

“Remembering Play” Beyond Retro: An Analysis of YouTube Videos and Comment Data on The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how nostalgia for games is formed and transformed into gaming practices, moving beyond retro game discourse. An exploratory study combining quantitative and qualitative text analysis was conducted on Korean-language YouTube videos and comments related to The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom in the South Korean context. The analysis yielded three findings. The YouTube comment section is a nostalgic space where players' memories and experiences are inscribed as social time. Comments that occur here are nostalgic practices that express and regulate emotions by contrasting the past and present, based on loss and deficiency in the series. This practice becomes a playful act where players critically engage with the game, invoking play experiences and nostalgia to reconstruct meaning through commenting. Game nostalgia is not merely retro representation or emotional recollection, but a cultural practice that transforms into emotional play through the remediation of players' memories and experiences.

Keywords

Nostalgia, Game Cultural Practices, Gaming, Remembering Play, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

Video games have a relatively short history compared to traditional legacy media, yet they have achieved rapid development and popularization through their integration with digital technology. Games have transcended computers, mobile devices, and consoles to become transmedia content consumed through video, animation, books, music, and more. This complex consumption has contributed to the accumulation of diverse traces as cultural artifacts, despite their brief history. Consequently, a player's experience extends beyond direct or indirect interaction with the game itself. It is constructed through various practices mediated by the game, and these experiences become intertwined in memory, transforming into meta-gaming experiences. Players not only play games they have experienced in the past but also indirectly consume

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games they have never played, engaging in another form of play. Conversely, they can recall their own gaming experiences and reconstruct memories.

Research on memory and nostalgia surrounding gaming experiences has generally focused on retro games, retrogaming practices, remakes, preservation, or representations of older game cultures (Swalwell, 2007; Garda, 2013; Sloan, 2015; Vuorinen, 2016; Suominen, Reunanen & Remes, 2015; Bowman & Wulf, 2023). However, such discussions tend to remain grounded in interpretations based on traditional media. In particular, the focus of these discussions is on “retro games.” Yet, as previously examined, gaming experiences evolve rapidly and densely, with players' gameplay experiences overlapping with diverse sensations within an extremely short span. That is, while the duration of a player's gaming experience is very brief, multiple experiences and memories rapidly intertwine within it, forming memories, recollections, and ultimately nostalgia.

As an example of this phenomenon, this study focuses on *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo, 2023; TotK) in South Korea. The unique position this game holds in South Korea exemplifies these characteristics well. To understand this position, it is necessary to situate the case within the broader context of South Korean game culture. South Korean game culture has historically been shaped more strongly by PC-based online games, PC bangs, and e-sports than by a continuous home-console tradition. PC bangs functioned not only as places for accessing computers, but also as social and cultural spaces that nurtured online gaming practices and offline–online relationships around games (Huhh, 2008). In this context, console gaming occupied a comparatively marginal position for a long period, while PC and mobile games formed the dominant platforms in the domestic market (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2020). This background is important because the nostalgia analyzed in this study was not formed through a long and continuous console genealogy. Rather, *The Legend of Zelda* became widely visible to many Korean players after the Nintendo Switch and *Breath of the Wild*, producing a compressed timeline in which memories, expectations, and nostalgia for the series rapidly accumulated.

Prior to *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo, 2018; BotW), the *Zelda* series had not garnered significant attention in South Korea. The series' official Korean-language release via Nintendo in South Korea began only after *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Nintendo, 2009) launched on the Nintendo Wii. At that time, Nintendo game consoles in South Korea were marketed under the catchphrases of “education,” “functionality,” and “a game console enjoyed with family” (Park, 2009).

The turning point was the official Korean release of the Nintendo Switch. In South Korea, the Nintendo Switch launched on December 1, 2017, not the initial release date of March 3, 2017. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* was released in South Korea on February 1, 2018. The game's reputation was already a hot topic online, and Korean players became interested through this information. This unique background for the *Zelda* series in South Korea was a factor that allowed play experiences, memories, and history with the series to truly take root.



Figure 1: Supplementary Google Trends comparison of Korean search interest in “Zelda (blue),” “The Legend of Zelda (red),” “Mario (yellow)”

Google Trends is used here only as a supplementary indicator of search interest, not as a representative measure of all search behavior in South Korea. Given the importance of domestic search platforms such as “Naver,” the figure should be understood as illustrating a visible shift in one search environment rather than providing a comprehensive account of national search practices.

This study aims to analyze how players’ memories function as nostalgia within the *TotK*-centered game series in the South Korean context, and how this nostalgia manifests as a sociocultural practice on the YouTube platform. This goes beyond existing discussions of nostalgia centered on retro games. In today’s game development environment, short release cycles between titles and the (re)use of development resources provide suitable conditions for forming nostalgic memories and experiences. Current game culture practices combine with community activities that share these opinions and exchange meanings, allowing us to understand game nostalgia as a broader cultural phenomenon. This process is conceptualized here as “remembering play”: a platform-mediated practice in which players do not simply recall a game after play, but continue to play with remembered experiences through comments, comparisons, advice, and affective responses. The research questions are as follows.

