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The Narrative Immersion of Play

A Link Between Immersion and the Narrative of Games' Side-Activities

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Description

Author(s) Uusitalo, Mikko	Type of publication Bachelor's thesis	Date Month Year
		Language of publication: English
	Number of pages 21	Permission for web publication: x
Title of publication **The narrative immersion of play** A Link Between Immersion and the Narrative of Games' Side-Activities		
Degree programme Business Information Technology		
Supervisor(s) Miikkulainen, Ilari		
Assigned by		

Abstract

The thesis aimed to research the connection between narrative immersion and the willingness of video game players to perform side activities while playing. There are many existing researches done on the connection between immersion and narrative, but not enough that focus on the side activities of games. The study was assigned by JAMK's Business Information Technology degree programme.

In the first part the history and theories regarding both narrative and immersion are looked at from the perspective of ludology. The relationship between narrative and ludology was found to be rather short yet controversial. Immersion on the other hand was found to go well with video games and different elements that causes it were discovered.

In the second part a qualitative study was conducted using two different narrative-heavy video games. A total of seven participants were interviewed on their experiences and thoughts on these titles. The participants were adults or young adults who agreed to be interviewed in an online environment. These interviews were then analysed on compared with pre-existing information on the topic.

The study found out that many elements affect the immersion and enjoyment of the game according to the participants. The two most important elements for immersive side activities from the perspective of the narrative turned out to be curiosity and context. The players needed to feel a logical connection between the world of the game and their actions while the game needed to keep the players invested by offering interesting situations where the players wanted to experience more.

Keywords/tags (subjects) Immersion, Video games, story, narrative
Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

Contents

List of abbreviations and useful terms

Narrative

Narrative refers to any form of storytelling that can be observed. This includes plot, dialogue, environmental story-telling and many more possible elements.

RPG

RPGs or Role-Playing Games are a genre of video games that refers to the content of the game rather than the themes. RPGs have the player in the role of an often fictional character. This genre is heavily associated with the player characters' narrative and mechanical growth.

1 Introduction

In their early days, video games were merely a past-time for a niche market, but have evolved since to be one of the most significant mediums in the world. Many players are not satisfied with just playing their video games either, as the fan culture surrounding video games has grown to be quite significant. The fascination people have for video games have created bustling fan communities, made competitive video game tournaments, held events celebrating the culture formed around video games and even were inspired to start making their games independently (Egenfieldt, Smith & Tosca, 2019).

One of the key features that have caused video games to increase in popularity is interactivity While movies allow the spectator to observe astonishing things, video games, however, allow the player to execute those great things. Interactivity in video games gives the player a choice on how they want to progress and immediate feedback on all of their decisions. This loop of action and feedback causes the player to gain more enjoyment out of the game (Klimmt & Hartmann, 2006) and makes the player feel positive and wanting to experience comparable situations again in the future (Bandura, 2009).

As a result of interactivity, video games can make the player feel like a part of a fictional world. This phenomenon is immersion. Immersion is a common term used in the gaming industry. Various video game critics and players recognise it as an important part of enjoying the experience of playing, according to Brown & Cairns (2004). Brown & Cairns also suggested that, while the term appears to be generally understood, there exist no clear definitions on what immersion is and what causes it.

Interactivity is also critical for how games are structured and how to form their narratives. The non-linear stories and narrative components that video games can offer can be entirely optional for the player (Freeman, 2004). Developers often create video games so that players can have freedom in their choices and make the process feel seamless. While video games that are limitless in their narrative freedom might never come to be made, especially with modern technology (Juul, 2001), the impact video games can have on the minds of the player is nevertheless important (Lu, Baranowski, Thompson & Buday, 2012).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the connection between immersion the narrative of side-activities in video games. These side-activities refer to ventures in video games that can be done along with or entirely separated from the main storylines of the game. Side-activities can be additional objectives, minigames or other gameplay enhancing features.

Research shall be done by having interviews with players of two different story-focused video games and gathering their thoughts on those games and how the events of the game have affected the feeling of immersion while playing. This data will then be analysed and compared to previously existing notions on immersion and character design. The games to be covered in this research were selected because both offer a heavy emphasis on story.

2 The Research

2.1 The Methods of Research

As stated earlier, the objective of the thesis is to gain a further understanding of the connection between immersion and narrative storytelling in video games. The intention is to achieve this by having qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews are a style of interviewing where only a handful of people are interviewed. While the amount of participants is small, qualitative interviews gather more information for each individual. In this case, the qualitative interview will cover the players' thoughts on two different video games, but each participant is only to discuss one of the selected games. The interview questions were made based on the interview models by Kananen (2014).

