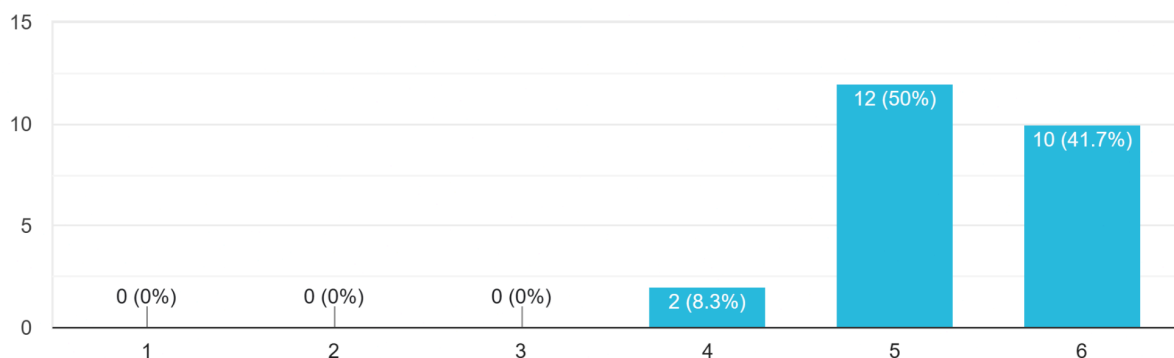
Figure 3. Survey responses rating the clarity of information on the Fandom wiki.

The first feedback question asked users to rate the content of the Fandom wiki's articles on how easy it is to understand the written information. The responses were overwhelmingly positive with almost all users rating a 5 or 6 out of 6, indicating that I wrote the article content successfully in plain language and in a clear and concise manner so that even users unfamiliar with *Clean Sweep* can follow. Open responses noted that the plot of *Clean Sweep* and the characters' lore were highlights of successfully straightforward and simple writing. They also noted the strong organization of the articles, with clear headings for subsections that split the article into digestible blocks, which successfully guided them through the article and compartmentalized the textual content..

On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy was it to navigate from article to article? If you visited only one article, do not answer.
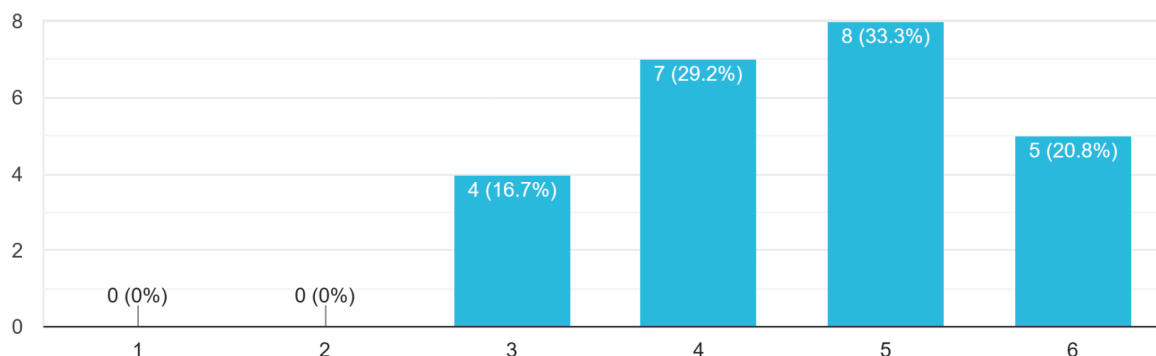
24 responses

Figure 4. Survey responses rating the overall navigability of the Fandom wiki.

The next feedback question asked users to rate the Fandom wiki's navigability from article to article, and responses were generally positive, with most users rating a 5 or 6 out of 6. This indicates that the pages on the wiki are successfully interlinked with at least one hyperlink to another page on the wiki, creating total site navigability. The table of contents for each article proved to be useful to users for intra-article navigation. Open responses generally highlighted the obvious hyperlinks in pink that had a clear purpose leading users to another article. Some users noted that it was easy to explore the wiki and to navigate to specific articles or back to the homepage despite their unfamiliarity with *Clean Sweep*. Other users noted that they expected the homepage of the Fandom wiki to have more content and links to better familiarize new users with *Clean Sweep* and to assist them as they navigate the wiki.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how much did you learn about the Clean Sweep game from the wiki?
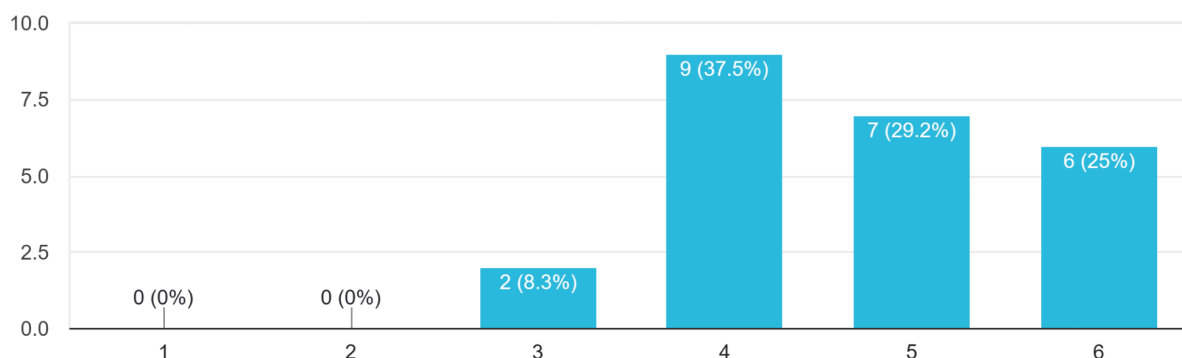
24 responses

Figure 5. Survey responses rating the level of educational information on the Fandom wiki.

The third feedback question asked users to rate the educational value of the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki by indicating how much they learned about the game from only the website content. The responses were fairly positive, though not as overwhelmingly so as with the previous two feedback questions. Most users gave a rating of 4 or 5 out of 6. Open responses noted that the articles about the characters had the most information written, thus they learned the most about the characters and their lore; however, they did note that information on their gameplay was lacking. Overall, users noted that they learned some information about the world of *Clean Sweep*, but were still confused about the actual gameplay mechanics and what the game was about. Some users noted that the articles on specific locations in *Clean Sweep* lacked sufficient information and could easily be expanded to be more educational.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how aesthetically pleasing are the visuals and design of the wiki?
24 responses

Figure 6. Survey responses rating the visual appeal of the Fandom wiki.

The fourth and final quantitative feedback question asked users to rate how engaged they were with the visuals of the wiki, including the overall color scheme and use of images and logos. As with the other feedback questions, the ratings were fairly positive, with most users giving a rating of 4 or 5 out of 6. Open responses noted that the wiki had a clear and consistent visual identity with its color palette of blue and pink to match the *Clean Sweep* logo. Positive responses highlighted the character designs done by *Clean Sweep*'s lead artist Jessica Liano, an IMGD senior undergraduate; I used these designs throughout the wiki. Other positive responses highlighted the balance between text and imagery in the articles. Some users thought that the wiki overall could use more images, notably for the characters with missing designs and for potential maps of the *Clean Sweep* world and locations. One user noted that they disliked the Fandom host site itself due to intrusive advertisements.

