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# Improving UX to Increase Player Retention and Usability in The Sims 4

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# 1. Executive Summary

This project analyzes the usability and accessibility challenges within The Sims 4's onboarding and navigation to identify redesign opportunities that support player retention and reduce barriers for new players.

# 2. Background

The Sims is one of the best-selling video games franchises of all time. It has a large player base and is arguably the most recognizable game in the entire simulation games genre. The Sims 4, the most recent installment in the series, released in 2014 and since then has been made available on multiple platforms for free attracting an even larger range of users. While its user experience does many things right, there are also multiple opportunities for improvement, and players should not have to settle for a frustrating or inaccessible user experience. We want to get real player data and find out where current players are struggling with UX and where we can improve so we can retain those players while attracting new ones as well.



### 3. Objective and Goals

- Identify and reduce pain points
- Enable users to onboard more easily and reduce the need for users to external information
- Increase player retention and improve accessibility
- Identify opportunities for redesign

### 4. Target Audience

- Current players who are facing challenges with the UI
- Long time users who have played previous installments
- New potential players looking for a casual and fun simulation game
- Players who may have dropped the game previously
- Players who play on the PC version of the game

### 5. Competitive Analysis

The Sims 4 has recently been challenged by new competitors in the casual simulation market. The following is a comparison of The Sims to similar titles Inzoi and Paralives. All three of these titles feature similar gameplay such as creating characters, building houses, and controlling character interactions in the game world. The other titles have also been released within the last year, showing how the introduction of these new games in the market emphasizes the need to reevaluate and refine the UX for to ensure players continue playing The Sims.

#### **The Sims 4**

Release Date: September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014 (free since 2022)

Price: \$39.99 at launch but now is free

Players: Estimated 11.9 million

Average Playtime: 35.2 hours

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Features: Single Player, Lots of DLC, Continuous updates, multi-platform

## **Inzoi**

Release Date: March 28, 2025 (Early Access) \*

Price: \$39.99

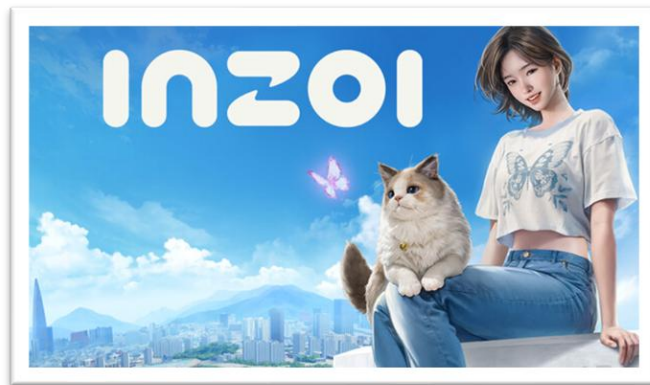
Players: Estimated 1.1 million

Average Playtime: 11.6 hours

Publisher: Krafton

Features: Single Player, Multiplayer, Next gen graphics

*\* "Early Access is a unique development model that allows games to be played as they progress towards a full release. Early Access encourages ongoing updates from developers, while letting players participate in direct feedback through gameplay and community involvement." – Steam Help Page*



## **Paralives**

Release Date: December 8, 2025

Price: \$39.99

Players: n/a – currently 1 million wishlists

Publisher: Paralives Studios

Features: Single Player, flexible building gameplay



While The Sims 4 has been around much longer than the competitors, they do have the advantage of reimagining systems in new ways. However, with the advantage of a current large user base we have the advantage of getting ahead by applying user research.