RQ 1. How does the comment section of game YouTube videos function as a space for players?

RQ 2. How do game YouTube videos and comments transform players' memories into nostalgia?

RQ 3. What are the implications of players' nostalgia practices for game culture?

NOSTALGIA AND GAME

So, what is 'nostalgia'? Nostalgia, derived from the Greek words for 'return home' (nostos) and 'pain' (algos), literally means the pain arising from the longing to return home (Hepper et al., 2012). Historically, nostalgia was often conflated with 'homesickness,' a longing for one's hometown. However, it is now defined as an emotional experience representing a yearning for the past encountered in everyday life (Lee, 2021; Kim, 2013). The term is defined in dictionaries as 'a sentimental longing for the past' (Sedikides et al., 2004). Thus, nostalgia fundamentally signifies an emotional, affective, and mental phenomenon capable of drawing strength and motivation from memories of the past (Hepper et al., 2012).

According to Kemper (1987), nostalgia is a secondary emotion influenced by culture. As Johnson-Laird & Oatley (1989) describe, it possesses both positive and negative dual aspects, encompassing dissatisfaction, sadness, and loss stemming from the contrast between a satisfying past and an unsatisfactory present. In other words, nostalgia is an emotion arising from both positive and negative aspects. Some researchers have regarded nostalgia as a negative emotion. Hertz (1990) described nostalgia as "a powerful and almost unbearable longing" (194), viewing the recognition that the past is irretrievable as inducing sadness (Best & Nelson, 1985). Frijda (1986) argued that nostalgia is "an unnecessary and hurtful non-functional emotion" (475). Indeed, in Wildschut et al.'s (2006) study, participants recalled negative memories associated with disappointment, loss, separation, and death, demonstrating that nostalgia often accompanies emotions like sadness or loneliness.

On the other hand, studies also exist suggesting nostalgia can function as a positive emotion. Kaplan (1987) defined nostalgia as a warm feeling composed of happy memories, happiness, and pleasure, and Davis (1979) similarly viewed it as a positive emotion devoid of negative feelings. Wildschut et al. (2006) reported that nostalgia induces higher levels of happiness than ordinary experiences and has an emotional recovery effect, where initial negative emotions are transformed into positive ones. Furthermore, nostalgia provides emotional stability and a sense of belonging through memories associated with family, friends, and loved ones, with this function becoming particularly pronounced in situations of loneliness or adversity (Wildschut et al., 2006).

Thus, nostalgia functions as a social and cultural emotion where family, friends, specific events, and environments surrounding the self are primary triggers. When negative emotions arise, recalling the past improves mood, alleviates psychological pain, and restores a sense of stability, thereby inducing positive functions (Wildschut et al., 2006). In this sense, nostalgia is a complex phenomenon extending beyond an individual's mere recollection of the past and longing, exerting influence into the present and carrying both positive and negative emotional effects into sociocultural daily life. Through this, we can define nostalgia as 'a complex sociocultural emotion where positive and negative feelings such as sadness, joy, and longing coexist as an individual recalls meaningful past experiences; it provides psychological comfort and strengthens identity and a sense of belonging'.

Previous research on games and nostalgia has primarily focused on gaming experiences stemming from longing for the past. Retro games are the core subject in studies examining games and nostalgia, based on the definition that nostalgia is closely linked to an individual's past experiences. Nostalgia through games generally stems from memories of games an individual played directly during childhood or the

past. Related studies particularly focus on the emotional responses provided by game experiences recalled through retro trends, even after approximately 15 to 30 years have passed. The concept of retro games is fluid over time, but recent research generally sets the fifth generation of video game consoles from the early 1990s and MMORPGs from the early 2000s as representative categories (Bowman & Wulf, 2023).

This retro-oriented tendency has also been discussed in relation to game preservation, collecting, and retro design. Swalwell (2007) examines how early digital games are remembered, forgotten, and later recuperated as nostalgic objects, while Garda (2013) distinguishes restorative and reflective nostalgia in retro game design. Similarly, Suominen, Reunanen and Remes (2015) describe retro gaming as a broader cultural phenomenon that includes playing and collecting aging hardware and games, as well as commercial products, museums, research, and online discussions. These studies show that game nostalgia has often been examined through older games, retro styles, and the cultural afterlives of past gaming technologies.

Building on this temporal distinction, Bowman and Wulf (2023) explored nostalgia induced by video games from multiple angles. They focused on “historical nostalgia” experienced by generations who did not directly experience retro games, and on game nostalgia formed within transmedia contexts. Their research particularly demonstrates that nostalgia functions as an emotional mechanism that deepens immersion in gameplay experiences, extending beyond simple sentimental recollection. Furthermore, nostalgia is proposed not only as a contributor to individual social well-being but also as a concept with the potential for theoretical integration within game studies.

Similarly, Vuorinen (2016) analyzed the discursive construction of retro game nostalgia. Focusing on comments from YouTube videos related to the 1998 releases *Spyro the Dragon* and *Banjo-Kazooie*, she examined how these comments linguistically express nostalgia. She analyzed how the emotional expression of nostalgia is amplified through linguistic features such as interjections, emoticons, and specific words. Vuorinen argued that these linguistic elements represent retro games as content evoking positive and warm emotions, further positioning them as cultural classic and symbolic content possessing cult status.

