

Influence of Content Creators on Re-balancing in “The Finals”

Daniel Wakefield

Abstract

This project investigates whether the game *The Finals* exhibits a bias toward content creators and competitive players, a common trend in the gaming industry. Such biases often arise because content creators act as free marketing, attracting their audiences and driving short-term profits. However, games that prioritize content creators frequently alienate casual players, leading to player dissatisfaction and eventual attrition.

Our analysis concludes that *The Finals* does not exhibit a significant bias toward content creators or competitive players. The findings suggest that Embark Studios is actively balancing the competitive aspects of the game while ensuring accessibility for casual players. Using keyword-based filtering and sentiment analysis, we evaluated player opinions on a specific weapon change, providing insights into the game’s efforts to maintain fairness and inclusivity.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE gaming industry often faces a delicate balance between catering to content creators, competitive players, and casual audiences. Content creators serve as influential marketing tools, bringing visibility and new players to games. Their opinions can shape public perception, and many games prioritize these creators’ experiences to maximize short-term profitability. However, this can alienate the casual player base, leading to frustration and a decline in long-term player retention.

This project explores whether *The Finals*, developed by Embark Studios, exhibits a bias toward content creators and competitive players. Specifically, the analysis focuses on weapon balancing changes and how they are perceived by the gaming community. By using keyword-based filtering and sentiment analysis, the research evaluates whether the game’s updates prioritize a specific demographic or strive for broader inclusivity.

The findings provide valuable insights into *The Finals*’ approach to balancing game play for diverse audiences. Ultimately, this study contributes to understanding how game developers can navigate the challenges of appealing to multiple player demographics while maintaining fairness and accessibility.

Our research questions include:

- 1) Is there evidence of developer bias toward content creators in *The Finals*?
- 2) How do users react to updates, and what factors contribute to sentiment shifts?

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A. Methods

1) Data Collection:

- Collected user opinions related to *The Finals* from Reddit posts, and YouTube Video transcripts
- Collected Weapon data from CSV data provided by a player of *The Finals* as well as patch notes provided by *The Finals*
- **YouTube Data:** Collected data from a total of 100 YouTube Videos
- **Reddit Data:** Collected data from a total of close to 1000 Reddit posts and comments

2) Data Pre-Processing:

- **Noise Removal:** Duplicate values, and Irrelevant posts were removed and avoided
- **Text Cleaning:** Applied Tokenization, lemmatization, and stop-word removal using spaCy
- **Keyword Filtering:** Isolated posts mentioning specific updates (e.g., “Cl40 rework”, “nerf pike”, “pike over powered” etc...)
- **Sentiment Analysis:** Implemented VADER for sentiment scoring, categorizing opinions as positive, negative, or neutral

3) Experimental Settings:

- 1) **Keyword-based Analysis:** Identify recurring topics such as weapon buffs/nerfs
- 2) **Sentiment Trend Analysis:** Examined sentiment before and after updates of a specific weapon. Was the change received well or poorly.
- 3) **Visualization:** Word clouds and histogram to highlight sentiment

B. Results

1) Dataset Analysis:

Community Analysis

• CL40

1) Pre-Update

- Top Keywords: "CL40", "Damage", "Nerf", "Kill", "Counter", "Light", "One", "Shot", "Reload", "aps", "rof", "self", "hit", "increase"

2) Post-Update

- Top Keywords: "CL40", "Damage", "Weapon", "nerf", "gun", "nerfed", "better", "recoil", "medium range", "need", "fire", "strong", "rof"

3) Common recurrence of the words, "damage", "nerf", "rof"



• Pike .556

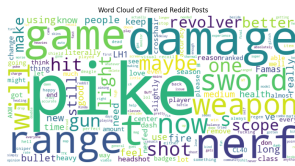
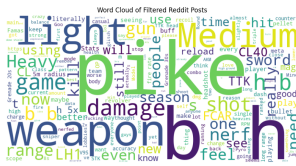
1) Pre-Update

- Top Keywords: "Pike", "Nerf", "One", "Shot", "TTK", "TTK head", "Consider", "Keep", "range", "Please", "Skill", "hit", "crosshair", "recoil", "skill"

2) Post-Update

- Top Keywords: "Pike", "Nerf", "Nerfing", "Consider", "Keep", "better", "slightly", "crosshair", "Skill", "Recoil", "high", "dmg", "good", "need", "change"

3) Common recurrence of the words, "nerf", "skill", "consider", "keep"



