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CHOICE AND THE ILLUSION OF IT IN NARRATIVE-DRIVEN VIDEO GAMES

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Abstract		
<p>Choices in video games are a rising trend and the balance between meaningful choice and the illusion of choice has been executed with varying levels of success in existing game titles. The thesis studied the topic through research, case studies and qualitative research through a survey. The survey helped provide data about how players understand and feel about the illusion of choice. The case studies focused on how choice had been implemented in the chosen game titles.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to provide comprehensive information about how choice and the illusion of it can be done and what core benefits and risks it can present. A secondary goal was to find out how the illusion of choice is understood and felt by players. The question, how and why the illusion of choice is used in video games, was explored and the hypothesis that players dislike the illusion of choice and so it needs to be used thoughtfully was challenged.</p> <p>The study showed that meaningful choice, although desired by players, is not always the best option. From the point of view of game development, it can be expensive, and it is difficult to execute successfully. Therefore, the illusion of choice can be a useful tool that can be used in both the narrative and the gameplay. The illusion of choice is relatively well understood, and the hypothesis is partly disproved, players do not on average appear to dislike the illusion of choice. However, case studies show that it should be used thoughtfully.</p>		
Keywords		
narrative-driven, video game, choice, illusion of choice, non-linear		

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1 INTRODUCTION

Choice is a complicated concept that is connected to thoughts of freedom and free will. Video games are interactive, and thus the player makes constant choices when playing. For example, they can choose how to play a level, what weapons to use and in some games, what character to play. Having control over the character and certain components when playing is what makes video games enticing as an entertainment medium. Because of the interactive nature of video games, they are not restricted to only linear narrative structures. Therefore, non-linear narratives, with choices are not unusual.

This research-oriented thesis is a study about choice and the illusion of it in narrative-driven video games. The study will specifically focus on narrative-driven games to provide a focused and thorough study of the topic. The thesis aims to answer the main question, how narrative-driven games use choice narratively and what benefits and risks it presents? The secondary goal is to focus on how choice, and especially the illusion of it, is received by players and to answer the question, why is the illusion of choice used in video games? The thesis looks to prove or disprove the hypothesis that the illusion of choice is disliked by players, and thus should be used very thoughtfully.

The goals of the thesis will be achieved through research on the topic, qualitative research through a survey that serves to help provide basic data about players and their understanding and feelings of the illusion of choice and through case studies of narrative-driven games such as CD Projekt RED's the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) and Bioware's Mass Effect series (2007-2017).

The thesis will begin with the basics of narrative-driven games. The brief history of the genre and the narrative structures used in them is explored to further understand the development of narrative-driven games. This is to define narrative-driven games and to introduce the terminology used throughout the thesis. Once the basics of narrative-driven games is completed the thesis will focus on choice. The topic will be explored through psychology to establish the basics of the psychology of choice after which the focus will move to what

meaningful choice is, how it is used and how consequences can be implemented to support them. When meaningful choice has been explored, the thesis will focus on the illusion of choice. The topic will be explained and studied through the results of a survey, with the goal of finding out how players feel and understand the illusion of choice. The question of whether the illusion of choice is better than no choice is answered based on the theoretical research and the survey results.

The purpose of analysing narrative-driven games is to gain existing examples of how choice is currently being used in the industry. The goal is to study successful and unsuccessful ways choice has been used, to help better understand the benefits and the risks connected to it.

2 BASICS OF NARRATIVE-DRIVEN GAMES

A narrative-driven game is a game that notably puts its focus on delivering an enjoyable narrative experience for the player. They can differ from shooter games that often focus on delivering an enjoyable player versus an enemy experience. Games are unique when compared to other media such as films. Games are part of interactive media, because the player has control of the main character and thus becomes an active participant in the story. In films the watcher is a passive viewer, who has no agency over what will happen next. (Herrera 2015; Prizeman 2018.)

Because games are an interactive media, the storyteller role is not always fully on the shoulders of the game developers but also the players. That is something films and books do not provide. The player can avoid starting certain story mission by doing something else and for some players this is an appealing trait in narrative-driven games. (Krawczyk 2006, 137-138.)

2.1 Brief history

Game developers have become more and more interested in creating games with stories. Originally games were not designed to have well developed

characters, deep themes and strong narrative experiences, instead they were designed with a strong focus on the mechanics and the rules. Stories in games have become increasingly popular within the last decade. Advancement of the technology used to make video games has allowed more freedom in the creation of narrative-driven games. Developers have more narrative tools available to them and are starting to go into more details and dip into more varied themes. (Picucci 2014.)

The depth of game narratives has developed with the evolution of the game visuals and the technology used to make games. Some storytelling development started to happen in the 1980's when game consoles became more popular and common. Nintendo's game Donkey Kong (1981) had a simple narrative where Mario must save the princess from the villain of the game. Although simple, the narrative served its purpose by providing the player with a goal. (Klug et al. 2011, 13-16.)