Sloan (2015), analyzing *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* and *Gone Home*, argues that contemporary video games commodify nostalgia not through simple reminiscence but via ‘remediated memories’ mediated through media. Both games actively remediate diverse media elements from the 1980s and 90s—such as film, music, TV, and consumer culture—to immerse gamers in a hyperreal past. This experience is grounded not in actual historical memory but in emotional images constructed by media. Sloan views this game-based representation as simultaneously satisfying nostalgia while serving to redefine consumers' self-identity and cultural positioning. He emphasizes that video games function as a powerful nostalgic medium that comprehensively integrates 20th-century media culture. In this sense, the nostalgia gamers feel towards these games is not merely a reflection of the past but can be viewed as a new gaming experience in the present.

What can be gleaned from this prior research is that nostalgia is an emotion encompassing both positive and negative human feelings, while simultaneously being an emotionally experienced phenomenon that operates socially and culturally. Based on this, nostalgia has the potential to function as a foundation for various practices,

extending beyond mere longing. The relationship between games and nostalgia also extends beyond mere longing for past games; it influences present-day gamer identity, immersion, and gaming experiences.

However, the concept of nostalgia is still often defined as an emotion evoked by reminiscing about one's homeland across a long span of time or a distant space. In other words, nostalgia is a phenomenon arising from a significant gap between the past and the present. Research linking games and nostalgia, developed around this definition, focuses on 'retro' and highlights the re-examination of past game works through remastering or remakes. However, confining the evolving nature of games, alongside rapid media technology advancements, solely to nostalgia formed from early games, risks overlooking the diverse meanings of gaming experiences gamers encounter. For some, memories spanning game series can also become nostalgia evoking longing and yearning. Moreover, the diverse peripheral media surrounding games help build such experiences with greater density, gradually pushing individual experiences into memories at an accelerating pace. Therefore, this study aims to present how players' experiences formed within this specific context are recalled and constructed as nostalgic experiences, and what implications this holds for game culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study conducted an exploratory investigation combining text mining and qualitative text analysis based on YouTube videos and their associated comment data. First, quantitative analysis involved organizing the large-scale comment data and identifying word usage trends and the distribution of comparative mentions across series. Subsequently, qualitative analysis focused on videos showing meaningful patterns in the quantitative results, providing a detailed interpretation of how comments interact with videos to form nostalgia. This approach was chosen to capture emotional and structural meaning beyond simple mention frequency.

YouTube was selected not only because it provides accessible video and comment data, but also because it occupies a central position in South Korea's contemporary media consumption. Recent research on YouTube-based public discourse in South Korea notes that YouTube has become a widely used channel for information seeking and public response, and that comment data can function as a meaningful source for examining social perception (Oh & Kim, 2025). Its large user base and high levels of engagement make it a significant platform through which gaming experiences are circulated, remembered, and discussed. In this sense, YouTube is not treated here as a neutral repository of comments, but as a platformed space in which game memories are publicly expressed and socially reorganized.

Data collection spanned approximately one year, from July 2024 to July 2025. In this study, the "South Korean context" does not refer to the verified geographic location of uploaders, viewers, or commenters. Rather, the corpus is operationally defined as Korean-language YouTube videos and comments collected through Korean search terms. Hangul use in video titles, descriptions, and comments was used as the primary marker for inclusion. Therefore, the data analyzed in this study should be understood as Korean-language YouTube discourse surrounding *Tears of the Kingdom*, rather than as comments produced exclusively by users physically located in South Korea. This also means that Korean-speaking users outside South Korea, including members of the Korean diaspora, may be included in the corpus. Top-viewed videos based on view

counts were collected using three keywords in YouTube’s search bar, resulting in 501 unique videos for final analysis.

The corpus included both long-form videos and YouTube Shorts, including gameplay videos, comparison videos, lore or detail analysis videos, review-like videos, news videos, and meme or entertainment-oriented videos. Because video format can shape the style and intensity of comment interaction, the qualitative analysis considered not only comment content but also the title, description, and format of the video in which the comments appeared.

Qualitative analysis focused on videos and comments with prominent mentions identified in the quantitative analysis. This qualitative analysis centered on deriving emotional categories from comment content and examining them within the video's context. This confirmed that comments were not merely expressions of opinion but processes of reconstructing or remediating past gaming experiences. Attention was paid to how comments connect to scenes within the videos and evoke recollection, comparison, and emotional responses. This allowed the identification of how individual players' experiences are transformed into sociocultural meanings through the platform.

Finally, the structural characteristics of the YouTube platform were incorporated into the analysis. This is because the comment interface, visibility of user responses, and algorithmic environment can influence commenters' emotional expression and memory recall methods. By considering not only the meaning of the text itself but also the platform context, this study aimed to integrate quantitative patterns and qualitative interpretations to achieve a more holistic understanding of the structure through which nostalgia is formed across game series.