The interviews will be done in an online environment using digital platforms such as Skype or Discord. All of the interviews will be recorded for further listenings. Only the people who voluntarily have agreed to be a part of this research shall be interviewed. Before the interview, the participants are required to have played at least a significant portion of their selected game. After a suitable amount of interviews has been completed, the results will be analysed and discussed further.

The video games chosen to be discussed in this thesis are Persona 5 and Fire Emblem: Three Houses. Persona 5 is a video game released for the Playstation 3 and Playstation 4 consoles in 2017. The game tells a story about a regular high school student who is transferred into a new school and soon finds himself leading a group of teenagers who can enter the minds of other people and making them have a change of heart. Fire Emblem: Three houses was released in 2019 and it is only available for the Nintendo Switch system. This game is about a mercenary in a medieval-based fantasy world who is selected to become a teacher in a school of knights, mages and other types of young warriors. The events in the story can differ drastically based on what class the player decides to teach in the game. Both of the selected games are Role-Playing games, or RPGs for short, which are games often regarded as having a heavy focus on the narrative elements (Qin, Patrick Rau & Salvendy, 2009). RPG games are also focused on growing your character and

interacting with other characters that reside in the game world (Apperley, 2006). The games are also recent and have gathered a fairly large amount of enthusiastic players, which should make the task of finding enough people to interview somewhat probable.

2.2   The Research Questions

Before making questions for the interview itself, a few simple research questions needed to be established. Research questions are the summarized versions of what is needed to be answered with this thesis and also act as a guideline for the interview. These are the research questions that were chosen for this thesis:

1.   How do video games create narrative immersion?
2.   How do the players feel about immersive narrative?
3.   How does narrative immersion drive the player to perform side-activities in games?

3   Narrative Immersion in Video Games

Before diving into further depths regarding video games, a discussion on what video games are and what makes them enjoyable is essential. Wolf (2008) explains video games by deconstructing the two words separately. The "video" in video games comes from the video technology used in them. Visual elements are necessary for a game to be a video game. Wolf (2008) also notes that there are many different descriptions of the concept of "games". Common elements seen in games are rules, conflict, player ability and finally an outcome.

The enjoyment found in video games can be explained by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004). They argue that players of video games enjoy them as experiences and thus, one of the underlying components of video games is their aesthetics. Aesthetics are the emotional responses the player reacts to when playing the game. Aesthetics in video games consist of such aspects like narrative, fantasy, social elements, sensation, expression, discovery, challenge and submission. Video games try to fulfil these aspects in varying degrees. As an example, video games with only single-player functionalities tend to lean more on the narrative rather than social elements.

Aesthetics are a part of the MDA theory made by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004). The MDA theory consists of two other components that result in games being enjoyable for the player. First of these is the mechanics of the game, which are the functions coded into the game. These functions are not visible for the players but act as a framework for the rest of the game. Dynamics are the bridge between mechanics and aesthetics. Dynamics of the game include the player's inputs and how quickly does the game respond to them. Dynamics also make the game create the desired aesthetics.

3.1   Games and Narrative

Ever since the first means of communication began to emerge, and the primitive humans started registering their ventures as cave paintings, stories have been there to transfer information from an individual to another. People are storytellers by nature and creating stories is a vital activity for humanity (McCabe & Peterson,

1991). Whether these stories are shared orally, by the written word or visually, they are still equally valid. The methods which we use to share a story are all part of the concept known as a narrative (Carey & Snodgrass, 1999).

Narratology, the study of narrative, has been an interest for many throughout the ages. One of the first to cover this subject was Aristotle in his collection of notes known as Poetics. In Poetics, Aristotle argued there to be six components in a story. These were Muthos (the plot), Character, Thought, Language, Mimesis (mimetic activity) and Action. Two of the most important being Muthos and Mimesis. Muthos meant the order of events that tie together to make the essential story of the narrative and Mimesis is the display of actions and behaviours in the story produced by Muthos. Aristotle showed with Poetics that structure is critical for the overall story and how the narrative assembles.

Aristotle laid the groundwork for modern narratology, and many theories since have been based on his findings. While narratology has a significant stand in the fields of cultural and literary studies, starting from the 1980s narratology began to undergo significant and drastic changes. It started expanding. Previously narratology was only regarded as something only found in literature, but after the transition narrative was considered something found everywhere (Currie, 1998). Movies, songs, games, comics and conversations can all have a narrative structure in them. Currie (1998) also argued that this newly found change brought to light that narrative can be a useful tool for self-expression and representation.