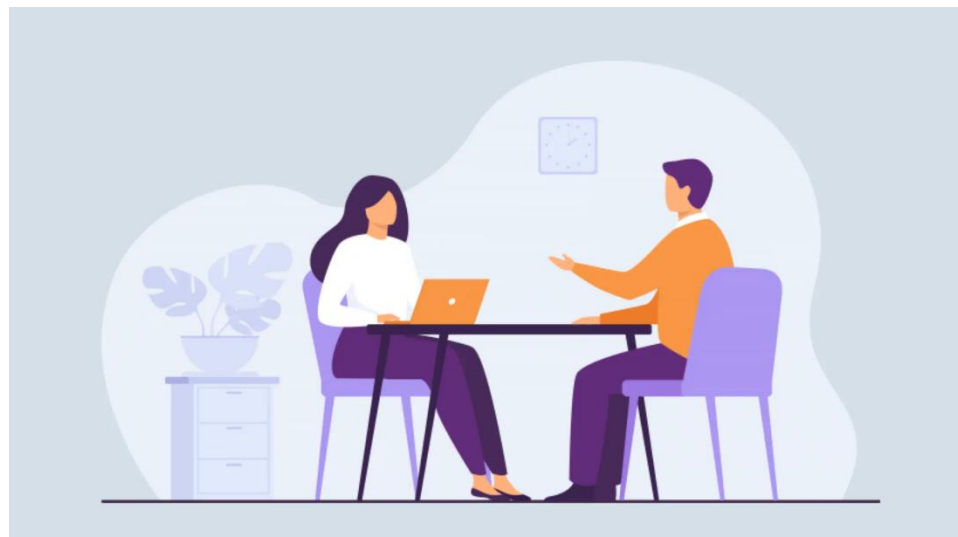
## 6. Research Methods

### Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 4 users who have played The Sims 4.

Questions were asked about the following (a sample selection of questions are provided under each category):

1. Background in games
  - How familiar are you with the Sims?
  - What types or genres of games do you enjoy most?
2. First Impressions when showing different screenshots of the game
  - What are your first impressions of this screen?
  - What do you like or dislike?
3. Playstyle, Pain points, and how they first learned how to play
  - How did you first learn to play The Sims 4?



The following screenshots display the three main user interfaces analyzed in my research (for both interviews and surveys). These are screens that users spend the most time navigating within the game and are the primary focus of redesign.

### Create A Sim (CAS)



### Build/Buy



## Build/Buy



## Survey

A survey was conducted to better understand how players perceive the game's user interface and learning experience. The questions of the survey were focused on qualitative feedback and asked users to give their thoughts on the three main user interfaces of the game.

### Survey Goals:

1. Identify player background and overall familiarity with the Sims series
2. Understand player sentiment towards the UI
3. Identify any emotional responses and pain points
4. Understand how players learn and the learning curve

### Target Audience for Survey:

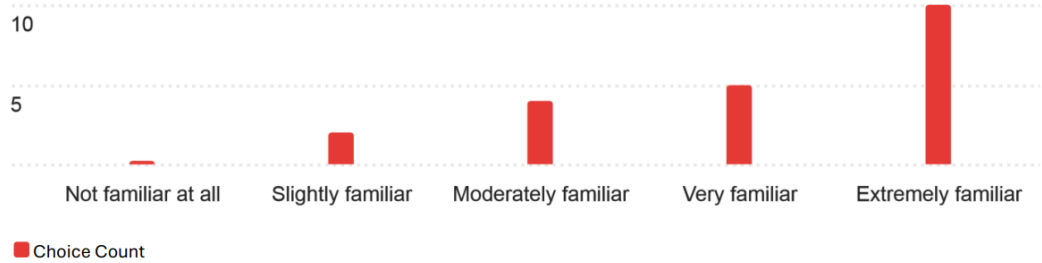
- Users who played The Sims 4 at least once
- Users who have prior experience with simulation games

The survey was posted on the official Electronic Arts Sims forum and on The Sims 4 subreddit and the majority of responses came from the subreddit.

A total of 40 responses were collected.

The following are key survey findings and summarized qualitative results.

### Q1 - How familiar are you with The Sims 4?



### Q2 - Other than The Sims 4, which of the following Sims games have you played?



### Q7 - How satisfied are you with the UI of The Sims 4?



As highlighted by the results of the first question, a challenge in gathering research was finding users who no longer played The Sims or have only tried it once. This is because once a user drops the game, they are no longer part of that community and as a result it becomes hard to find research participants in that specific category. This is why the results are skewed far in users who are already extremely familiar with the game.

