

# MDA Analysis for *The Last Of Us Part II*

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**Abstract:** The *The Last Of Us Part II* is a very big game that took me 27 hours to play and so this analysis only covers some mechanics. Such as crafting and upgrading weapons. Data design focuses on these. Communication design focuses more on the HUD and how they communicate the main mechanics of the game to the player in the moment-to-moment gameplay. Since the game is so big the level design focuses more on the movement mechanics and the aesthetic of exploration.

## 1 Introduction

"*The Last Of Us*" is a game series set in a post-apocalyptic world. This report will analyse the second game and speak about design concepts using the MDA analysis framework. This game was chosen as although the concepts of the design are simple they have depth and allow players to decide how they want to play the game (And I personally enjoyed the game).

The design concepts that will be covered are data design, communication design and level design. Data design will be covered in **2 Data Design** followed by communication design in **3 Communication Design** and the level design in **4 Level Design**.

## 2 Data Design

The aesthetics of the game are exploration, survival and fantasy under the MDA framework. I considered these to be the aesthetics as a lot of the mechanics and why you can use these mechanics make sense with these aesthetics. There are other aesthetics like discovery but that falls under the story of the game and what the developers wanted the player to discover from the story.

Data design is seen a lot in the game and is essential to actually surviving and finishing the game. One of the mechanics used a lot in the game is crafting and upgrading weapons. Starting with the weapons upgrades. Not every weapon has the same upgrades to it. Such as the semi-auto pistol and the revolver. Although weapons have similar upgrades, each weapon has their own upgrade that is different from the others. Since there are ten weapons that you can upgrade as well as the weapons you have depend on which character you are playing as in the story, I will just discuss the data design for two weapons when playing as "Ellie".

The first weapon is the semi-auto pistol. The possible upgrades are fire rate, stability, recoil and capacity. In order to actually upgrade the weapons the player needs to find parts to do so. The upgrades for this pistol are as follows:

**Fire rate:** 40 parts = +45% fire rate.

**Stability:** 50 parts = +35% stability.

**Recoil:** 30 parts = +25% accuracy; -35% recoil.

**Capacity:** 50 parts = +4 capacity.

The second weapon is the bow. The upgrades are as follows:

- Fire rate:** 50 parts = +50% nocking speed; +70% draw speed.  
**Stability:** 60 parts = +60% stability.  
**Rangefinder:** 80 parts = Bow gets a rangefinder.

Each weapon is different and so by making different upgrades it gives the weapon a unique characteristic. If each weapon had the same upgrades, every weapon would feel the same and only the ammo they shoot would be different. By making the upgrades depend on the weapon it creates diversity and can allow for different playstyles.

Depending on what the player chooses to upgrade it will likely affect their playstyle. If a player prefers to move through the levels in a silent way they will probably want to upgrade the bow before they upgrade the shotgun for example. If a player likes to play by fighting against the enemies they will most likely want to upgrade the pistols and shotguns for close range combat. If they prefer to be silent in close range combat but loud in long range combat then the player would most likely want to upgrade the bolt-action rifle.

The playstyles could also be affected by how many parts the player is getting. Depending on the difficulty setting the player chooses, the amount of parts that spawn differ.[1] If a difficult setting is chosen then the parts are more rare to find than if a player chooses the easy difficulty. So if the player finds themselves with little parts they either have to save for a longer amount of time or change their playstyle and choose the upgrades that cost the least amount of parts. This data design with the upgrades creates diversity and there are so many ways to approach it. This creates a depth in the dynamics.

The next main part of the data design is crafting. In order to craft stuff like molotovs, bombs and silencers, to name a few, you need to have progressed far enough into the story or explored enough in the game to get the "recipe" for the item. Once you have the recipe you still need to explore the world in order to get the components to craft the item. Which makes sense as normally one item does not just consist of one component.

For example, you need 1x rag and 1x container to craft a silencer for the pistol when playing as "Ellie".[2] The more components of a recipe you have the more you can craft. Again what you can craft all depends on the players playstyle. If the player prefers to be silent they would want to upgrade their melee weapons, use trap mines and make arrows for the bow. This is where the aesthetic of exploration makes sense as in order to upgrade weapons and craft items the player needs to explore. The more the player explores the easier it is to survive in the game. This again adds to the depth of the dynamics.