The rest of the user test survey were optional open-response questions that asked users to provide additional feedback on the wiki, specifically regarding any confusion or points of frustration they may have had with the draft, overall suggestions for improving the wiki, and whether or not their expectations for a fan-made video game wiki were met. Although some users indicated they did not find any aspect of the Fandom wiki confusing, some noted that they were still not sure what the *Clean Sweep* game was actually about and were confused by article subsections that did not have any written content under them. Some users, however, specifically noted that they understood the Fandom wiki is a work-in-progress and thus found it adequately clear for a draft Fandom wiki.

Suggestions for improving the Fandom wiki mainly focused on the website's general lack of content, calling for more information on the characters, location, gameplay, and narrative of

Clean Sweep. Suggestions also encouraged filling in the wiki with more images of the game, location, and characters, especially the characters who currently lack an image on the Fandom wiki. One user specifically hopes for more information on the levels and quests of *Clean Sweep* so that the wiki can become a walkthrough source for the game. Some users suggested for the homepage to be expanded for better navigation, with more subsections that broke the characters and locations down into more specific categories. A couple users suggested a navigation bar that acts as a sitemap for an easy overview of the whole wiki and a quick list of the articles they can explore.

According to the open responses, the Fandom wiki draft overall met user expectations of a game wiki being informational in nature while being easily navigable and visually engaging. Users specifically highlighted the total site navigability and the strong foundation that the current draft has built to become a well-organized, fully detailed game wiki for *Clean Sweep.* Although some users pointed to the general lack of content, they understood the wiki is a work-in-progress. They indicated that the site overall met their expectations for an informational game wiki because of the wide breadth in topics covered and the depth in the character lore covered.

4.3. User Test Survey - *Clean Sweep* Website Wiki Mockup

Encouraged by the positive responses to the Fandom wiki and inspired by the engagement with the visuals and aesthetics of the *Clean Sweep* game through the wiki, I wanted to experiment with the form that a video game wiki could take and to move away from using existing wiki hosting bodies to replicate examples of fan-made video game wikis. Thus, I created a draft of a *Clean Sweep* website wiki mockup via Canva.com, and I distributed this draft for user testing (Appendix C). The user test survey returned valuable feedback on the visual design, content and organization, and scannability and readability of the website wiki mockup. Similar to the user test survey for the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki, users took advantage of the open-response opportunities to expand on their quantitative ratings and to provide detailed feedback and suggestions for specific aspects of the website wiki mockup.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how visually engaging is the design of the mockup?
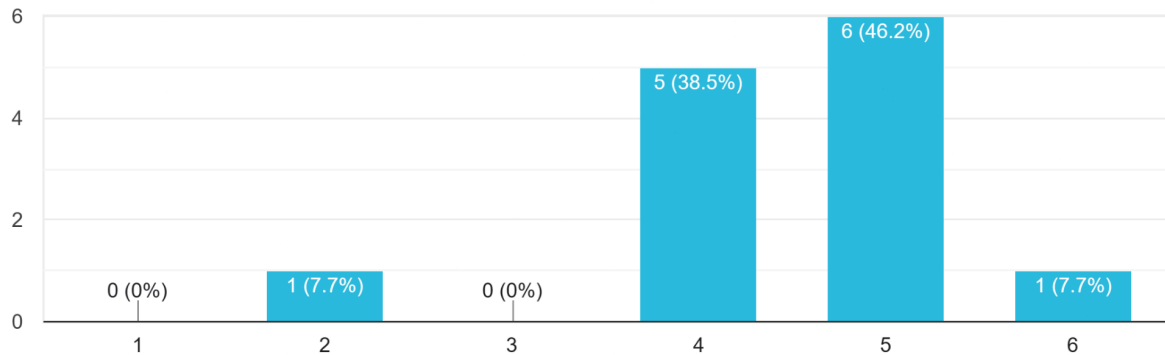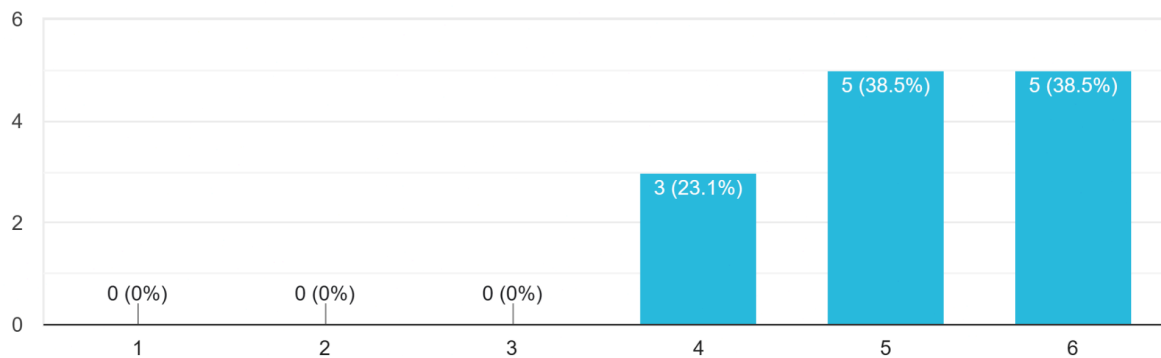
13 responses

Figure 7. Survey responses rating the visual design of the wiki website mockup.

The first feedback question asked users to rate how engaged they were with the visuals of the website wiki mockup, including the overall color scheme, the use of images and logos, the overall design of the webpages, and the use of text. The ratings were fairly positive, with most users giving ratings of 4 or 5 out of 6. Open responses highlighted the strong use of colors to create an eye-catching website without overwhelming the user. Some users also highlighted the heavy but consistent use of imagery. Other users pointed out that the different art styles of the images took away from the design consistency of the website; they were thrown off by the character art being 2D, the location art being 3D, and the item splashes being real life imagery. Further suggestions focused on the text, with one user noting that the heavy use of bold text is distracting, and another user noting that too much text has similar weight; these responses suggest that there should be higher contrast in text weight between titles, subtitles, and descriptions.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to follow is the flow of the mockup?
13 responses

Figure 8. Survey responses rating the navigability of the wiki website mockup.

The second feedback question asked users to rate how easily they were able to follow and understand the overall progression of the wiki website mockup, including if the buttons and navigation logic made sense even for a non-interactive website mockup. The ratings were overwhelmingly positive, with most users giving ratings of 5 or 6 out of 6. Although some users lamented that there is no interactive website for them to explore and gain a better sense of the real version's navigability, open responses did note that this simulated version with comments was very successful. The users clearly understood how the comments were helping them imagine how they would navigate the usable version of the wiki from one page to another and which links or buttons they would press to do so.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how obvious are the buttons, icons, and links in the design of the mockup?
13 responses
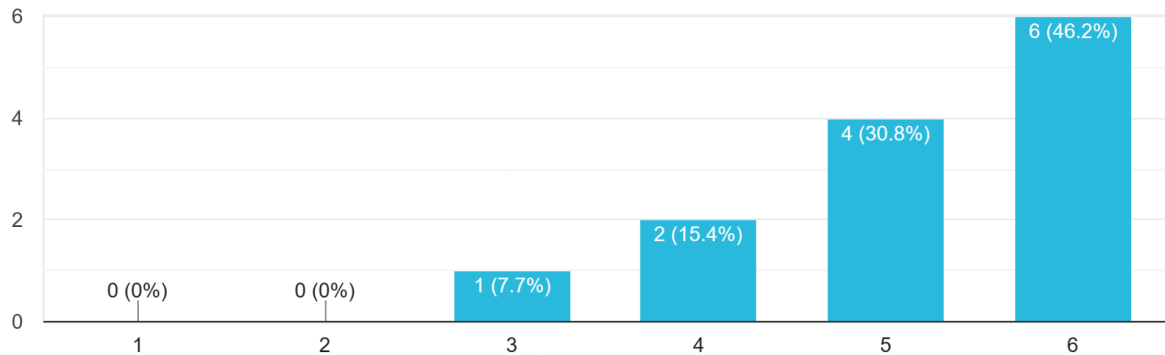
Figure 9. Survey responses rating the clarity of the interactables on the website wiki mockup.