Overall satisfaction appeared to be mixed across the board. As will be highlighted in the next section, those who did have some dissatisfaction reported multiple pain points in the various navigation systems.

## 7. Key Findings and Insights

### Interface clutter increases with game complexity and DLC

- Across all modes, players reported that additional expansion packs significantly increase visual clutter and menu density.
- This makes scanning, filtering, and finding items more difficult over time.

*“The more packs, the more cluttered it becomes.”*

*“With so many packs it needs a facelift.”*

### Nested menus and excessive sub-menus create friction

- Users frequently described frustration with interaction menus and dropdowns that require repeated clicking.
- This was especially prominent in Live Mode and Create-a-Sim.

*“Way too many sub-menus. Why not utilize all that empty space?”*

### Players rely on mods to fix usability and accessibility gaps

- Many respondents reported using UI mods to expand columns, add trait slots, reduce eyestrain, or improve lighting.
- Reliance on mods indicates unmet usability and accessibility needs in the default UI.

*“The background causes me eyestrain.”*

*“The columns do not scale up well using the UI scaler.”*

### Accessibility concerns are common and under-addressed

- Small icons, fixed layouts, visual density, and insufficient scaling options were frequently cited.
- UI scaling was viewed as a workaround rather than a true accessibility solution.

*“Difficult to navigate when visually impaired due to unchangeable icon sizes.”*

### Mixed sentiment toward overall usability

- Some players found the UI intuitive and familiar, particularly experienced users.
- Others described it as overwhelming or outdated.

## 8. Persona

We can represent our findings and visualize a typical player to have a focus for our redesign. This way, we can see how our research findings and analyses can be represented in a standard user and how we can design for them.

### Sam the Sims Player



**Context:** Sam is a gamer who likes playing games casually. She is a fan of the Sims franchise and has played the previous Sims 3 game. When they do play, they tend to play for long sessions. Their playstyle involves decorating their Sims environments and creating their own storylines in the game. Outside of the The Sims 4, Sam only plays mobile games and spends her free time reading and watching movies.

**Technologies:** Phone, TV, Laptop, Social Media, Internet

**They also play:** Sims 3, Mobile Games

**Motivations for playing this type of game:**

- Sam is a casual gamer and doesn't own any consoles and they are drawn to the Sims 4 because it is free and available on PC
- They saw others playing it (friends, influencers, etc.), It can be low-stress and a relaxing game that is not too intense, They have played the previous Sims 3

**Issues or why they abandon games:** Too hard or stressful, Doesn't match her playstyle, Prefers single player games

**Frustrations with The Sims 4:**

- The way items/menus are organized can be confusing

- The size of text/fonts is not scalable and not accessible
- Playing with expansion packs can make menus feel overwhelming

**Goals:**

- Customization and inclusive options
- Playing the expansion packs and purchasing more
- Controls are easy to navigate and similar to previous installments of the game, since Sam is already familiar