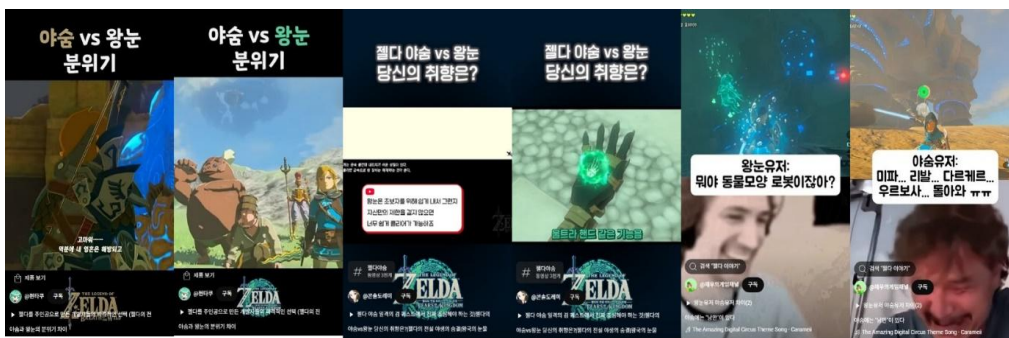


Figure 2: Example of Korean-language YouTube videos on *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*

YOUTUBE COMMENT SECTION AS A SPACE OF NOSTALGIA

The quantitative results suggest that the comment section of TotK can be approached as a social space. Here, “social space” does not simply mean that many users posted comments. Rather, it refers to a discursive environment in which players repeatedly refer to shared game texts, compare their own play experiences with those of others, and transform individual memories into collectively recognizable points of reference. In this sense, the quantitative analysis does not by itself prove nostalgia. Instead, it identifies the shared vocabulary and recurring relational structure through which nostalgic discourse becomes possible. Frequency, relative frequency, and collocate analyses therefore function as a way of mapping where cross-title references and

comparative discourse are concentrated within the corpus, providing entry points for the qualitative examination of recollection, affective evaluation, and loss-oriented expressions.

A notable finding was the frequent appearance of the term “BotW (야숨),” which refers to the prequel of the main object of analysis, TotK. Alongside this, the particle-marked form “야숨은” also appeared frequently. “BotW” appeared 549 times, while “야숨은” appeared 179 times, totaling approximately 700 instances. By comparison, “TotK (왕눈)” appeared 681 times and “왕눈은” appeared 218 times, totaling approximately 900 instances. This shows that, excluding the target title TotK itself, BotW was one of the most frequently mentioned game-related terms in the corpus. In other words, BotW did not appear merely as a background reference, but functioned as a key term through which players discussed, compared, and contextualized TotK. This centrality is also visually confirmed in the Cirrus visualization.



Figure 3: Cirrus & Corpus Term in Keyword

When examining each keyword by relative frequency, this trend becomes even more pronounced. First are the relative frequency results for “BotW” in each video’s comments. It consistently appears with low frequency within each comment. Considering that out of 177,560 total words, 51,750 are unique words (approximately 29%), this indicates BotW is mentioned in many videos. Particularly, points where relative frequency sharply increases within specific video groups can be identified. This suggests these videos are likely to contain recollections of the previous game or discussions comparing the two titles.

The relative frequency results for TotK and BotW show that each keyword maintains a low overall distribution while appearing consistently across the comment corpus. At the same time, both terms become highly concentrated in specific videos, indicating that comparison between the two titles is especially active in certain video groups.

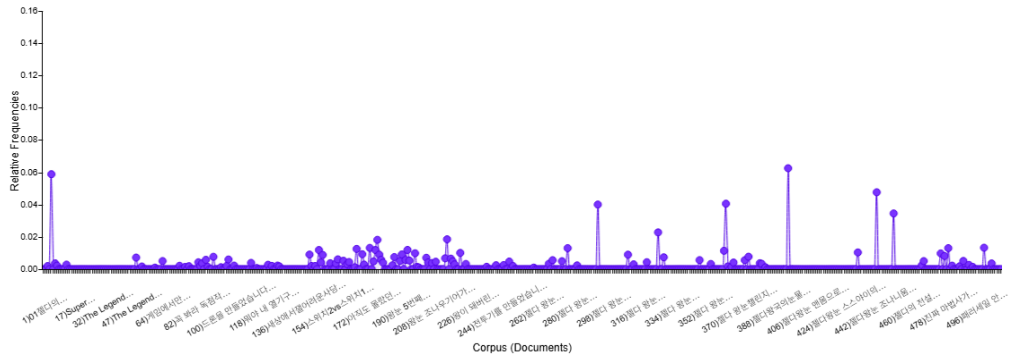


Figure 4: Relative frequency of “BotW (purple)”