During the 1990's role-playing games (RPGs), that often have a strong focus on the narrative, became more available. Squares Enix's Final fantasy games (1987-2019) did not just amaze with their graphics but also became some of that century's most remembered games with strong narratives and characters. In the 21st century video games slowly cemented their role as a storytelling medium for a wider audience. Games have become more cinematic in part because of the improvements in graphics but also due to the narrative becoming increasingly intertwined with the design of a game's mechanics. During the last decade the concept of a narrative-driven games has become a norm in a variety of game genres. (Buckler 2012; Klug et al. 2011, 26-29.)

There are still game genres such as card games and some puzzle games where the game is not based on a narrative, however these days even games with no clear narrative still include a character with a conflict that works as a narrative base to help create a goal for the player. (Wolf 2001, 5.)

2.2 Typical narrative devices in narrative-driven games

Narrative devices in films are the camera angles, the lighting and other devices that help communicate the story to the viewer. Video games also use these devices but because games are an interactive medium, other narrative devices are also used to inform the player of the game's goals. (Cameron 2017.)

Like films, video games use dialogue to further the narrative. Although silent protagonists are still used in games, these days large quantity of them have a speaking protagonist with companion characters who often engage in dialogue between each other. Dialogue can happen during cutscenes but also during gameplay. Majority of games with choices, allow the player to choose between different dialogue options. Cutscenes are another common used narrative device in games. They are often an unplayable cinematic scene, where the story and the characters are moved forward in some way. These narrative devices are very common in almost all narrative structures used in in video games. The most common structure is the linear narrative. Linear games often focus on delivering a well-presented game with a heavy focus on well-developed dialogue and cutscenes. (Cameron 2017; Dubbelman 2016.)

Multiple games depend on written elements to tell their story. They feature audio logs, books, codices and other elements that can be found in the game by exploring and interacting with the world. There are however also games that use no written elements to tell the story. Narrative architecture, the use of the game's environment as a narrative device, is a commonly used narrative device in these types of games. Often the environment and the world building in a game is vital to the delivery of the narrative. (Cameron 2017.)

This narrative device is especially observable in games such as thatgamecompany's *Journey* (2012), where the story is told through environmental, visual and aural components. The game does not have any dialogue, or clear cutscenes, so the player must observe the narrative through other means.

The most important narrative device however can be argued to be the mechanics of the game. When designing a narrative-driven game, it is important to design the narrative based on the mechanics of the game. This way the two elements will remain consistent with the themes of the game and can play off each other. If the story of the game is done before the mechanics design is even started, the narrative might restrict the game design and it will be important to make the game coherent. (Extra Credits 2013.)

An example of narrative-focused game design is Dontnod Entertainments' Life is strange (2015). In the game the player controls a character who can rewind time. This time control mechanics is vital to the gameplay and the themes of the game.

2.3 Linear narrative structure

Linear narratives are the easiest and most common types of narratives seen in film, television and games. Films are almost always linear narratives but a recent exception to that rule is the interactive movie from Netflix Black Mirror: Bandersnatch (2018). It can be observed that possibly due to the rise of media-service providers, the film and television industry is starting to experiment more with interactive storytelling and non-linear narrative structures.

Most linear narratives or sometimes called traditional story structures, follow the three-act-structure where a story can easily be split into three acts that are illustrated in below Figure 1. A linear narrative is a story that has a clear exposition, conflict and resolution or in other words a beginning, middle and an end. (Krawczyk et al. 2006, 58-60.)

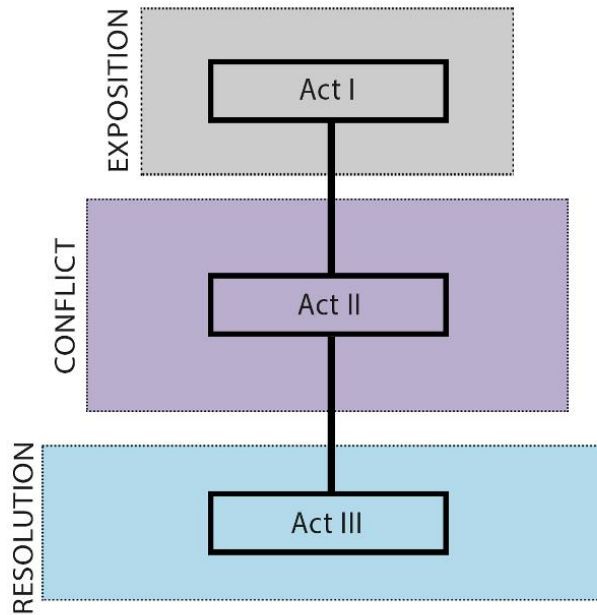


Figure 1. Illustration of a linear three-act narrative

Everyone experiencing a linear narrative will have the same base narrative experience with no changes. Act 1, the exposition, will introduce the main character's problem that then will lead to act 2, the conflict. In act 2 the story will usually focus on more than one obstacle and problem the main character must solve to get to act 3, the resolution. In act 3 the problem that was introduced in act 1, and the obstacles in act 2, have been resolved and the story can end. (Krawczyk et al. 2006, 58-60.)