The third feedback question asked users to rate how clear and obvious interactive elements on the website wiki mockup were. The ratings were generally positive, with most users giving ratings of 5 or 6 out of 6. This indicates that the users were consistently able to differentiate which elements on the webpage mockup should be clickable, including buttons and text hyperlinks. Open responses stated that although interactive elements on the mockup were obvious, they were perhaps too obvious. Some users highlighted the bright colors of the text hyperlinks, the placement of buttons next to images, and the clarity with which icons read as navigation buttons . However, users also pointed out that underlining hyperlinks on this website would be unnecessary, instead suggesting that users will naturally expect certain text to be clickable links in the usable version of the wiki. One user suggested that instead of underlining, an arrow icon can be placed next to the text hyperlink to indicate it is clickable.

On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to scan and read are the information in the mockup?
13 responses
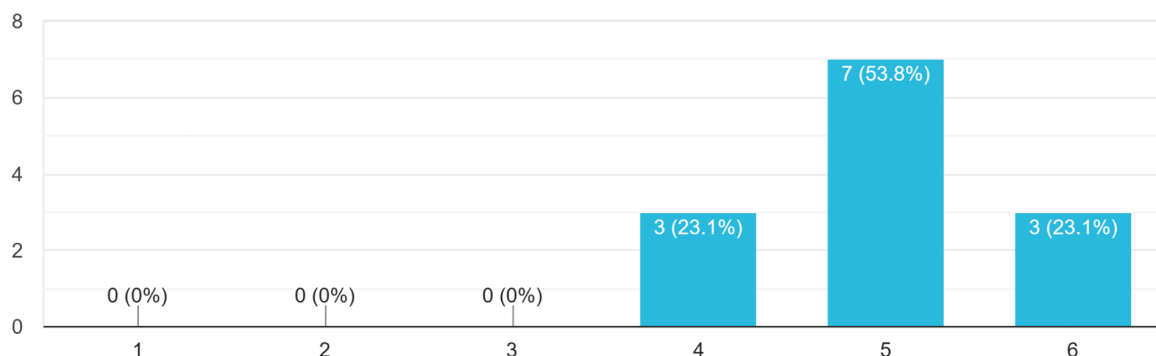
Figure 10. Survey responses rating the scannability and readability of the text information on the website wiki mockup.

The fourth and final quantitative feedback question targets the textual information of the website mockup; it asks users to rate the organization of text content as if it were wiki content throughout the mockup. User ratings were generally favorable, with many users giving a rating of 5 out of 6. Open responses highlighted the succinctness of text information and the usefulness of the comments for contextualizing the mockup's informational webpages; these qualities helped users understand the purpose of the mockup webpage being shown to them. However, some users noted that the character blurb paragraphs need to be shortened, as users may find large paragraphs on simple visual webpages hard to digest. They also noted that these blurb paragraphs should use a more readable serif or sans-serif font that is not as weighted or stylized, and this font should be the same as the font that the wiki website mockup primarily uses.

As with the user test survey for the Clean Sweep Fandom wiki, the rest of the user test survey for the Clean Sweep wiki website mockup were optional open-response questions that asked users to provide additional feedback on the wiki, specifically regarding anything confusing in the mockup and any suggestions to improve the website design. Users did not note any points of confusion; however, one user did lament the lack of interactivity, explaining that website designs need to be tested as interactive pages in order to receive the most helpful feedback. Suggestions for improving the wiki website mockup include expanding some of the introductory content on the website to give a quick overview about Clean Sweep so users who are unfamiliar with the game are not confused about what exactly they are exploring when they move past the wiki's homepage. Another user suggested adding alt text to the images on the website to improve accessibility.

5. Discussion

5.1. Rhetorical Analysis of Selected Game Wikis

I rhetorically analyzed four wikis from the Alphafest survey responses, which I selected based on the ratings participants gave for those wikis. I chose wikis that users rated unusually high or unusually low compared to other wikis in the survey. When selecting these wikis, I also wanted the group to vary in wiki host, wiki size, and genre of the primary source. My analysis mainly focuses on the website's visual design, webpage content and organization, and navigability from homepage to article. Although I personally navigate these wikis myself without any site data or ad-blockers on Microsoft Edge, I must keep in mind that user responses to these wikis may be based on their experiences and settings, which could include using cookies and ad-blockers.

The four wikis I analyze are listed below, with accompanying statistics as of 1 December 2023, followed by a short rationale for selecting each wiki:

- *Wikipedia* - https://www.wikipedia.org/
  - 6,750,493 content pages
  - 123,092 active registered users
  - Launched 15 January 2001
- *Terraria Wiki* - https://terraria.wiki.gg/wiki/Terraria_Wiki
  - 5,128 content pages
  - 132 active registered users
  - Launched 18 May 2011
- *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki* - https://warhammer-40k-darktide.fandom.com/wiki/Warhammer_40K_Darktide_Wiki
  - 197 content pages
  - 8 active registered users
  - Launched 22 November 2022
- *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* - https://bg3.wiki/
  - 7,591 content pages
  - 203 active registered users
  - Launched 17 December 2021

Wikipedia is generally the ubiquitous "standard" for wiki content, as it is the original "digital encyclopedia" format that many wiki hosts follow, including MediaWiki, and is heavily moderated and edited for quality. It is the only wiki site that multiple respondents specifically pointed to. The two responses do vary in rating, which is to be expected as the two users most likely did not cross the same topic paths at all on a wiki as large as *Wikipedia*; however, the relatively small deviance speaks to the consistent quality of *Wikipedia* across topic paths.

The *Terraria Wiki* is a fan wiki for the titular adventure sandbox game, released on 16 May 2011. The wiki is hosted by Wiki.gg. This wiki is the only wiki in the Alphafest survey that is hosted on Wiki.gg whereas all other chosen wikis are *Wikipedia*, MediaWiki, or Fandom. As such, the *Terraria Wiki* gives me the rare opportunity to analyze a wiki hosted by Wiki.gg based on brief insights into another user's experience, which is helpful when comparing it with the much more common wikis of *Wikipedia*, MediaWiki, and Fandom. The survey responses to the *Terraria Wiki* were also varied, with one rating as high as 6 and another as low as 3, which could be a reflection of how a wiki can excel in some areas but struggle in others.