In the modern study of narratology, one medium has become more divisive than others on how it relates to narrative theory. That medium being video games. A debate began among the practitioners on how games should be studied and even if games include a traditional form of narrative at all. The characteristic that distinguishes games the most from other forms of narrative media, and the feature that started the debate, is interactivity. Players can change how the story progresses and make critical decisions on behalf of the central characters. Frasca (1999) suggested that a new field of study called "ludology" would help to obtain a better understanding of game narratives due to their narrative complexity. However, Juul (1999) argued that games were not a narrative medium by any means due to them

having interactive storylines and that the relationship between books and their readers is completely incomparable to games and their players.

As a response to this debate, Aarseth (2012) researched games comparing their narratives to traditional views of narratology, rather than debating the matter on a meta-level. He found out that similar traits exist in games that appear in other types of stories, such as world, objects and agents. The world reflects the setting in stories. Games typically are a host to either linear, open-ended or maze-like worlds. The mechanics and narrative structure of the game often support the kind of world that the game has. Objects in stories are any items that can be observed, for example, weapons or even non-relevant characters. Objects in games are reactive, non-reactive or made and controlled by a player. Finally, agents are the story-relevant actors in a narrative. Agents can be deeply written and complicated or without the slightest hint of a personality.

Due to games having interactive storylines, the narrative structure of games is different from other mediums. While other mediums offer linear and fixed storylines, games can differ from this norm and have changing and non-linear story structures (Qin, Patrick Rau & Salvendy, 2009). According to Majewski (2003), there are four structural models of game narrative achievable. The first model has the player face a certain amount of established events. Between these events, the players make meaningful choices. The next model consists of different story paths for the player to take on. After each segment of the story, the player will face a decision that will rail the story going forward. The third model offers freedom for the player. While the focus of the story is in the central themes, the game has player following subplots around the game to conclude. This style of a narrative opens up to the player spatially. The last model is one the player composes themselves and is unstructured. It is produced while in the progress of playing the game.

Image 1. Story significant choices being given for the players; Life is Strange: Before the Storm

While games can tell incredible stories and heavily rely on their narratives, it is important to point out that this is not true for all games (Aareseth, 2012). The amount of narrative the game offers is quite often tied to the genre it is in. Games come in such a large variety of styles and genres that it is near impossible to group them as one. It is good to understand that not all games have stories, but ones that do can offer a lot to the study of narrative theory. The world and characters of a video game will begin to feel empty and without meaning, if the narrative is not in play (Taylor, 2002). Games like fighting games or sports games usually have the minimal narrative substance, while action games can rely on it (Qin, Patrick Rau & Salvendy, 2009). On the narrative-heavy side of games is the role-playing game Xenoblade Chronicles. The game is set on a fantasy world where people and animals live on the dying corpses of two ancient giants and are losing a war against an evil mechanical species over land. The story begins with the player character gaining the ability to wield a mysterious sword and turn the tides of battle. The narrative is shown through text, character dialogue, the environmental and cutscenes which can last over half an hour. However, video games like the classic puzzle game Tetris (1985), can work as an opposite to this. Tetris has the player dropping blocks downwards to create complete lines which cause them to disappear. The game is lost whenever the play area is full of blocks. There does not exist any context for the events of Tetris, which makes the game offer no narrative value.

Video games are also unique in the way that they can offer smaller narrative pieces that can be removed from the main plot of the game. These moments are often

called sidequests. The purpose of sidequests to offer a non-linear and a smaller scale story that usually reward the player for completion. Quite often these sidequests are completely optional for the player to complete (Freeman, 2004). Sidequests are an effective method to bring more emotion and character to the world of the game. In fantasy games, you might find a person asking the player to slay monsters for them to save a village. This sidequest tells the player about the characters living in the world of the game and their issues, making the world seem more realistic and possibly even bringing emphasis to the main plot. Sidequests can be found in many different genres of games, but are more common in adventure games and role-playing games (Freeman, 2004).