The third and last part of the design that will be mentioned is upgrading the players passive skills. These can be considered skill trees. In order to get to the more powerful skills you have to go along a list and get those skills until you get to the powerful skills. To purchase these skills the player needs to get supplements and they do not by default have all the skill trees. In order to get more skills tree the player needs to find certain manuals to unlock the skill tree. Since there are two people you play as in the game I will just speak about "Ellie's" skills.[3]

"Ellie" starts with a survival skill tree. She can then obtain the manuals for crafting, stealth, precision and explosives. Each skill tree increases the stats on that specific manual that the player has found. For example, a player can unlock a skill in the explosives skill tree that allows them to produce more explosives with the same amount of crafting material needed for one explosive. However to unlock skills in that tree not only do you have to find the manual you also have to find

supplements through exploring. Like the parts for upgrading the weapons, the difficulty setting affects how rare the spawning of the supplements is. Just like the previous mechanics data design it all depends on the players playstyle and this increases the depth of the dynamics.[3]

### 3 Communication Design

The communication design is simple but effective for all of the basic things that need to be communicated. Starting with the basics of ammo, weapon equipped, health and possible weapon attachments. At the bottom right of the screen the weapon shows up with the amount of ammo beneath it and the health is next to that. It also shows you which melee weapon you have equipped if there is one. This can be seen by **Figure 1** in the appendices.

The developers added another form of communication design for the players inventory. Normally in games you have to open your inventory to see what is in it. When you play as either "Ellie" or "Abby" they both have backpacks with things inside and on the outside that show you some of the stuff in your inventory. For example with "Ellie" and the bow. If you have the bow and the bolt-action rifle equipped they will appear on the bag and the arrows for the bow stick out of the bag to indicate that you have arrows. This can be seen by **Figure 2** in the appendices.

The most important communication design is when enemy starts detecting the player and knowing where the enemies are in the game. With the enemies detecting you, there is a sound that they start playing. If the enemy is starting to detect you the sound starts and if they are getting closer and about to find you then the sound gets louder. If you move and they stop detecting you then the sound gets softer. If it's not to be silent then this is important. If your playstyle isn't to be silent then this still is useful for certain zombie types. The "Clicker" is blind but uses sound to detect you. If they hear a footstep then they turn and face your direction and the sound starts playing. If you are quiet from then on then the sound goes away or gets softer.

For the players knowing where the enemies are there is a mechanic called listen mode where you can hear people or zombies more clearly through walls and from this you know their positions. Their model turns a bright white so that you know where they are. Again, this is important if you want to be silent and know where the enemies are. A figure showing the listen mode can be seen by **Figure 3** in the appendices.

The HUD showing the current weapon equipped, ammo and health as well as the listen mode also depends on the difficulty setting that is chosen. If the player chooses grounded difficulty then they do not have a HUD and they cannot use listen mode. Dependent on how realistic a player wants the experience to be, the communication design will change.[1] Choosing the difficulty also adds to the depth of the dynamics as it can change the way someone plays the game. It also uses the aesthetic of survival. If the player is able to finish the game on this difficulty setting then they can consider it an achievement that you survived as if it was the real world.

### 4 Level Design

The movement mechanic and the aesthetic of exploration are important in this game. How you move could be the difference between getting shot or not being found by the enemies. The one mechanic in the game is that if the player is sprinting toward the enemy, the enemy is more accurate. So unless the player is really close to the enemy and has a melee weapon they either

want to hide behind things or try and shoot the enemies from a position where they cannot get shot.

In terms of the movement the levels always have something to hide behind or hide in. If you want to be silent and sneak up on enemies a player needs to watch and remember their patterns and move accordingly. There will always be somewhere to hide such as behind a desk or in long grass. If the player wants to fight the enemies then they always have a place to take cover from while getting shot at.

Exploration is important in this game as it makes your chances of surviving much greater. Since getting parts, supplements and training manuals is so important they have added many floors and also rooms to a building for the player to explore and get what they need to craft and upgrade weapons. Sometimes even the enemies that are in that level can drop ammo.

## 5 Conclusion

I stated that the aesthetics were exploration, survival and fantasy. These made sense to me according to the mechanics used in the game. Exploring the levels of the game allow the player to get stuff needed for crafting, upgrading weapons and increasing the players skills. This in turn increases the chances of survival and depending on the difficulty chosen the chances of survival can be slim. This report only covers a few things in the game, there is so much more but what I covered is what I think is important and forms the different playstyles and creates depth in the dynamics.

## References

[1] Fandom, "Fandom," [Online]. Available: <https://thelastofus.fandom.com/wiki/Difficulty>. [Accessed 1 May 2021].

[2] gamepressure, "Game Guides," [Online]. Available: [https://guides.gamepressure.com/the-last-of-us-part-ii/guide.asp?ID=54653#NH2\\_1](https://guides.gamepressure.com/the-last-of-us-part-ii/guide.asp?ID=54653#NH2_1). [Accessed 1 May 2021].

[3] gamepressure, "Game Guides," [Online]. Available: [https://guides.gamepressure.com/the-last-of-us-part-ii/guide.asp?ID=54654#NH2\\_3](https://guides.gamepressure.com/the-last-of-us-part-ii/guide.asp?ID=54654#NH2_3). [Accessed 1 May 2021].

All figures were captured by me Dylan Baker.

## Appendices

### Figures



**Figure 1.** Figure showing the HUD at the bottom right.



**Figure 2.** Figure showing the equipped weapons and ammo in the backpack.



**Figure 3.** Figure showing the listen mode in the game.