The *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki* is a fan wiki for the titular action game, released on 30 November 2022. The wiki is hosted on Fandom. At 197 pages and 8 active registered users, this wiki is by far the smallest of the four wikis and offers insights into how quality may scale based on wiki and moderation scope. It is also the youngest wiki on this list. Despite the tiny number of active contributors, the response to this wiki on the Alphafest survey was overall one of the most positive, with almost all categories rated as a 6.

The *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* is a fan wiki for the titular role-playing game, released on 3 August 2023. The wiki is hosted with MediaWiki. Although *Baldur's Gate 3* is a massive AAA video game hit, the Alphafest survey response to this wiki was among the lowest rated of all respondents. The users did not rate any category a full 6, and it is the only response in the survey to include a rating as low as 2. Keep in mind that this wiki's content pages are the most recent of the other three wikis; the game fully released almost a year after the next most recent source. This wiki offers insights into how quality may scale based on wiki and moderation timeline, though the game was in early access starting 6 October 2020.

5.1.1. Visual Design

Building visual identity

To a certain degree, each wiki has their own unique visual style that aesthetically separates them from other similar wikis. The visual style depends on the wiki host they are using as each wiki host comes with their own distinct "default" look. To create a truly unique visual identity, wiki editors can build upon the "default" by making deliberate choices on the website's color palette, backgrounds, heading styles, section styles, and use of images. An aesthetically pleasing wiki should not only have a coherent visual identity, but also match its intended tone and, in the case of fan wikis, with the aesthetics of the primary source.

Wikipedia's visual identity is simple, neutral, and unassuming. The website does not try to be flashy with colors, images, or backgrounds and keeps it plain with a solid white background and standard black text. Links to other pages are the ubiquitous blue color of hyperlinks, the same as on search engines and word processors when embedded. Images are used sparingly and only to provide context or other important detail. Headers do not have any

embellishment and section styles do not move away from the white background and black text. In this case, *Wikipedia* prioritizes function over form at all levels of visual choices. This works for *Wikipedia* as the all-encompassing "digital encyclopedia" because the website's tone is strictly informational, and the articles are moderated to be as neutral, factual, and unbiased as possible. The website is deliberately plain to communicate as little aesthetic information as possible so as not to take away from the written content of the page. While the plain style may not hold much visual gravitas, it became the "default" basis for other wiki hosts, especially MediaWiki.

The three fan wikis, on the other hand, take much more creative liberty to build their visual identities. They make extensive use of color palettes, images, and backgrounds to create an aesthetically engaging website that matches the visuals of their primary source. For example, the *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki* uses black background boxes to match the darker tone of the source material. The main color accent being a burnt orange matches the game's logo and creates cohesion with the source material. The background of the entire website is an image taken straight from the game, not only connecting back to the source material again visually but adding a dynamic shot to cut an otherwise plain text website. The *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* takes a similar approach, accenting with a shade of orange to match the game's logo and including an ominous screenshot from the game in the website's background. One visual choice unique to the *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* is an animated banner on the homepage, distinguishing itself from the other wikis. This adds some dynamics to the page and a sense of action, which is great for *Baldur's Gate 3* as an opportunistic role-playing game. This banner in addition to the wiki logo using a similar visual style to the *Baldur's Gate 3* logo draws a lot of attention on the homepage and contributes to the visual appeal that is there.

The *Terraria Wiki* perhaps visually connects with the source material most successfully of the three fan wikis with one simple design choice. While the two other wikis use a basic dark background box to hold text, the *Terraria Wiki* holds all text in a big brown box topped with *Terraria*'s grass texture. This implies the idea that the content is "underground" in *Terraria*'s world, directly connecting the visual design of the wiki to the game design of the primary source. These design choices not only act as a visual "hook" for a user to immediately build aesthetic appeal, but the visual connection to the primary source is also a shared connection with the user as a fellow consumer of said primary source.

One thing that all three fan wikis struggle with, however, is clearly moving away from the wiki host's "default" look to truly create a unique visual identity. The *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki* visually inherits Fandom's "default" look. The same can be said about the *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* with MediaWiki and the *Terraria Wiki* with Wiki.gg. For the most part, it comes down to the three wikis not changing much outside of the color palette, keeping the wiki host's default font and default skeleton for headings, section styles, and formatting. For experienced users, the easily recognizable "default look" can take away from what the three wikis do well to build a visually engaging website. There is the risk of the wiki editors seeming

lazy or uninspired because of the notion that a clearly recognizable "default look" signals an unpolished, indistinguishable product. However, the decision to keep the default font and default skeleton is a decision of function over form. The default fonts are practically accessible and readable on all devices, and the default skeleton does a perfectly functional job of organizing site content to be easily scannable.

Special consideration can also be made for the *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*. The wiki is run by only 8 active users. Thus, it is understandable that the pages on this wiki will rely on the unpolished default look because it is perfectly functional, and the limited manhours can be focused on generating and organizing the actual content of the wiki.

Designing for visual clarity

Wikis, by nature, are encyclopedias meant for users to navigate through to find information on a specific topic. As such, one of the most important aspects of a successful wiki is being easily scannable and readable. One way to visually build these aspects is designing for strong visual clarity through visual contrast. Clear visual contrast is an effective way for users to distinguish between sections of content and easily identify relevant sections of information to what they are looking for.

Wikipedia does an excellent job of building visual clarity through contrast. On its homepage, the content is organized for visual clarity between snippets of information. The news, fun facts, and history on this day are never more than one sentence, separated by clear bullets, with the most important article links bolded. While there is such a wealth of information, the visual clarity prevents information overload and makes the content easily scannable. *Wikipedia* adds color to the page by holding this content in two columns—one in bright green and the other in bright blue. The featured image has its own section underneath it in a bright purple. This not only adds vibrancy to the page, but visual contrast between the information sections to improve readability. Each section of this homepage is also visually distinct and clearly labeled with the header in a larger font, bolded, and over a different color shade than the rest of the content background.

Another effective strategy from *Wikipedia* is its use of the table of contents on articles. While many other wikis have a static table of contents near the top of the page, *Wikipedia* gives the table of contents its own column on the page so it is ever-present while scrolling through the article. The table of contents will automatically highlight the section that the user is currently looking at. Altogether, this approach to the table of contents is an effective way for users to track where they are on the page at all times and always have a quick snapshot of the page's content with links to the specific sections. This not only improves navigability, especially for long articles, but it helps to make the article scannable at a glance no matter where the user is on the page.

On the *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*, the six sections on the homepage are clearly labeled in large, bold text that also links to the corresponding category or article page. Each topic within a section is a visual button, using large images to represent and link to the topic's article. Most of the space on its homepage is taken up by large images. Not only are these large images visually clear and engaging, but they prevent information overload by visually contrasting topics from each other on the page, making sure each link has its own distinct real estate and visual button. Altogether, the wiki presents its homepage in a visually clear way that makes it easily scannable and the major categories and topics visually distinct from each other.