3.2   The Player Character

The player avatar and additional playable roles are an essential feature of games. In other forms of entertainment, the actions of the characters can be merely observed, however in games the player can be directly responsible for them (Cohen, 2001). These player characters act as a link between the player and the game world. The characters help the player experience the setting of the world both from the physical and social aspects (Isbister, 2006). But how do games display these characters, and how do they affect the player?
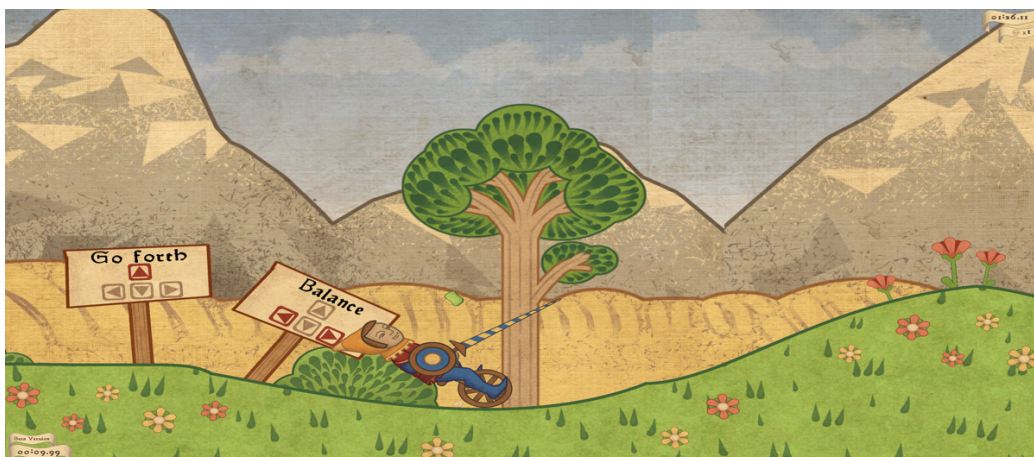

Image 2. Player being informed how to control the player avatar in the popular indie game Balancelot.

There are many different methods a game can present its main character. One of the methods is for the game to put the player in control of a role-based character. These role-based characters are a predetermined aspect of the game. Their purpose is to have the player step in someone else's shoes and see the world from their perspective (Klimmt 2003). A role-based character could be a fantasy heroine, a grizzled army general or an athlete. A second method of displaying a player character is to have the character to be fully player-generated. These characters typically do not have many characteristics attached to them. The player can decide most of the elements themselves, like appearance, roles and identity. The character is often left as a "blank slate", so the player can reflect their personalities to the character with greater efficiency. The player made characters are often silent protagonists (Domsch, 2017). Many online and even some modern adventure games use player-generated characters (Hefner, Klimmt & Vorderer, 2007). It is also possible for a game to have a character that is a mixture of these two styles. The player could be assigned a clear role by the game, but the character itself could be changed to fit the players own preferences.

When playing, players want to feel like they become these characters. This phenomenon is called identification. For the duration of the playtime, the players attach a part of their own identity to the character being controlled. The players experience this illusion which results in their self-perception becomes distorted (Cohen, 2001). One of the theories presented as an explanation for this phenomenon is escapism. The player wants to get away from their daily life and personal problems by becoming someone else in a fictional setting. For video games, it is also possible for the player to achieve becoming themselves in a new setting. The interactivity of games can heighten the feeling of identification with the fictional character even further. Not only can the player achieve great acts in games, but they can also choose how to make them and be directly involved in the progress. Identification can also fail if the player does not want to become the character or loses interest (Hefner, Klimmt & Vorderer, 2007).
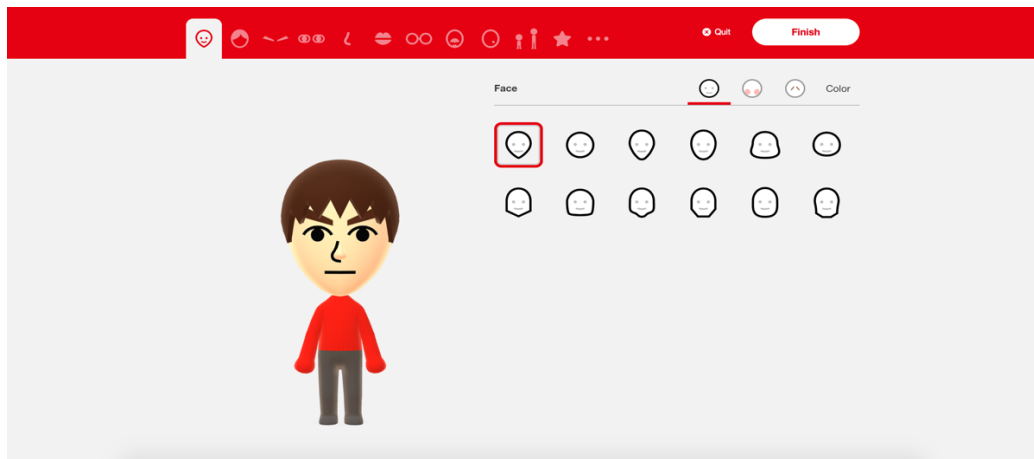
Image 3. Nintendo's Mii Avatar Customization.

3.3   Interactive Worlds in Video Games

Worlds in video games represent the setting where the game is based in. Worlds do not only consist of where the story of the game is set in but also the area the player is allowed to observe (Nitsche, 2008). In these worlds, the players can run, jump, navigate and interact with what the game allows them to. In this chapter, the focus will be set on the narrative qualities that the worlds in the video game have to offer.