Content Creator Analysis

• CL40

1) Pre-Update

- Top Keywords: "CL40", "Damage", "Efficient", "Change", "Nerf", "Weapon Balancing", "Less", "One", "Shot", "balance", "high", "ability", "change"

2) Post-Update

- Top Keywords: "CL40", "Update", "Performance", "Weapon", "Balancing", "strategy", "effective", "indicate", "balance", "emphasize", "ttk", "kill", "advantage"

3) Common recurrence of the words, "balance", "high", "damage", "ability"



- Pike .556

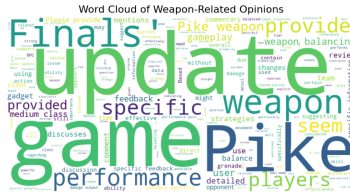
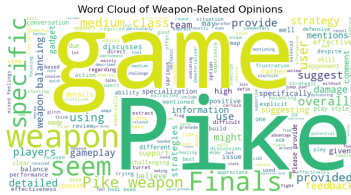
- 1) Pre-Update

- Top Keywords: "Pike", "Specific", "Weapon", "Strategy", "overall", "damage", "high", "balance", "strategic", "play style", "challenging", "use", "gadgets", "recoil"

- 2) Post-Update

- Top Keywords: "Pike", "Update", "Weapon Balancing", "feedback", "effective", "performance", "damage" "specific", "team", "players", "gadget", "high" "ttk" "ability", "recoil"

- 3) Common recurrence of the words, "balance", "high", "damage"



- 2) Sentiment Trends:

Sentiment scores are scores on a scale of negative(-1) neutral(0) positive(1)

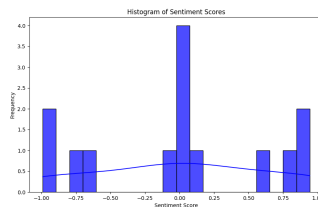
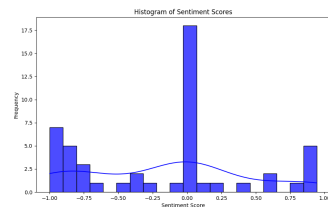
Community

- CL40

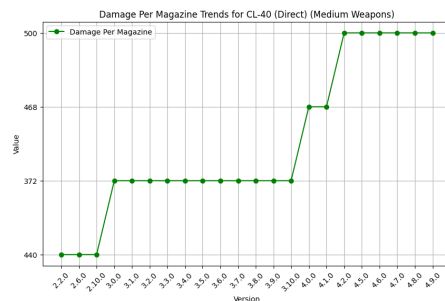
post-update sentiment = -0.16465

pre-update sentiment = -0.0030

The sentiment score changed pre and post update, this could be due to a number of contributing factors. Based on the word clouds for pre-update(-0.1646) and post-update(-0.0030), it seemed players were not happy with the overall damage of each iteration. Originally before we included stronger filters, the sentiment seemed more positive. Looking at the new data we see that community members were not too happy, because of recurring words like, "one shot", "damage", "self damage". We need to be able to look more at each community members main class in which they play, but we can come to the conclusion because of words like "light" and again "one shot" that community members who were frustrated most by the v.4.0.0 update would be light class players

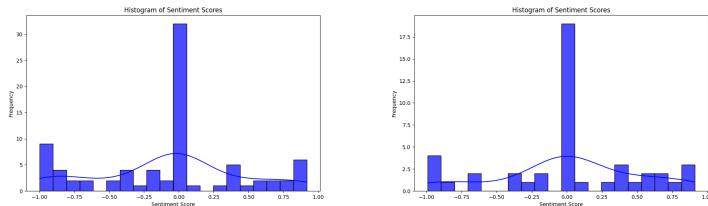


Even post update there still exists a negative skew though minuscule, but we still must acknowledge that this skew exists. Based on the common words found in the word cloud it is possible that the negative sentiment comes from light classed players still not satisfied with the kill potential of the weapon on their player class. This is because even though the one shot potential is gone, the overall damage per magazine was increased from 468 to 500. Meaning that if a team of lights faces off against even one medium player they can still be wiped assuming the game mode is one that is lower than 5 players



- Pike .556
post-update sentiment = 0.07515
pre-update sentiment = 0.01454

The sentiment score for the Pike .556 followed a different trend for the community than it did with the CL40. The beginning sentiment as shown below was fairly negative (-0.0751). The post update showed a positive skew though not a huge gap in sentiment (0.01454). Players were happy overall that the weapon damage had been reduced, but some were still not satisfied as its recoil and skill ceiling were still too high. This is shown with the recurring words, "Nerf", "slightly", "better", "high", "recoil", "reticle". Taking a closer look at posts made during the post update timeline we see that some players aren't happy with the reticle placement, and complain that a weapon made for ranged encounters has been more reduced to a medium to close range weapon (I'm sorry, but WHY? (Pike-556) 2024).