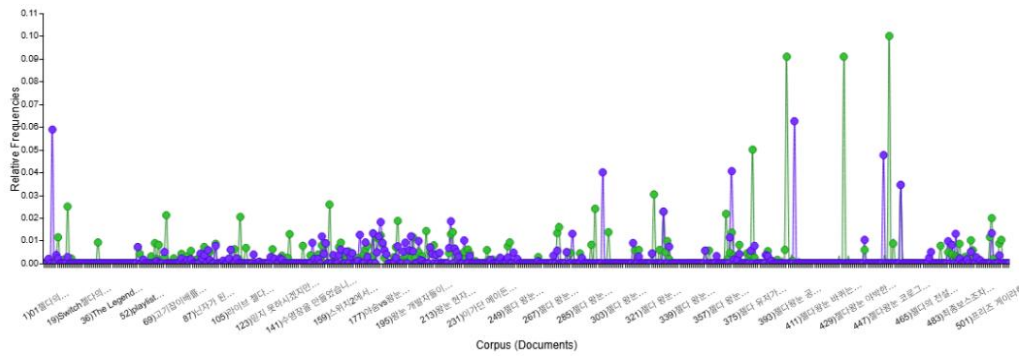


Figure 5: Relative frequency of “BotW” and “TotK (green)”

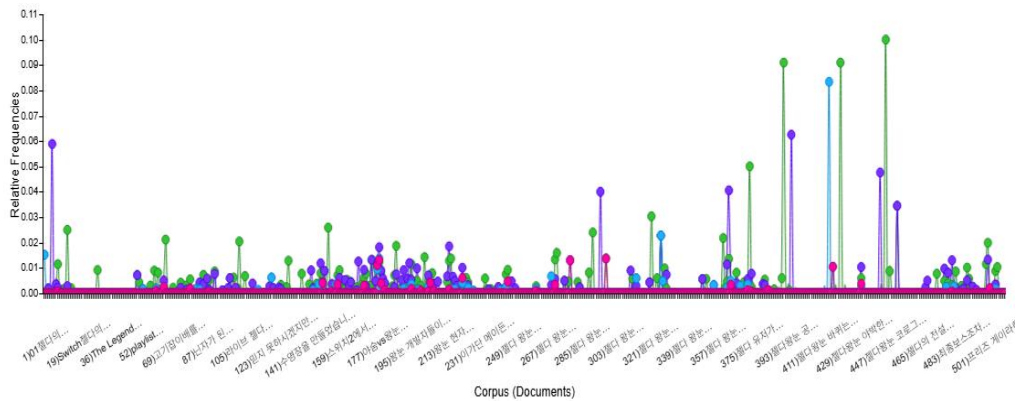


Figure 6: Relative frequencies of “BotW,” “TotK,” “BotW is (sky blue),” “TotK is (pink)”

Looking at it more specifically, “BotW” and “BotW is” are repeatedly used in the corpus not merely as simple references to a specific game, but as central examples in discussions and as points of comparison. “BotW” and “TotK” frequently appear together in this corpus, primarily used within comparative structures. “BotW” serves as the benchmark as the predecessor, while “TotK” is described as an expansive sequel adding new elements upon it. Examining the collocations for “BotW” and “TotK” makes this even clearer. Collocation analysis revealed that “BotW–TotK” word pairs appeared with the highest frequency (“BotW–TotK” 153 times, “TotK–BotW” 125 times), demonstrating that a strong structure of mutual reference between the two games dominates the comments overall. Collocations appearing 20 times or more

BotW were repeatedly distributed across the TotK comment corpus while also becoming concentrated in specific video groups. The collocate and network analyses further indicate that BotW and TotK were often discussed relationally rather than as separate titles. These co-occurrence patterns do not establish nostalgia in themselves; rather, they reveal the discursive conditions under which nostalgia can be examined. In this study, nostalgic discourse is distinguished from general comparison by temporal and affective markers, including references to past play experiences, expressions of longing or loss, evaluations of absence or deficiency, affective memories such as fear or tension, and desires to return to or replay earlier experiences. The following qualitative analysis therefore examines how these markers appear within specific comment contexts.

Based on this relational structure, we can understand why BotW repeatedly appears in TotK-related comment contexts. The next step is to examine how these relational references become emotionally marked. What is more unique is that, within the relevant context, complex comparisons and contrasts are made between the two games regarding memories, emotions, and sentiments. The data included 1,429 sentences contextualized with “BotW” where “BotW” functions as sensory text eliciting deep emotional responses from players (viewers). The comments reflected diverse emotional experiences like fear, tension, trauma, and nostalgia. One comment stated, “The BGM is too scary,” expressing fear, while another revealed tension and anxiety experienced during play with expressions like “BotW PTSD.” Furthermore, “BotW” evokes nostalgia for many commenters, stimulating emotional recollection. Some players connected past experiences to their current feelings through remarks like “Let's build up BotW memories again.”

While the surface reason BotW is mentioned in TotK videos is their shared game series, the overall tone of related comments suggests players are drawing a complex blend of nostalgia, mixed emotions, and memories from the videos. Thus, players are not only recalling positive longing but also revisiting and expressing past negative emotional experiences. However, their complex emotional experiences differ from traditional retro nostalgia in two key ways: they involve ‘nostalgia for a series released within a relatively short time span’ and ‘nostalgicizing their own gaming experiences and virtual reality.’