Video game worlds are an essential part of what makes the narrative enjoyable. Worlds can make the player more invested and curious about the narrative, as they want to piece together and make sense of their surroundings. The meaning can be found through exploration of space and interacting with objects. According to Nitsche (2008), there exists "evocative narrative elements" in-game worlds. These elements are purposely placed in certain areas of the game world to guide the player and make them comprehend the environment and the current situation of the narrative. Evocative narrative elements do not contain actual pieces of narrative in them, but rather they are meant to make the player realize important parts of the narrative themselves. Audiovisual cues or sign systems are a great example of evocative narrative elements in video games. These elements are important for the enjoyment of the game as game worlds have to be built carefully or the player might become disinterested. The order and placement of the narrative elements are referred to as the structure of the world.

With structure, the two other factors that make the video game world seem more enjoyable and attractive to a player, are the presentation and functionality of the game. The presentation consists mostly of the audiovisual components of the world (Lefebvre 1991). This includes the graphics, music, lighting, textures and many more components of the game. These components are all important and have to tie into each other to make the desired experience as effective as possible. Horror games would not feel as scary, if they did have relaxing music playing in the background, instead the music has to be fear-inducing as well. Functionality, on the other hand, reflects on how the rules and limits of intractability coexist with the established setting of the world (Nitsche, 2008). Functionality might not always be directly visible for the player, as it could be for example a solution to a puzzle, but functionality is always felt by the player. The design of the menu system, coded behaviours and rules set by the game also represent the functionality of a game.

3.4   Immersion and the Theory of Flow

"Immersion refers to baptism and the sense of being immersed in to water. In virtual reality, like a computer game, immersion refers to the feeling of being absorbed in to a virtual world. It is very much a mental experience". – Otzen, 2015

Immersion is a widely used term in the modern video game industry and it is a phenomenon that players often look for video games (Yee, 2006). Despite the common usage of the term, there has not been a single definition for it or what causes immersion to occur (Brown & Cairns, 2004). Thus the question arises, what is immersion and why does it happen?

There have been several studies and articles that have tried to try and explain what immersion is or dissect it into different subsections. The study The Pleasure Principle: Immersion, Engagement, Flow by Douglas & Hargadon (2000) immersion was explained with its relation to the feeling of pleasure and schemas. Schemas, as explained by Douglas & Hargadon (2000), are specific concepts that are wired to our minds. As an example, a schema could be the feeling that a bottomless pit in a video game is most likely going to end in a game over in a video game. We get pleasure

from the immersion when we are completely invested with the familiar narrative schema of our experience, but we are not engaged until the familiar schemas conflict or conjoin. Therefore, Douglas & Hargadon (2000) argue that immersion can be similar to engagement, but those are not the same phenomenon.

However, Brown & Cairns have argued in their 2004 study A Grounded Investigation of Game Immersion that immersion in video games could divide into three levels of attachment, engagement is the lowest level of immersion. Each of these levels represented how involved the players were to the game they were playing. When the player is engaged they have had to invest time, attention and effort to the game. On this level, the player also needs to start to feel satisfied with their investments. The level following engagement is engrossment. Engrossed players are more immersed with the game and have now formed emotional involvement with it. The final level is called total immersion. Reaching total immersion, the players feel full like they are part of the experience. This level can be fleeting as empathy towards the playable character or the atmosphere presented by the virtual world of the game can often break the feeling of total immersion.

What both of these studies have in common is that they both eventually link immersion with the theory of" Flow" by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as a state of mind where a person is completely absorbed in a task. The flow is born from the right balance between challenge and skill. If the task happens to have a low skill level for someone they start to feel boredom and when the challenge is high, it will cause anxiety. Obtaining a state of flow will result in an increase in efficiency, deeper levels of learning and satisfaction.
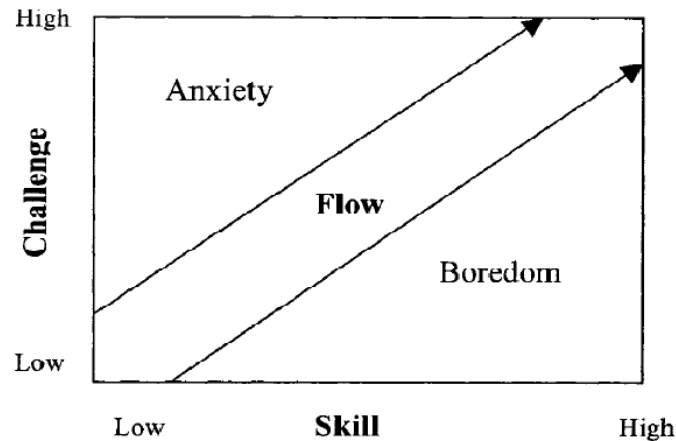
Figure 1. Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993)