Another visual point of clarity on the homepage is its unique inclusion of a table of contents on the side of the page. While an interactable table of contents is common for topic articles, it is uncommon on a homepage. In this case, a table of contents works well. In general, a table of contents improves the navigability of the page by listing all the page's content sections and subsections and including links to each. This gives the user a quick snapshot of the page and can thus scan the table of contents to quickly navigate to the information they are looking for. The table of contents works specifically for this homepage because it is visually dense with images, meaning that the homepage's vertical scroll is much longer than the other wikis', making it more difficult for a user to get one good glance at the whole homepage to identify where to go for the information they are looking for.

On the *Terraria Wiki*, the deliberate color and design choices with the "underground" look framing the content not only fit with the game perfectly but create enough visual contrast to promote navigability and readability between selected/unselected tabs and text sections. The distinct shades of brown used create the clear visual contrast between content sections. These design choices not only take directly from the game itself but gives a sense of the wiki existing within the game world itself, immersing users and "hooking" them with a distinct approach to visual clarity.

While the content sections are visually distinct from each other, providing clarity in locating yourself on the homepage and traversing from section to section, the actual text within these sections are almost all links. Each section holds more than a dozen links listed out, many of them approaching two dozen links. The links are simply listed as text and not as visual buttons. While each link is accompanied by a game sprite to represent the topic, these images are tiny. As such, each section is dominated by a wall of links without much visual clarity of what topic each link covers. In a wall of links, users may become overloaded with information. They may become paralyzed from the amount of navigation choices or become lost in all the links when trying to find a specific topic they are looking for.

5.1.2. Content and Organization

Homepages

Homepages are where many new users begin when navigating a wiki. As such, it is important for the homepage to present a snapshot of the wiki as a whole and guide users to the information that they want to get to. The three fan wikis take a very similar approach to the content on their homepage. These wikis are purpose-built fan-driven wikis of a specific game. As such, their scope is limited to the information within or pertaining to the game that the wiki covers. In this context, the homepages for the game wikis are focused as a starting "hub" for users to navigate around specific categories of content about the game. Essentially, the homepage on game wikis are navigational dashboards that attempt to capture all major categories of topics as potential information paths for the user.

The *Warhammer 40K Wiki* and *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* similarly separate these content categories into clearly labeled sections and with large image buttons to link to highlighted topics within those categories. These images visually distinguish topics from each other and are spaced out enough so the buttons do not crowd each other. Meanwhile, the *Terraria Wiki* is much more text based as mentioned above. Its approach tries to cram as much information on the homepage as possible, but takes away from the usability and readability of the homepage as a starting "hub" for users trying to navigate to other parts of the wiki and other information. The homepage trades easy navigation for unfamiliar users through abstraction for creating a dashboard of all features and mechanics, catered toward experienced players who may already know what to look for and where.

Wikipedia's homepage is very different from the three fan wikis. *Wikipedia*'s purpose is to be the digital encyclopedia of everything notable that humans can document. As such, its scope is almost infinitely larger as it does not focus on any one specific subject to closely document. In *Wikipedia*'s case, it would be impossible for the homepage to be a navigational dashboard as there are too many categories and topics that users may be looking for. Instead, *Wikipedia*'s homepage aims to be a snapshot of the site as a whole by highlighting specific snippets of information from the site's articles. For one, the homepage reflects *Wikipedia*'s never-ending scope to cover all notable information as it happens by including a news section of recent world events, linking to their related articles. The "fun facts" section similarly reflects *Wikipedia*'s never-ending scope to cover notable topics in the past in a lighthearted and entertaining way, also linking to their related articles. The homepage continues its snapshot with a featured article, including an image, blurb, and links to recently featured articles. It also has a featured image, accompanied by a blurb explaining what the image is in encyclopedic form. Another reflection of *Wikipedia*'s scope is a list of historical events that happened on the current day. Altogether, what *Wikipedia*'s homepage does great is act as an informational "hook", rather than a visual one, to encourage readers to explore more.

Content articles

For the topic articles themselves, however, the four wikis are much more similar in approach. All four wikis make use of an intro blurb and information panel on the side when necessary for quick and easy information, followed by the rest of the in-depth content organized into clearly labeled sections. Supplementing the content is a table of contents that lists and links to all the article sections, providing a quick page snapshot and navigational tool for the user. Articles make sure to link to other topic articles if they are mentioned, making sure that all wiki pages are interconnected for total site navigability.

The four wikis similarly match in written tone for the content. Wikis are supposed to be unbiased and informational, so all four wikis use a plain style of writing that emphasizes unembellished diction and is limited to factual content. The word choice is deliberate to eliminate as much personal input from the editor as possible to create a neutral tone that is accessible to all audiences as informational resources regardless of opinion. One thing that *Wikipedia* does well to keep this tone is clearly attributing claims and non-obvious descriptions to some other source to indicate that they are backed from a secondary source and is not just personal input from the editor.

One aspect that is distinct between *Wikipedia* and the three fan wikis is its approach to verifying information with citations. *Wikipedia* is very serious about attributing every bit of information to a reliable secondary source that is citable in a list of references at the bottom of every *Wikipedia* article. These clear citations build strong credibility and maintain a high level of reliable quality for information from *Wikipedia*. In turn, these are backed by observant editors who uphold this dedication to reliable cited information. The three fan wikis do not nearly show this dedication to citing their sources of information. No articles on the three fan wikis cite where their information comes from within the primary source. Thus, it is hard to immediately verify the information without having to comb through the primary source itself. In turn, this creates a lack of immediate credibility with inexperienced users and introduces skepticism that the information may or may not be presented in a fully accurate manner. These fan wikis thus run the risk of losing credibility if users discover pieces of information that are unfounded or indiscoverable within the primary source.

5.2. Evaluation of *Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki

Overall, the positive responses to the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki draft indicate that it is a effective game wiki that meets user expectations that a game wiki should be highly informational in nature, with the content written and organized to be easily scannable and readable through clear visual contrast between sections. The positive responses also indicate that the wiki draft meets user expectations of having a coherent visual identity and total site navigability through all wiki pages being interlinked.

However, as some users and I recognize, the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki is still a work-in-progress and is not yet an effective game wiki despite the positive responses because it falls short on the level of educational information on the wiki. Many users noted that they were still confused on what the *Clean Sweep* game was actually about, missing key information about the gameplay mechanics, details about specific locations, and the role of the characters in gameplay. These and other comments indicate that the wiki draft is still far from complete, but currently stands as a good framework to build the full wiki within and expand the content until it can meet user expectations of being highly informational while easy to understand. As the preliminary survey at Alphafest found, users of video game wikis primarily expect the site to answer any questions of fact-checking and/or research about the primary source, while secondarily acting as a walkthrough for quests, levels, and locations. Until the level of content in the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki can specifically answer to those expectations, it will not be an effective game wiki.

The lackluster level of content should not undermine the strengths of the current Fandom wiki draft, however, being visually coherent and engaging while being easily navigable from page to page, article to article. The overall lack of content can also be easily explained. The Fandom wiki draft was created shortly after I joined the *Clean Sweep* IMGD MQP team as a member on an Independent Study Unit, meaning that the wiki content was written by an author who was still unfamiliar with the game. Furthermore, *Clean Sweep* was still in development, and many features and information surrounding the characters, narrative, locations, items, and gameplay were not yet finalized or implemented into an official build. As the wiki author, this meant that there was a shortage of accurate and up-to-date information on the game features that the team was comfortable sharing publicly at the time. In an ideal situation, the game wiki would be launched after a version of the game is released that is stable and has a substantial amount of content implemented. The wiki would then be built by passionate players who would already be deeply knowledgeable about the primary source.