As these individual nostalgic experiences accumulate, YouTube videos become a social space. Recent studies on virtual temporality have paid attention to YouTube because it functions as a reference framework for social time, allowing users not only to receive temporal narratives but also to interact with others and reorganize past and future possibilities (Sime, 2023; Areni & Todres, 2023). Srirachanikorn (2025) explains this through the concept of “internet pitstops,” online places where social time is stored, expressed, and reconstructed through timestamps, comments, and sharing. The Legend of Zelda videos also function in this way: players’ memories and negative gaming experiences have materialized in comments, becoming temporal landmarks that bring past social time into the present (Birth, 2017). In this sense, videos operate as sociocultural “postcards,” while comments become shared “souvenirs” of play experience (Sime, 2023).

The pattern of player comments driven by nostalgia manifests not merely as longing for the footage, but as writing revived memories into comments and exchanging feedback through them. Players create another source of enjoyment by leaving comments about their experiences during gameplay. Notably, even when expressing

anger or displeasure through comparisons between TotK and BotW, these comments do not conclude with a simple 'so it wasn't fun' evaluation. This demonstrates that emotion functions as a mechanism driving empathy and communication with others.

NOSTALGIA PRACTICE OF 'LOSS' AND 'DEPRIVATION'

Based on these findings, this study highlights that players engage in play through nostalgia. This operates in two ways: the nostalgic practice derived from longing between the two games, and the play that emerges from it. Statements from players who experienced BotW and TotK reveal that emotions embedded in memory emerge as part of personal experience, transcending mere gameplay outcomes. BotW leaves behind feelings of isolation, loss, and self-identification, but this solitude transforms into a nostalgic longing for the past. Players yearn not simply for BotW as a game, but for the sentiments and landscapes they lived within. In contrast, TotK constructs a more social and hopeful emotional framework through collaboration, world-building, and emotional recovery. Thus, the two games are internalized differently: BotW as a memory of longing and nostalgia, and TotK as an experience of solidarity and recovery.

“Only after playing TotK did, I truly realize how lonely Link felt in BotW.”

“TotK makes you feel constantly connected to someone while playing, which is reassuring.”

“BotW felt lonely throughout, but strangely, I enjoyed that feeling and kept wandering.”

“As someone who loved BotW's 'world with no one else' atmosphere, TotK's change feels unfamiliar.”

“I still remember that scene in BotW where you sat alone by the campfire, gazing up at the night sky.”

From this perspective, the comments from players on TotK's videos express nostalgia for memories gained from past gameplay, expressed through comparisons with YouTuber's videos or experiences. The unique point here is that the source of this enjoyment lies in the difference or misalignment between past and present gameplay. Another characteristic aspect of nostalgia is that the feeling of nostalgia is accompanied by a sense of loss and deficiency regarding its object. In other words, nostalgia is an emotion connected not only to the past, which reveals what is currently lost and deprivation, but also to reality and the future. BotW's nostalgia shared and mentioned by players in the comments reflects the sense of loss and deprivation felt in TotK. BotW and TotK share a direct prequel-sequel relationship, inheriting or sharing similar backgrounds, monsters, items, and other elements of their worldview and imagery.

“Why did the divine beasts vanish from the TotK?”

“The divine beasts vanishing is so damn frustrating”

“I liked the hero so much (...)”

“Breaking the divine beast and getting the hero's story made my heart race”

“I miss ‘Samji Rizal Boomerang’”

“Divine Beasts... Where on earth did you go (...) I miss you...”

“Seriously, why did the Bomb Arrow disappear... That damn Bomb Flower...”

Players express clear regret, citing emotional experiences of loss and deprivation amidst these changes. Even outwardly identical elements create emotional density differences through subtle balance shifts or deleted content. This aspect is noteworthy because, unlike existing studies analyzing nostalgia primarily through retro games, the same emotional mechanism occurs even between games in a series released relatively close together. Video games function as a kind of “affective time machine” (Wulf et al., 2018). The sense of loss and deficiency experienced by players across both games serves to nostalgize BotW's gameplay, and TotK's videos existed to revive those memories. This tendency reveals that the nostalgia for BotW originating from TotK stems from a longing born of loss and deprivation.

“I still can't forget that boss battle back then.”

“I want selective amnesia~ I want to forget BotW completely and play it again.”

“TotK is good, but nothing can replace BotW's atmosphere.”

“That initial feeling when playing BotW... I doubt I'll ever feel it again.”

The players' experience of a deficient present becomes even more vivid through comparison with the intense memories of the past. From the perspective of ‘remediation’ as described by Sloan (2015), the emotions of BotW recalled by players in their comments are not the experiences themselves from the past, but rather emotional memories reconstituted in the present through the mediation of the new text TotK and its YouTube reproductions. The emotional gap that emerges when present experiences clash with past intense memories forms a structure of remediated emotion, intensifying players' sensations of lack and regression (Sloan, 2015).

Players feel a relative lack in the current game compared to past experiences. They do not merely lament the absence of the past but strongly express a desire to reclaim that loss or experience it anew. One comment reveals a yearning to revive the thrill of the first BotW play experience, which goes beyond wanting to feel the fun again and becomes a desire to return to the “beginning.” Other comments recognize the loss of in-game entities as objects of emotional attachment and connect the current deficiency to the act of returning to the past game. This can be understood as an emotional practice that attempts to restore what is lacking. Thus, players repeatedly express not just longing, but an active desire to revive loss, showing that these videos function as spaces of emotional recovery and regression (Van Alst & Cory, 2024).