To reach the state of flow in a game, the game must reach certain conditions according to Chen (2006). Chen argues that the game needs to have an intriguing premise and the concept needs to feel rewarding. If the player feels disinterest towards the concepts provided in the game, reaching a state of flow is impossible. The player also needs to feel in control of what is happening in the game. In a situation where control is lost and it goes against the player, it will break the feeling of being in flow and take the player out of the game. A situation where this can happen is when the main character makes a decision against the wishes of the player in a narrative sense or if the game is simply becoming difficult to control with the control inputs, such as a keyboard or a gaming controller. Lastly, the game should have the right amount of difficulty. Game designers can also add difficulty that changes depending on the player skills to increase the likeliness of flow occurring.

Aside from flow, another term often linked with immersion is presence. Weibel and Wissmath (2011) explain presence as a concept similar to flow, where flow refers to a sense of involvement and presence is more related to a feeling of spatial immersion. Steuer (1992) adds to this by saying the player feels like they are a part of the virtual world, rather than the physical world. While presence is a different phenomenon from flow, their similarities lie in how they are formed and what effects they have on the player (Weibel & Wissmath, 2011).

To sum it up, immersion is a phenomenon that occurs when the player has the feeling of being present in the digital world provided by the game but is also satisfied

with challenging enough to feel the need to continue forward. For a game to be immersive it needs to be rewarding to the player, offer the correct amount of difficulty and make the player satisfied with their investments.

3.5   Immersion and Narrative

Narrative immersion is one of the main goals of interactive narrative. Narrative immersion contains the same traits as regular immersion, as it is the feeling of being completely submerged in one's actions. If narrative immersion is efficient, it heightens the levels of enjoyment for the player and keeps them invested (Ryan, 2008). However, what separates it from the central form of immersion, is that narrative immersion is created solely by the narrative qualities of a game.

There exist different factors for narrative immersion (Qin, Patrick Rau & Salvendy, 2009). Some of these factors are similar to the central form of immersion (like challenge or control), but others are unique to narrative immersion. Firstly, the game's narrative needs to advocate a sense of curiosity for the player. When the player is curious, they are more likely to want to discover more aspects of the story and the world. Curiosity can provide the player with a sense of spatial immersion, which is feeling like a part of the game's world. The narrative also needs to give the player curiosity regarding the story of the game. Players will start to feel more engaged and immersed when they want to find out the next parts of the story, which Ryan (2008) refers to as temporal immersion. Temporal immersion can be tricky to achieve in linear games as the story might not be as influential on subsequent playthroughs. Nonlinear games can avoid this issue if the story changes in significant ways.

Temporal immersion can also be disturbed by the lack of comprehension and concentration from the player. Even before fully starting the story of the game, players need to be able to understand the basics of it. In the case that this does not occur, the player will feel lost in the world and might not want to continue. After the groundwork for the story has been established, it needs to grab the attention of the player. The player needs to be kept concentrated on the story to be fully immersed in it (Qin, Patrick Rau & Salvendy, 2009).

The final point a game's story needs to have is empathy for the characters and world of the game. With empathy in the game, the player will feel emotionally immersed in the story and is capable of effectively react to the events and characters of the story (Ryan, 2008). The player will start feeling even more immersed when they care about the non-playable characters as well (Isbister, 2006). If there is no empathy for any of the characters, the player will lose interest, and full immersion is unachievable (Brown & Cairns, 2004).

4 Research Analysis

4.1 The Interviews

Seven people ended up being interviewed for this study. Four of the participants had played Persona 5 and three had played Fire Emblem: Three Houses. The participants were all young adults or adults, so the age range of the participants ranged from 20 to 30 years old. They were located in both Europe and North America. All of the participants were also experienced with playing video games before this study, many of them having video games as a hobby or a profession.

The participants for this study were found from online platforms such as Twitter and Discord. On Twitter, the possible participants were sent a private message on whether they would be interested in being interviewed as a part of a study regarding one of the selected games and on Discord similar messages were sent on chatrooms were video games, in general, were discussed. If any possible participants showed interest, they would be contacted privately and details of the interview were then discussed. All of the interviews were done on Discord as the platform allows for voice calls. The OBS application was used to record the interviews.

4.2 Analysis

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked basic details about themselves and how do they usually play video games. All of them played video games regularly as either a hobby, to socialize or as a source of income. Two of the participants told video games were merely a pastime and entertainment, and the five others found video games to be a defining pillar of their lives, either for social reasons or the expression of their identity.