The struggle to successfully fill in the Fandom wiki with enough content was also related to there being one sole author. While I mentioned earlier that fan-made video game wikis are powerful examples of participatory user culture where fans of a piece of media can actively contribute to their favorite media, it is extremely rare, if any examples exist at all, for any effective fan-made game wiki to be designed, written, and edited by a sole author (Jenkins, 2006). Instead, fan-made wikis are community spaces where fans can come together and work on the site together, as indicated in the statistics about example fan-made video game wikis I shared in my rhetorical analysis where the *Terraria Wiki* and the *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* have hundreds of active users adding, editing, and moderating hundreds to thousands of content pages. This is to say that building an effective game wikis requires tons of man hours that I did not have during the unpredictable school year with obligations to other projects. For the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki, I prioritized the information that was readily available and the team had detailed the most,

such as the character descriptions, to implement as the initial content of the wiki. While users noted that they did learn a lot about the characters and their lores, they had expectations to learn about the game of *Clean Sweep* from a game wiki, which I failed to meet. Users expected the information already on the wiki to introduce the game, its premise, the gameplay genre, and core gameplay elements.

Now that the *Clean Sweep* game is in the later stages of development with an expected release date of August 2024, the Fandom wiki can be expanded with the massive amounts of content designed and/or implemented into an official release up to this point. For the characters, this includes full character story routes, involvement in narrative quests, and combat moves and characteristics. For the game itself, the combat system has been fully designed with unique moves, items, and status effects. New features such as Janitor Jobs and interactable shops and currency have also been added. All of these implemented features now have full design documentation and descriptions displayed to the player in-game which can be used to pull information for the wiki.

Beyond information, the visuals of the Fandom wiki will also see robust improvement because of the substantial visual content added to *Clean Sweep*, including full 3D models and animations for the characters, full character portraits, and fully modeled location sets that can replace the current images on the wiki and be additional images in a "gallery" section for each character or location. Now that the visuals and gameplay of *Clean Sweep* are close to ready for release, gameplay screenshots can be used as additional images on the Fandom wiki, or even be the background image of the site similar to the *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*.

5.3. Evaluation of *Clean Sweep* Website Wiki Mockup

The goal of the *Clean Sweep* website wiki mockup was to move away from limiting myself to building within a wiki hosting body and replicating common wiki writing practices in favor of a novel approach to what we can expect game wikis to look like. Because of the positive responses to the aesthetics of the *Clean Sweep* game on the Fandom wiki draft, and because of the user expectation that wikis are highly informational through text, the website wiki mockup took full advantage of the aesthetics of *Clean Sweep* with a highly visual approach based on direct images or visual sequences from *Clean Sweep*. However, to still meet user expectations that the site is an informational wiki, the mockup takes a telescoping website approach where the visuals eventually give way to detailed, text-based content the more a user explores into the site's subpages. In this way, the mockup balances between being a dedicated public website for *Clean Sweep* as a source of marketing while being a neutral wiki as a base for information about the game.

The generally positive responses to the website wiki mockup suggests that I was successful in striking this balance, with much of the suggestions for improvement focusing on

specific elements of the website's design, such as the buttons, and the formatting of the text. The telescoping approach proved successful in engaging the user immediately with the strong visuals, encouraging them to explore and learn about *Clean Sweep* from the more text based informational pages. Because of the positive responses, there is potential for this approach to a wiki website to be effective for balancing visual engagement with depth and breadth of information.

Surprisingly, though, I received little to no feedback on the lack of informational content on the wiki website mockup despite the mockup overall having far less information about *Clean Sweep* than the wiki. I recognize, however, that this lack of information is still an issue with the wiki website mockup as with the Fandom wiki draft because the primary purpose of a video game wiki is to be a base of information for the primary source. This may be due to the differences in the feedback questions between the Fandom wiki user test and the wiki website mockup user test. The Fandom wiki user test survey asked more directly to rate the level of information and educational value that the current draft holds. Meanwhile, the wiki website user test survey asked for more feedback on the design and flow of the mockup. Users also may have had different inherent expectations because of the two different mediums being user tested. One set of users were expecting to test a detailed wiki, while the other set of users were expecting to test a visual website. When approached with a Fandom wiki clearly designed and implemented to be a game wiki, users will expect a lot of textual information and to learn a substantial amount of knowledge about the primary source. When approached with a custom, highly visual website mockup, users will instead gravitate toward the website's designs and features, expecting the visuals to be clear and engaging and the features to be simple and intuitive. It is possible, then, that the two user sets were focusing on entirely different elements and critiquing for different purposes, despite the Fandom wiki draft and the wiki website mockup having the same core purpose of becoming an effective game wiki.

One user did note in their additional comments that they recognized the potential dual purpose of the mockup's approach acting as both advertising for the game and as a wiki. They pointed out, however, that mixing these two purposes may alienate users specifically looking for one or the other. Users who are looking for the wiki on *Clean Sweep* may be confused by the highly visual homepage and first couple pages of the mockup and believe that they opened the game's marketing website instead of the wiki and thus not explore further. In the current design of the mockup, it is not clear upon opening the website that the core purpose of the site is to still be an effective game wiki for *Clean Sweep*. Because wikis have a certain "look" to them, as discussed in my rhetorical analysis, users will expect all wikis to retain the "look." A wiki website that delineates too far from looking like a wiki risks communicating that the website is not a wiki at all. While I recognize the potential of this custom website approach for building an effective game wiki, I cannot necessarily recommend it over building in a more traditional wiki hosting body.

Moreover, a fully customized, made-from-scratch website approach for a wiki would take more time and effort than building in a wiki hosting body that already has a framework set up to become a full wiki website. It would also create a barrier of entry to new fans to contribute, as they may be unfamiliar with the website's design and code. Meanwhile, Fandom allows for easy editing through simple visual interfaces by any user at any time without needing any technical knowledge on websites (Fandom). As previously mentioned, fan-made wikis are powerful forms of participatory culture and have become community sites for fans of a particular media (Jenkins, 2006). By increasing the barrier of entry, it reduces the accessibility to contributing to the wiki and weakening one of the cultural strengths in fan-made wikis bringing fans together through community effort.

6. Conclusion

While there are many fan-made wikis on the world wide web covering franchises as obscure as *Acchi Kocchi* with only double digit content pages or as enormous as *Grand Theft Auto* with over 10,000 content pages, a common trait that they share is that they were built and designed by passionate moderators and admins and their design intuition. It is extremely rare, if any examples exist at all, for a fan-made wiki to be built and designed based on findings from rhetorical analysis, and then drafted to be user tested and iterated based on feedback. My feedback-based approach to building and designing wikis introduces a niche where fans can be invited to user test fan-made wikis to hopefully create more intuitive, navigable, and useful wikis for all potential users.

Wikis are, at their core, designed to serve users by meeting their expectations of the wiki being highly informational to answer their questions and easily navigable through strong content organization and interlinked articles. Fan-made wikis, then, should invite feedback to evaluate if they are meeting user expectations and pinpoint areas of improvement. Moreover, by introducing more ways that fans can contribute to fan-made wikis, it reinforces their strength as forms of participatory user culture and community building. It will be impossible to take and implement every individual piece of feedback, however, as it is easy to get overwhelmed by all the suggestions or receive suggestions that are contradictory. Instead, it is more crucial to look for patterns in the feedback to prioritize which areas of improvement to address and implement.