“I was most excited for Sky Island, but it's disappointing there's not much content.”

“TotK is fun, but strangely, after seeing the ending, I feel a huge emptiness. It doesn't leave a lingering feeling like BotW, which is a shame.”

“I was playing TotK, but I missed that feeling from BotW, so I played BotW...”

The nostalgic practices players employ to overcome loss and deprivation extend beyond simply commenting and expressing themselves. They reconstruct their gaming experiences around nostalgia, and the gameplay scenes in the videos, along with the accompanying comments, function as a rearrangement of gameplay where the player's past experiences and present sensations converge—transcending a mere space for appreciation. Videos comparing BotW and TotK evoke more than mere memory recall in viewers, inducing emotional responses that reawaken the sensations and immersion they once experienced. This summoning of memory transforms into a playful act of sharing personal feelings through comments. Here, playful act functions as an emotional practice that realigns memory and identity (Wulf et al., 2018). Furthermore, this emotional recollection manifests as a process of reconstructing one's own standards of enjoyment by comparing them with the new gaming experience of TotK. Ultimately, through watching videos and writing comments, players re-enact their own memories, emotionally reconstruct their gameplay experiences, and simulate a game space of emotional recollection (Sloan, 2015).

“After seeing the TotK ending, I ended up revisiting the BotW ending... The emotions both games evoke are so different it makes it even more poignant.”

“TotK is good, but I miss the atmosphere of BotW.”

“REMEMBERING PLAY” THROUGH SOCIAL GAMING EXPERIENCES

Arnold-Forster (2024) analyzes nostalgia not as mere longing for positive past emotions, but as an emotional state encompassing negative experiences that lead to future-oriented emotional construction. From this perspective, the BotW players recall in comments is not a simple past emotion, but an emotional experience reconstructed through interaction with the present game elements of TotK. This emotional reconstruction expands from personal experience to public practice through comments. It goes beyond merely pointing out inconveniences or dissatisfaction with the game system, scenario, or play experience. Players presuppose memories of more specific and core gameplay experiences from the BotW era and perform retrospective comparisons contrasting the current TotK game experience with the past. Furthermore, this evaluation process extends beyond personal emotional regulation into a communal form of play where emotions are shared with fellow players.

A key point here is that this retrospective comparison process is not merely an emotional reaction but embodies a critical structure of re-running past experiences. According to Sloan's (2016) discussion of “playable criticism,” nostalgia is not merely reproducing past texts but an emotional practice that produces new meaning by re-performing past experiences within a present context. Here, the concept of performance does not solely refer to parodic staging within the text. This study views the process where players themselves evoke their own emotions and memories, compare them with the present text, and rearrange them as part of performative criticism. That is, players do not merely read past texts; they transform past emotions into a ‘playable structure’ and re-execute them.

However, this does not mean that all comments in the corpus can be understood as playable criticism. In this study, the term refers specifically to comments that recall a prior play experience, evaluate the present game or video through that memory, and

transform this evaluation into an action, expectation, advice, or renewed desire to play. In these cases, commenting becomes more than feedback or reminiscence: it becomes a way of replaying memory and reorganizing the meaning of play.

“(Personally) I found it super inconvenient that to use the Sage's ability on TotK, you had to get close to the Sage and press A to activate it.”

“I wish TotK had more of that BotW-style tension.”

“Compared to BotW, it definitely feels like the emotional depth has weakened.”

Negative recollection does not repeat past disappointments but demonstrates a forward-looking attitude that transforms the experience into a current evaluation criterion (Henricks, 2015), leading to expectations for sequels or adjustments in play style. In other words, this commenting is not merely recalling memories but an emotional practice of rearranging past experiences within present sensibilities (Srirachanikorn, 2025). The point where playable criticism operates here is that players do not merely reproduce past experiences as “better/worse” impressions but perform an analytical act of reevaluating current issues through the emotional structures of the past.

“Seeing how the physics engine tricks that were criticized as bugs in BotW were fully integrated into the system in TotK makes me hopeful that even the current inconveniences will eventually become strengths in future works.”

“I wish they'd put more effort into the ending cutscenes in TotK.”

Meanwhile, difficulties in games could remain purely personal frustrations, but in YouTube comment sections, these emotions are transformed into scenes of overcoming through communal practice. These comments are not mere expressions of gratitude; by sharing the process of overcoming challenges with fellow players, they expand into practices integrating emotion and skill (Harborth & Pape, 2020). This interaction demonstrates how past negative emotions like fear and disappointment are reinterpreted within community empathy and information exchange, transforming emotional recollection into playful exchange. In other words, the comment section functions as an ‘emotional playground’ where personal failure, overcoming, and emotional shifts are exchanged with others.

“I've gotten so much help from Holic's videos (YouTuber's Nickname) while playing *Zelda*. I finally beat the Divine Beast that was giving me trouble this time too.”

“Since I successfully unearthed the Divine Beast, I think I can do it now that I've practiced!”

“I tried it before, but the Guardian looked so tough it was hard. Now that I'm used to it, I'm actually having fun taking it down.”