	Persona 5				Fire Emblem: Three Houses		
	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
Was the game enjoyable?	Mixed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mixed	Yes	Yes
Was the main story engaging?	Mixed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were there moments where the players had to keep playing?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were there moments where the players were put off while playing?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Was the participant interested in the characters?	Mixed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the participant interested in the main character?	No	Yes	Mixed	Yes	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Did the participant enjoy the world of the game?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Yes
Did the participant enjoy the side-activities of the game?	Mixed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mixed
Did the participant have play session consisting of only side activities?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Figure 2. Results of the interview based on the interview questions

Three of the participants had played Fire Emblem: Three Houses and four of the participants had played Persona 5. All of the participants who played Fire Emblem enjoyed the game immensely and had played it through at least once. In the case of Persona 5, the feedback was not all positive, but overall the participants thought it was still phenomenally captivating and immersive. One of the participants was still relatively early in the game and still gave compliments to the mechanics of the game.

The next questions in the study were about the main stories of the games. Persona 5 players seemed to enjoy the themes and setting of the games. The game is located in modern-day Tokyo and follows a group of teenagers who can change the minds of corrupted adults. This situation caused the players to similarities between the story and events in the real world. Persona 5 did get some negative feedback on the pacing of the game and the overall length of the game, which made the game seem like it should have ended much sooner and the story progress kept dragging at certain points. Fire Emblem players had a different experience with the story as the game is built around choices. The biggest choice related to the story comes in the very beginning as the player is choosing what path they will take. Depending on the path they choose, the main story will immediately change for the rest of the game. Despite the changes in narratives, all three of the participants enjoyed the main story. Two of the participants had chosen the red path, while just one had chosen the yellow path.

The characters of the game were discussed next. For both games, the characters made a huge impression for the participants. The participants enjoyed talking to the

characters at all points of the game that they could to find out more about them. Many of them had the urge to get the friendship levels that exist in the games to their highest. They even prioritised spending time with the characters many times over other side activities the game had to offer. Any negative feedback the characters got is that one of the Persona 5 players said that some of the characters were slightly generic and they disliked the art style the characters were drawn in.

While most of the characters in the games were liked by the participants, neither of the main characters were as popular. Fire Emblem players described the main character as somewhat plain and uninteresting to the main character and disliked the lack of personality. One participant said: "It's completely okay to have a silent protagonist, but when a game has a character with no personality and everyone makes fun of him for having no personality, it just feels hokey". Persona 5 players could relate or understand the main character slightly better due to the events that happen early in the game that causes him to move to Tokyo, but also the participants also saw him as a blank slate for most of the adventure.

The following subject that was discussed was the world that the games were set in. In Persona 5 the game was set in modern-day Tokyo. The participants enjoyed this set as they were already familiar with the city and were interested in travelling there. One of the participants described Tokyo in the game as a bit restrictive and cramped but understood that it was made like that for the sake of realism. Fire Emblem takes place at a monastery in the fictional continent of Fodlan. Two of the three participants who played the game said that they did not think about the continent the game was set in that much but said the conflicts the countries of Fodlan had been realistic and believable. All of the players enjoyed exploring the monastery in the beginning, but with time it became tedious.

The final major talking point in the interviews was the side activities that the game contained. Both of the selected games have a calendar mechanic part of the game. With this mechanic, the story is cut into days where the player can plan on how they want to proceed and do each day. Most of the days in the games are free for the player, so the game deliberately forces the players to spend time with the side activities. The days in the game are also limited, so the player has to think carefully what to do to make the most of each day. Due to this mechanic, the participants were

asked how they decided to spend most of the days. Participants of both sides answered that they prioritised levelling up friendships with the other characters and boosting the abilities of the main character.

The participants were also asked whether or not they had any play sessions where they decided to only focus on the side activities and not focus on the main objectives of the game. Five out of seven participants confirmed that this was the case and they found it enjoyable. The two that did not do this were both players of Persona 5. The first of these had not played the game to the point where it was possible to spend an entire play session without also doing the main objectives and the second one wanted to get to the end of the game as soon as possible.

5   Conclusions

This study was conducted to find out the answers to three questions. First of these research questions was how can video games create narrative immersion. The answer to this is complicated as narrative immersion is created by many things, some of which the game designers are not able to influence, such as concentration. As Qin, Patrick Rau and Salvendy (2009) pointed out that games need to make the player feel curious, they need to be able to understand the events and situations of the game and feel empathy for the characters and the world of the game. With the covered games, empathy was achieved by making the characters likeable and have some depth to them. Fire Emblem exceeded in this by having the player encounter a situation where they had to fight and kill former students of the monastery later in the game. Curiosity was made by making the stories have mysteries and impactful moments for the characters. Understanding relies on how well the events of the game are explained and how realistically do the events occur. Even when the outcomes of the events seem unrealistic to the player, the characters in the game need to react accordingly.