6.1. Additional Recommendations for Developing Game Wikis

Nevertheless, the process of building, designing, and testing both the *Clean Sweep* Fandom wiki and the *Clean Sweep* website wiki mockup have revealed three practices I would recommend to anyone developing a game wiki, and particularly myself for developing a wiki for the *Raveling Dreams* IMGD MQP. These three recommendations are in addition to the standard effective wiki writing practices of developing highly educational and informational articles, organizing content with clear and distinct sections and subsections, and interlinking all articles to create simple, but total site navigability:

1. Take advantage of the unique aesthetic of the primary source for the visual design of the wiki.
2. Become familiar with the wiki hosting body of choice to take full advantage of its editor and create a visually distinctive wiki.
3. Document a style guide for consistent article content and tone, including use of images, logos, and visuals.

As discussed in my rhetorical analysis of existing game wikis, one of the key strengths of the *Terraria Wiki, Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*, and *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki* is that they utilize imagery and visual elements from their primary sources in the wiki itself to build a cohesive

visual identity that is clearly connected to the primary source. This clear connection to the primary source through the overall visual design of the wiki will create a sense of immersion and may increase user engagement. In the case of *Raveling Dreams*, the game has a strong and unique aesthetic of 2D, hand drawn character sprites on pieces of lined paper. The wiki for *Raveling Dreams* should utilize this paper aesthetic to create website backgrounds and section boxes that look like a paper notebook with doodles and the drawings of characters.

In order to execute this visual design and create a visually distinct wiki, a developer must first familiarize themselves with the editor of their wiki body of choice. The level of website customizability and the technical knowledge needed for said customization will vary from wiki body to wiki body. Wikis built with Fandom come with their own visual editor and visual framework that limits the website's customizability, but lowers the technical knowledge needed and increases accessibility for new users to build, design, and edit the wiki. Wikis built with MediaWiki allow for higher control of the website's visual framework, but require a higher level of technical knowledge to take full advantage of. In the case of *Raveling Dreams*, I would first familiarize myself with the Fandom editor to find how much it can customize the website and determine if it will be sufficient for my design goals before moving on to learning the more powerful, but more technically difficult MediaWiki editor.

Currently, I would not recommend the experimental approach with a custom, made-from-scratch website for *Raveling Dreams* because of the technical challenge and the diversion from established user expectations of what an informational game wiki should look like, aforementioned in my evaluation of the *Clean Sweep* wiki website mockup.

As a final recommendation, wiki developers should create a style guide document that details out standard practices for creating and uploading content to the wiki to ensure consistent quality, tone, and moderation of content throughout the wiki. This style guide should include article templates for certain categories of topics, complete with an infobox and section headers. It should also include a writing style guide to determine a standard and neutral voice, diction, and language, as well as an expected level of detail and specificity for information in articles. For easier asset management, the style guide should also include naming conventions for files uploaded to the wiki, including all images, videos, and sound files.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Preliminary Survey Questions at Alphafest

PW MQP - Raveling Dreams Wiki Survey

The Professional Writing side of the Raveling Dreams MQP aims to build a comprehensible and navigable wiki that publicly documents all the major features and aspects of the Raveling Dreams IMGD MQP game.

Your responses to this survey will help me understand how users utilize and navigate existing game wikis.

* Indicates required question

1. What game genres do you play? Check all that apply. *

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Action
   ☐ Adventure
   ☐ Fighting
   ☐ Gacha
   ☐ MMO
   ☐ Puzzle
   ☐ Role-playing
   ☐ Sandbox
   ☐ Simulation
   ☐ Strategy
   ☐ Sports
   ☐ Other: _____

2. Do you use fan wikis about games? (i.e. Minecraft Wiki, League of Legends Wiki, Hollow Knight Wiki, etc.) *

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

PW MQP - Raveling Dreams Wiki Survey (continued)

The Professional Writing side of the Raveling Dreams MQP aims to build a comprehensible and navigable wiki that publicly documents all the major features and aspects of the Raveling Dreams IMGD MQP game.

Your responses to this survey will help me understand how users utilize and navigate existing game wikis.

3. Which wiki bodies are you familiar with? Please check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

☐ Wikipedia

☐ Fandom (i.e. League of Legends Wiki, Hollow Knight Wiki, Grand Theft Auto Wiki, etc.)

☐ MediaWiki (i.e. Minecraft Wiki, Bulbapedia, Smash Wiki, etc.)

☐ GitHub Wikis

☐ Wiki.gg (i.e. Terraria Wiki, Sea of Thieves Wiki, Arknights Wiki, etc.)

☐ Other: _____

4. How often do you visit fan wikis about games? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Once or more per day

◯ Once or more per week

◯ Once or more per month

◯ Less than once per month

◯ Rarely or never

5. What did you use these wikis for? Please check all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Entertainment
- [ ] Fact-checking
- [ ] Research / Inquiry
- [ ] Troubleshooting
- [ ] Walkthrough
- [ ] Other: _____

6. Please choose one wiki you have visited in the last month (or longer, if applicable) * to answer the following questions.

_____

7. How many articles did you visit on the wiki? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4+

8. On a scale of 1 to 6, how quickly did you find the information you were looking for? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very quickly

9. (Optional) Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. On a scale of 1 to 6, how well did the wiki answer what you were looking for? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very well

11. (Optional) Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to understand were the articles? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

13. (Optional) Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy was it to navigate from article to article? If you only visited one article, do not answer.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

15. (Optional) Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B: User Test Survey Questions - *Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki

PW MQP - Clean Sweep Wiki v.1 Survey

The Professional Writing side of my MQP aims to build a comprehensible and navigable wiki that publicly documents all the major features and aspects of the Clean Sweep IMGD MQP game.

Your responses to this survey will help me understand how users utilize and navigate the first draft of this wiki. Please be as honest and thoughtful in your responses as possible. The more thorough the feedback, the better future versions of the wiki will be.

You can find the wiki here: https://clean-sweep.fandom.com/wiki/Clean_Sweep_Wiki. Please do not edit anything!

Begin at the homepage, and start exploring links and articles from there for approximately 5-10 minutes. Then, fill in this survey as best as you can. **This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes.**

* Indicates required question

1. As a user, what do you browse game wikis for? Please select all that apply.

   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Entertainment
   ☐ Fact-checking
   ☐ Research / Inquiry
   ☐ Troubleshooting
   ☐ Walkthroughs
   ☐ I don't browse game wikis.
   ☐ Other: _____

2. As a user, what are some qualities you expect a game wiki to have? Please select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Informative articles
- ☐ Neutral voice
- ☐ Thematic design
- ☐ High-quality images
- ☐ Consistent reading
- ☐ Streamlined navigation
- ☐ I don't have any expectations.
- ☐ Other: _____

3. How many articles did you visit on the wiki? *

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ 1-2
- ⬭ 3-4
- ⬭ 5-6
- ⬭ 7+

4. What was the first article you started with? *

_____

5. What was the last article you ended on? *

_____

6. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to understand were the articles? *

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

7. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy was it to navigate from article to article? If you visited only one article, do not answer.