Some comments provide direct gameplay advice or feedback, intervening directly in the current play experience. Feedback on gameplay is also not merely an advice transfer; it is a combined form of emotional and skill-based play that shares past failure experiences and the lessons learned from them. In this process, negative emotions expand into shared feelings within the community, forming an emotional

common sense where specific experiences become established as ‘our shared experience.’

“Using a jump attack in this section lets you clear it faster.”

“I used to struggle here too, but using the bow after jumping makes it way easier.”

These cases illustrate how the criteria of playable criticism operate in the comment section. The exchange structure involves not merely sharing tips but re-enacting the structure of failure–overcoming–re-execution from past play experiences with others. Users replay accumulated emotions and skills, and by proposing them to others, perform a critical play that rearranges emotional and technical signifiers. In this sense, emotional interactions in comment sections are not mere reminiscence but a critical practice that re-plays memories and emotions to reinterpret the current gaming experience.

The comments identified in this study demonstrate such “replay” cases (Sloan, 2016). Statements like “I want to go back to the beginning and play again” or “It reminds me of when I first beat the DLC” function as critical play that re-evaluates past sensations within the current play context. The comment “I was playing TotK and missed the feeling of BotW, so I played BotW again” is a prime example of re-invoking past emotions through action. This replay extends beyond the individual level, becoming a cyclical practice in which players reference others’ emotions and memories to rearrange their own emotional structures.

This study defines “remembering play” as a practice in which players do not simply recall a game after play, but continue to play with remembered experiences through comments, comparisons, advice, and affective responses. The concept refers to the transformation of memory into a socially shared and platform-mediated practice of interpretation. In this sense, remembering play connects nostalgia, commenting, and play by showing how players use remembered experiences not only to recall the past, but also to evaluate the present game, communicate with others, and reorganize the meaning of their own play.

Ultimately, the nostalgia arising between “BotW–TotK” can be understood as a playful practice that goes beyond simple recollection or longing, involving the repeated play of memory and the reconstruction of emotional meaning. This structure prompts players to ruminate on past emotions and design philosophies, recalibrate their emotional interpretations with others, and ultimately reveals that nostalgia itself functions as an emotional-critical play—a form of playable criticism. In other words, the comment section is a “place for replaying” emotions, and this spatiality functions as a device that concretely manifests playful and performative attributes within the digital platform environment.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how nostalgia is constructed within the modern gaming environment and its sociocultural and gaming implications by analyzing YouTube comments surrounding *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. The findings revealed that nostalgia is not merely a simple recollection of the past, but rather a process where emotional meaning is rearranged within the context of a new game

text and the YouTube platform. Specifically, players formed nostalgia by sensorially comparing the structural differences and shifts in emotional density between the two games through videos, contrasting current deficiencies with past experiences.

Players' nostalgic experiences demonstrate that nostalgic memories and emotions can be reactivated even within relatively short gaps between series in the modern digital environment. YouTube comment sections function as social spaces where emotions and memories mutually reinforce each other, expanding individual play experiences into social practices. This process can be explained through re-mediation: players do not merely reminisce about past experiences but reconfigure them with contemporary meaning by connecting them to new textual and social contexts. Through this, comment sections become nostalgic spaces where markers of social time accumulate and are stored.

The nostalgic practices emerging here do not merely dwell in recollection; they are shared, critiqued, and transformed into play through comments. Even negative experiences from past gameplay—frustration, disappointment, or difficulty—are transformed into present-day practices of emotional overcoming, re-attempting, offering advice, and showing empathy. This series of acts closely connects to the performance of playable criticism discussed by Sloan (2016). The comment section functions as the interface where this critical practice occurs. In other words, we can understand that game nostalgia, moving beyond simple personal recollection or sentimental reaction, becomes play through platform-based community formation, the sharing of social time, and interactive emotional practices, forming a unique aspect of game culture.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that nostalgia between game series in contemporary game culture is not a regression to personal memory, but rather a playful practice where emotions are rearranged within a context where platform, community, and text overlap. Nostalgia is not static contemplation but a game-cultural practice through the remediation of memory and experience, transforming into emotional play. This study demonstrated this structure through concrete case analysis and expands perspectives for interpreting nostalgia in game studies by examining interactions between memory, emotion, and platforms.

This study has several limitations. First, because it focuses on YouTube comment data, the platform's algorithmic structure and interaction patterns may have influenced the data. Since the corpus was defined through Korean-language videos and comments rather than verified user location, the study also cannot fully distinguish between users physically located in South Korea and Korean-speaking users outside South Korea. Future research should compare other platforms, such as game forums, SNS, and streaming channels, and examine how location, language, and migration shape nostalgic relationships to the same game series. Second, because this study relies on text-based materials, it cannot fully capture non-verbal affect such as physical reactions, immersion, or emotional experience during actual gameplay. Interviews, participant observation, or play-based methods would complement this limitation. Third, it remains difficult to distinguish whether nostalgic emotions stem from actual memories or are reconstructed by platform factors such as algorithms. Future research should therefore examine the difference between memories based on game texts and memories reshaped through platforms.

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