The second question was how the player feels about narrative immersion. The players seemed to react positively whenever they felt immersed in the games. Immersion seems to be a phenomenon the players would always like to feel but is not necessary for the enjoyment of the narrative. They still seemed to enjoy the games and come back to them later, even when faced with unpleasant experiences and unfulfilling moments. The participants had many different moments where they felt immersed and had to keep on playing to find out what events would happen next in the game and those moments were often the players' favourite parts of the games. All of the participants who played Fire Emblem mentioned the time-skip when talking about their favourite moments. The time-skip refers to the moments in the game where the main character falls asleep for seven years and wakes up to see the different classes of the monastery at war with each other. The participants described this event as a moment they were fully into the game and kept thinking about the consequences even after the play session.

The last question of this study was how the narrative immersion drives the player to perform side activities in games. Both of the selected games encouraged the player to perform side activities by having the story progress be based on a calendar and that the side activities were the only way to efficiently upgrade character abilities. In addition to the mechanical side, the games also gave contextual sense to why the main character needs to perform these side activities. In Persona 5 you play as a high school student that needs to study to upgrade abilities and Fire Emblems' main character is a teacher who is assumed to need to teach their students for their abilities to upgrade. This contextual sense that was given to the side-activities boosted the motivation to perform them.

Another important discovery was the curiosity expressed by the participants towards the characters and their dialogue. The characters were a significant talking point when it came to the discussion on how the players spent their free time in the game. One participant who played Fire Emblem described the character interactions and the growth of relationships as essential points of the series, which made the game interesting to play through even though they disliked the strategical RPG-style gameplay of the series. The growth of character relationship is prevalent in both of the games and kept the participants engaged with the game and the story. The evolving character interactions make the characters feel more three-dimensional and realistic. The participants wanted to keep playing to discover how all of the relationships manifested, what the characters had to say and who could you develop deep relationships with. Five of the participants also revealed that the curiosity to develop relationships with different characters was one of the leading causes on wanting to play through the game again after completing it once.

6 Further Discussion

The research this study conducted gained some interesting results on how immersion and narrative can impact the players' enjoyment of games. Many different factors influence immersion and should be considered in the design progress of a game. While the importance of each of these factors depends highly on the content intended to make, players seem to always be delighted to be immersed while playing.

One of the biggest challenges faced in this thesis was the available source material. The available material on video games, narrative and immersion were quite plentiful, but the area where more study was needed is the side content of video games. Apart from Freemans' (2004) article "Creating emotion in games: the craft and art of Emotioneering" other articles and studies related to the narrative in games only seemed to focus on the main plot and objectives of the games.

More research on the narrative theories and how immersion can be created in video games is needed. While the previous research, and even this one, cover some of the bases well, that is nearly just a scratch of the surface. Video games are already one of the most influential mediums in the world and have great effects on people. New perspectives and studies on this young academical field are required.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.   Interview Questions

Introduction Questions:

- Could you tell me about yourself?
- How often do you play video games in general?
- What do video games mean to you?
    - Just entertainment, a social thing, job, a way to express yourself?

Game Questions:

- What did you think about the game in general?
    - Did you like it? Are you familiar with the series or other similar games?
- When did you play the game?
- How much have you played the game?
- Have you played it Multiple times?
    - If yes, why did you want to play it again?
- What do you think about the story of the game?
    - Was it engaging?
- Did you have any moments where you kept playing, because you just had to know what happens next?
    - Which moments?
- Were there any moments that made you feel frustrated or put off, moments where you didn't want to continue playing anymore?
    - Which moments?
- What do you think about the characters in the game?
    - Best/worst Characters?
    - Did you talk to all of the characters to see what they had to say?
    - P5 How did you manage your social links? Were they a priority? Did you do all of them?
    - FE What did you do with the students? Who did you recruit? Did you do side activities with them, like a tea party?
- What about the main character?
    - Did you like him/her?
    - What can you tell me about the main character? What kind of a person are they?
    - While playing, did you feel a connection to the character? Were you playing as him or as yourself?
- What do you think about the setting and world of the game?
    - P5 Did you enjoy walking around Tokyo?
    - FE Did you enjoy walking around the Monastery?
    - Did you spend time just wandering around for fun?
- What do you think about the side activities the game had to offer?
    - Any favourites?
    - How did you spend most of the in-game days?
    - Did you ever have play sessions were you just wanted to do side activities the whole time?
- What was your favourite experience or moment that happened in the game (not outside, and related to it)? What made it special?