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

9. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

10. On a scale of 1 to 6, how much did you learn about the Clean Sweep game from the wiki? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very much

11. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. On a scale of 1 to 6, how aesthetically pleasing are the visuals and design of the wiki? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very pleasing

13. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Did you have a favorite article? If yes, please specify.

15. Were there any aspects of the wiki that you found confusing or unclear? If yes, please specify.

16. Do you have any suggestions for improving the overall user experience of the Clean Sweep wiki?

17. Did the Clean Sweep wiki meet your expectations of a game wiki? Please explain.

Appendix C: User Test Survey Questions - *Clean Sweep* Website Wiki
Mockup

PW MQP - Clean Sweep Wiki Website Mockup Survey

The Professional Writing side of my MQP aims to build a comprehensible and navigable wiki that publicly documents all the major features and aspects of the Clean Sweep IMGD MQP game. At this step of the MQP, I have user tested an initial draft of the wiki built in Fandom. Now, I have created a mockup of a custom wiki website design for Clean Sweep ready for feedback.

Your responses to this survey will help me understand how users scan and read the mockup redesign of a wiki website for Clean Sweep. Please be as honest and thoughtful in your responses as possible. The more thorough the feedback, the better future versions of the wiki will be.

You can find the wiki website mockup here: https://www.canva.com/design/DAF9QU-R1jI/rP6jP5_pZD60y1_KDqmnAQ/edit?utm_content=DAF9QU-R1jI&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton.

Follow the walkthrough to the end. Then, fill in this survey as best as you can. **This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes.**

* Indicates required question

1. As a user, what do you browse game wikis for? Please select all that apply.

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Entertainment
    ☐ Fact-checking
    ☐ Research / Inquiry
    ☐ Troubleshooting
    ☐ Walkthroughs
    ☐ I don't browse game wikis.

    ☐ Other: _____

2. As a user, what are some qualities you expect a game wiki to have? Please select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

☐ Informative articles
☐ Neutral voice
☐ Thematic design
☐ High-quality images
☐ Consistent reading
☐ Streamlined navigation
☐ I don't have any expectations.
☐ Other: _____

3. On a scale of 1 to 6, how visually engaging is the design of the mockup? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very engaging

4. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to follow is the flow of the mockup? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

6. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. On a scale of 1 to 6, how obvious are the buttons, icons, and links in the design of the mockup? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very obvious

8. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. On a scale of 1 to 6, how easy to scan and read are the information in the mockup? *

   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

10. *(Optional)* Please explain your answer.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

11. Were there any aspects of the mockup that you found confusing or unclear? If yes, please specify.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

12. Do you have any suggestions for improving the overall user experience of the Clean Sweep wiki website?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

13. Any additional comments or feedback?

Appendix D: Links to the *Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki and *Clean Sweep* Wiki Website Mockup

Appendix E: Poster for Project Presentation Day

Game Wikis for Clean Sweep and Raveling Dreams IMGD MQPs

Ethan Chau (IMGD + PW)
Advisor: Professor Sarah Riddick (PW)

Introduction

Recent research on web usability and cross-cultural studies suggests how user culture influences audience expectations for the appearance and functionality of websites.[1][2] Gaming fandoms illustrate this dynamic well. Generally, fandoms have created a participatory user culture where they become involved in the media they consume.[3] In gaming fandoms, a common practice of their participatory fan culture is the building of wikis. Fan-made wikis have been described as "sites of participation" that allow fans to contribute to their favorite media.[4] **This project explores how digital rhetoric and web usability contribute to the persuasiveness of fan-made game wikis as a participatory online genre.**

Goal

Use rhetoric and writing strategies to create effective wikis for two video games that I am involved in: *Clean Sweep* and *Raveling Dreams*.

Methods

- Identify effective and ineffective wiki writing practices in existing fan wikis.
- Identify notable topics in the *Clean Sweep* game to be written as interlinked articles.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and usability of the latest wiki draft through user testing.
- Revise my wiki to expand and refine written content and to improve comprehensibility.

Clean Sweep logo — THE MOP IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

Raveling Dreams logo

Preliminary Survey

Distribution:
- Google Form at Alphafest, an IMGD playtesting event

Information gathered:
- wiki hosts people are familiar with
- reasons people use fan-made game wikis
- examples of fan-made game wikis

Preliminary Survey - Findings

- Users are generally familiar with Fandom. Some are familiar with MediaWiki. I can expect users to have prior knowledge on how to navigate Fandom and MediaWiki fan-made wikis.
- Users primarily expect game wikis to be sources for fact-checking, research and inquiry, and/or walkthroughs about the primary source.
- Secondarily, users expect game wikis to be sources of entertainment and/or troubleshooting for the primary source.
- Favored game wikis include the *Terraria Wiki, Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki,* and *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki.*

Rhetorical Analysis

Wikis analyzed:
- *Wikipedia*
- *Terraria Wiki*
- *Warhammer 40K: Darktide Wiki*
- *Baldur's Gate 3 Wiki*

Features analyzed:
- visual design
- webpage content and organization
- navigability

Reasons I chose these wikis:
- variety of wiki hosts
- variety of wiki sizes
- variety of primary source genres

Rhetorical Analysis - Findings

- Wikis should have a coherent visual identity and match the aesthetics of the primary source.
- An important aspect of a successful wiki is being easily scannable and readable through clear visual contrast between content sections.
- Articles should link to other articles, so that all wiki pages are interconnected for total site navigability.

User Testing

***Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki:**
- built in Fandom with the visual builder
- includes drafts for the homepage and 38 interlinked articles

***Clean Sweep* Website Wiki Mockup:**
- designed in Canva
- includes mockups for the homepage and 5 telescoping webpages

Features evaluated:
- visual design
- webpage content and organization
- navigability

User Testing - Findings
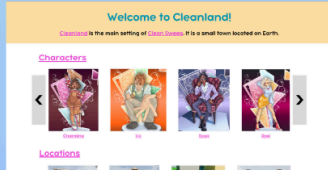
***Clean Sweep* Fandom Wiki:**
- Positive feedback include the coherent visual identity, easy navigability, and well-interlinked articles.
- Suggested changes include expanding the writing to better explain what *Clean Sweep* is about. Some commented on the intrusive ads that come with Fandom.

***Clean Sweep* Website Wiki Mockup:**
- Positive feedback include the visuals of the website being clear, cohesive, and engaging. One user commented it's a good balance between a marketable website and an informational wiki.
- Suggested changes include decluttering the buttons and text and improving readability with a different font and shorter paragraphs.

Clean Sweep Fandom Wiki

Clean Sweep Website Wiki Mockup

Conclusion & Recommendations

While it is important to take feedback from users, it is more crucial to look for patterns in feedback to priortize which areas of improvement to address. It is impossible to account for every individual's preference. From what I've learned developing the *Clean Sweep Wiki* drafts, **I recommend the following for future development of the *Raveling Dreams Wiki*:**

- Use the unique aesthetic of the game for the wiki's visual design.
- Get familiar with MediaWiki's editor to create a visually distinct wiki.
- Create a style guide for consistent content and tone in articles.

Link to project deliverables

References

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