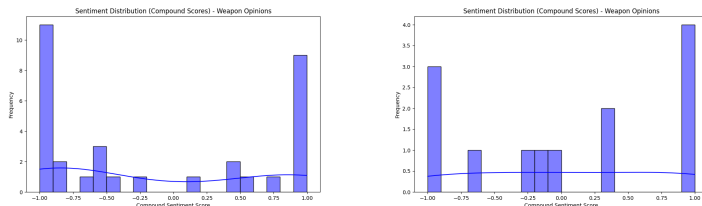


The positive sentiment post-update shows that this was a step in the right direction, but players have shown that the damage was not so much the problem(at least for medium / heavy players), it is the fact that the weapon does not feel like it can be used by casual players.

Content Creators

- CL40
post-update = 0.0455
pre-update = -0.1299

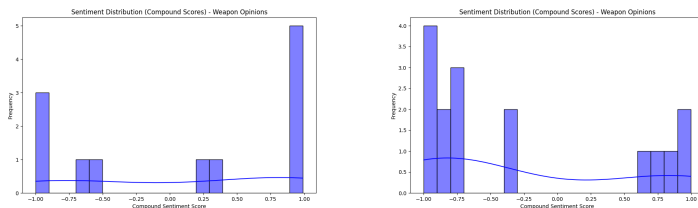
Content creator sentiment took an opposite trend than that of the community sentiment. Content creators seemed less keen to the v.4.0.0 update than the community was. This could be due to the fact that most content creators are in the competitive scene, where team balancing is bigger. We see pre-update (-0.1299) that content creators weren't too happy. With evidence from the word cloud we see the following common words, "Nerf", "Less", "One" "Shot", "Balance". The time between this update up to the rework there was an increase in videos showcasing the CL40 grenade launcher and its strength as players in the competitive scene were looking for ways to counter its damage.



Post update there is a jump in sentiment, though there still exists a grouping of neutral to negative sentiment. This is most likely again due to an existing portion of the competitive scene players using the light class. We saw a similar trend in the community, where players who enjoy the mobility and damage of light were dissatisfied with the changes since even though the damage per shot was decreased, the time to kill and damage per magazine were increased

- Pike .556 post-update = -0.2731
pre-update = 0.1084

The initial introduction of the Pike .556 was well received in the competitive player community as well as the content creator sphere. Players who enjoyed light for the L11 DMR were able to make a switch to medium and not have to sacrifice health for damage as seen with most of the light's arsenal compared to the medium's arsenal. Looking at common words in the word cloud for the Pike pre-update we see; "Strategy", "Overall", "Damage", "High", "Challenging". Alluding to the fact that while the weapon has a high damage output, the user still needs to have some sort of strategy formulated and be tactical in its use. A common word between content creators and the community alike show as to why strategic and tactical plays are needed; (i.e. "recoil"). While this is a complaint from the community, content creators seemingly praise the need to be able to manage the weapons recoil.



Post update we see the sentiment change to mostly negative, jumping from 0.10 to -0.27. Looking at common appearing words we see that creators are angry about the damage drop from v.4.0.0 to v.4.6.0 meanwhile in that time nothing was changed for recoil. Developers stated in patch notes for v.4.2.0 and v.4.4.0 that the overall function of a weapon is tuned in consideration to; overall usage, (i.e. the pick rate), and types of encounters the developers saw it being used most in. Without going in depth it was found that the weapon was being used most at ranges it wasn't intended for which is why damage was tuned and recoil was not.

3) Correlation Analysis:

- Sentiment Shifts:
 - To increase coverage and make more dependable numbers two weapons were added for sentiment analysis over updates, and correlation analysis
 - Model 1887: med to long range shotgun, had an overall positive sentiment between v.4.0.0 and v.4.9.0
 - R.357 Revolver, "Revolver" for search term, had an overall negative sentiment between v.4.0.0 and v.4.9.0
- Pearson Correlation(0.91):
 - A Pearson correlation of 0.91 indicates a strong positive linear relationship between sentiment shifts and weapon changes. Meaning that as the sentiment shifts positively weapon changes tend to increase, and vice versa.
 - The p-value established was 0.085 which would suggest that correlation might not be statistically significant at the typical alpha level. The value is still close to 0.5 and could close in if more data points were added
- Spearman Correlation(0.77):
 - The Spearman rank correlation of 0.77 suggests a moderate to strong positive relationship between sentiment shifts and weapon changes. Though the p-value of 0.225 indicates that this correlation is not statistically significant, there is still a notable trend.