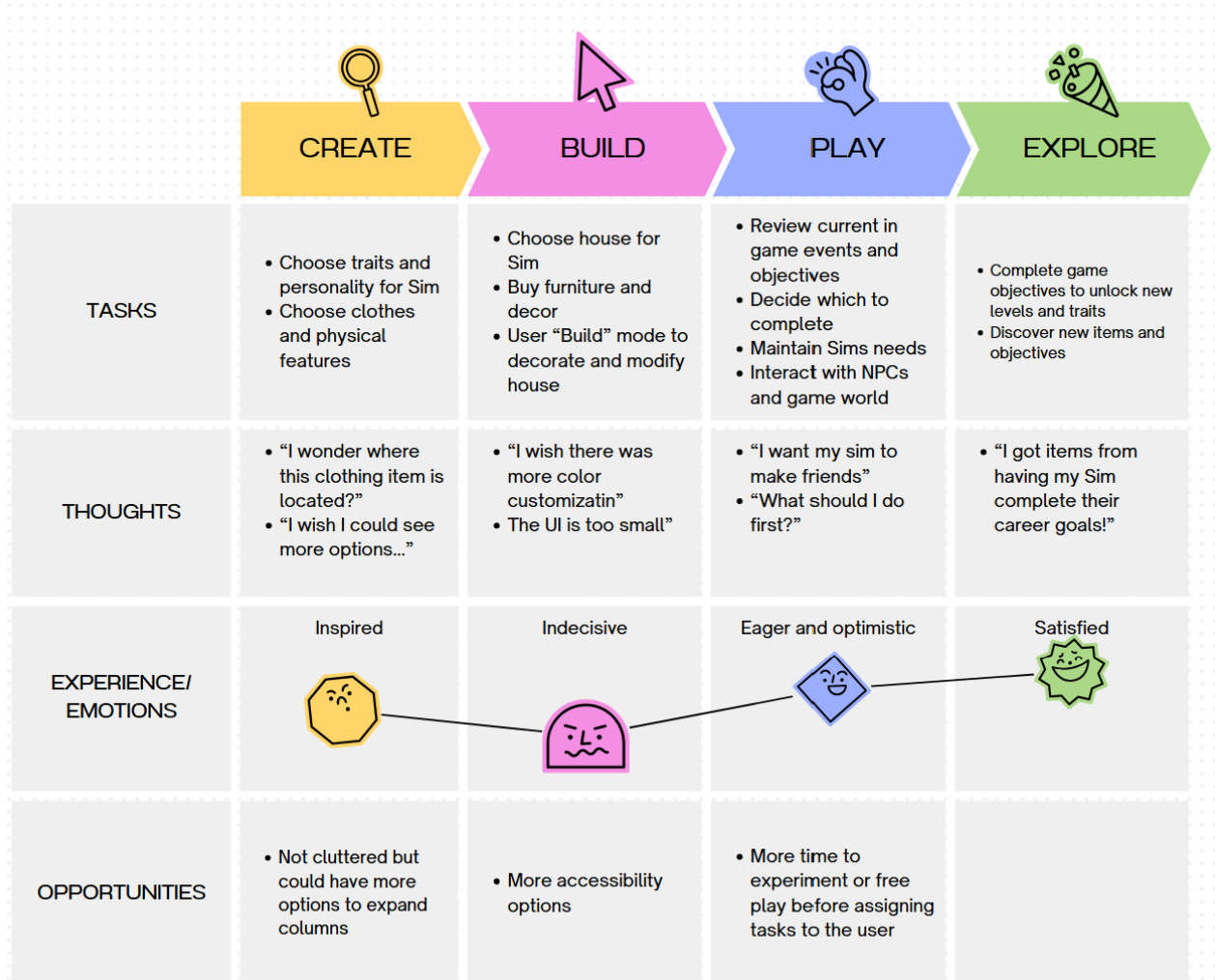
# 9. Journey Map

This journey map displays the experience of a user like Sam who is starting a play session in The Sims 4.

In this scenario, Sam wants to start a new Sims playthrough and complete in-game objectives.

User Expectations:

- Pick up and play
- Customization
- Identify what game icons mean



# 10. Redesign and Next Steps

Based on the data outlined in this brief, a redesign of the core item menus in the game will greatly improve engagement for current players and prove more appealing to new ones.

**The redesign will focus on three key areas:**

## Decluttered Menus and Filters

- Simplified layouts, improved categorization, and better filtering.



## Stronger Accessibility Options

- Expanded UI scaling, adjustable text and color settings, and features that better support players with visual or print disabilities.



## A Streamlined Onboarding Experience

- Clearer tutorials and in-game guidance so new players can learn without relying on external YouTube videos or wikis.



This redesign will:

- Improve player retention.
- Reduce frustration and increase engagement.
- Support accessibility standards and a broader audience.
- Align with long-term franchise growth and player satisfaction.