4) Discussion: The analysis of user and content creator sentiment surrounding the weapon balancing updates in *The Finals* reveals that there exists both similarities and contrasts in perspective across each player group.

Community Sentiment: The sentiment surrounding the CL40 updates showed a significant shift, with the pre-update sentiments trending negatively due to concerns about the weapon's damage potential, particularly among light class players who found contempt in the players who relied on the weapon as a means to counter them, claiming that its "one-shot" capability was unfair. Despite changes intended to balance the weapon, the post-update sentiment still leaned slightly negative, primarily due to the weapon's performance against specific player match-ups, especially in modes with fewer players. This suggests that while the rework increased the weapon's overall damage per magazine, it failed to address the concerns of certain player classes, reinforcing the challenge of balancing for all user types.

Conversely, the Pike .556 update elicited a more positive response from the community, with a noticeable increase in sentiment post-update. This shift highlights that players generally appreciated the reduction in weapon damage but remained dissatisfied with the weapon's high recoil and limited usability for casual players. Although the adjustment addressed competitive concerns, it didn't fully meet the expectations of casual players who found the weapon less accessible due to its skill ceiling. **Content**

Creator Sentiment: Content creators, particularly those in the competitive scene, showed a more nuanced reaction to the updates. For the CL40, content creators' sentiments pre-update were notably negative, likely due to the weapon's dominance in competitive play, which spurred content focused on strategies to counter its high damage. Post-Update sentiment improved, but some dissatisfaction remained. Suggesting that competitive players, especially those using the light class, were still concerned about the changes to the weapon's effectiveness in team play.

In the case of the Pike .556, content creator sentiment was opposite that of the community. Where pre-update the sentiment was more positive, there was a significant drop in sentiment post update when the damage was dropped. This reinforces the notion that updates didn't adequately cater to the competitive game-play experience. While the weapon's damage adjustments were appreciated, the recoil and weapon role shift were significant pain points, leading to a mixed reception.

Overall while both community and content creator feedback suggested that updates were steps toward balance, the divergence in sentiment highlights the difficulty of satisfying both competitive and casual audiences, especially when adjustments may favor one group over another.

II. CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that while Embark Studios have made considerable efforts to balance the game for both competitive and casual audiences, the implementation of changes such as re-balancing of the CL40 and Pike .556 continues to generate polarized reactions.

The efforts toward addressing the CL40's "overpowerdness" resulted in a shift in player sentiment that leaned toward the neutral end but positive in favor of the competitive players. The update failed to fully satisfy certain player classes, particularly the light class or casual users who again were contempt of the power of the weapon when used against their team configuration or against them directly as there was no sure way to counter the grenade launcher especially in the hands of a skilled player. In a similar fashion the Pikes' Updates were well received by casual players who found playing against skilled players difficult when said players were using the Pike. They often found themselves frustrated in a difficult match-up against a player using a weapon they had no hope in understanding how to use. The updates lowering the one-shot potential and overall damage of the Pike satisfied casual players who wanted an even playing field as well as an enjoyable playing field.

This analysis reveals that content creators, often at the forefront of competitive play have different concerns compared to the broader community. These influencers prioritize team balance and weapon effectiveness in high-stakes environments, which sometimes contrast with the casual player's focus of overall accessibility and ease of use.

In conclusion, *The Finals* appears to be striving to strike a balance between competitive integrity and accessibility for a broad audience. However, as seen in the diverse reactions to the CL40 and Pike .555 updates, achieving this equilibrium remains a challenging task. Though Embark cannot always satisfy both classification of player this research concludes that *The Finals* does not exhibit a noticeable bias toward content creators. Embark seemingly tries to release updates that brings balance to the competitive scene while keeping the game fun, engaging, and open to casual or new players.

Key challenges in this research included managing noisy data and interpreting subjective user feedback. Moving forward the goal of this project will be:

- 1) Building predictive models to forecast user sentiment for planned updates.
- 2) Conducting a deeper analysis of casual versus competitive feedback segmentation

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