Games are not linear because they are an interactive medium but some of the most popular video game franchises have linear narrative structures. For example, Naughty Dog's the Last of Us (2013) is a narrative-driven game with a clear linear narrative. Games such as Giant Sparrow's What remains of Edith Finch (2017) and Fullbright Company's Gone Home (2013) are examples of games made by indie developers that are very narrative-driven with a clear linear narrative structure.

Linear stories are common because their rules are well established, and the structure is easier to follow and create than some other forms of narratives. A

linear narrative is also one of the best ways to deliver a deep and well-balanced story with well-established characters and world. (Cohen et al. 2010.)

2.4 Non-linear narrative structures

Non-linear narratives are narratives that do not clearly go from point A to point B, like linear narratives. For example, a non-linear narrative might present itself out of chronological order. Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp fiction* (1994) is an example of a non-linear narrative structure in a film. In interactive media, such as games, a non-linear narrative, or its elements, might change based on the choices the player makes in the game. This means that if the player were to play the game again, they might experience the story differently. This is achieved through presenting the player with different types of choices that can lead to changes in the story. (Novak 2008, 136.)

2.4.1 Branching

Of all non-linear narratives, the branching narrative structure is among the simplest and most common. In a branching game narrative, the player is given choices which can lead to a different consequence than another choice. Every new branch in the narrative doubles the amount of writing the writer must do, thus achieving a narrative with many narrative branches can be very difficult. As seen in below Figure 2, a branching story follows the same base flow, exposition, conflict and resolution that linear narratives follow. (Nelson 2015.)

As seen in below Figure 2, branching narratives can be divided into minor, moderate and major branches. Minor branches have little to no significant effect on the story. It might only affect one scene in the game and then quickly rejoin the main story branch. Moderate branches do not have significant effect on the main plot but can create different scenarios that lead to the same destination. Moderate branches eventually merge back to the main story branch of the game. The major branch is the main narrative of the game. When a major branch is branched then the effect is permanent. (Klug et al. 2011, 184-187.)

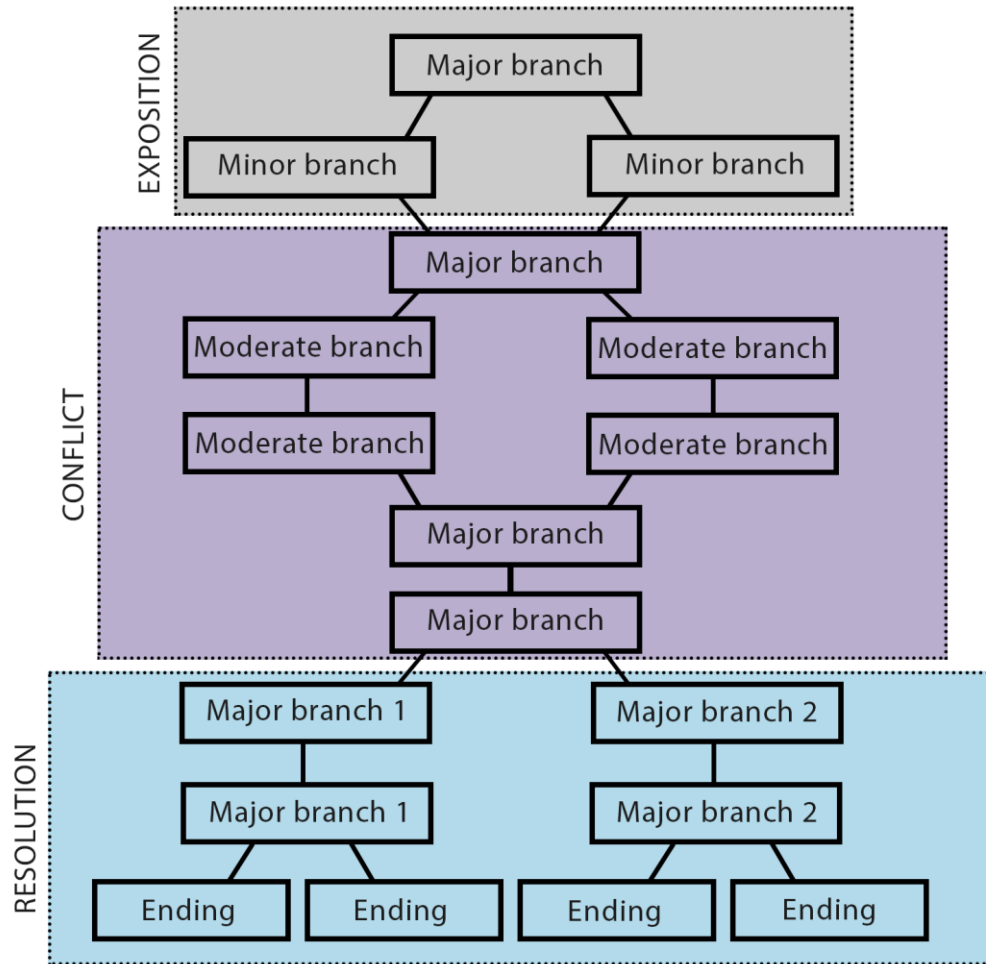


Figure 2. An illustration of a short branching narrative with all branching types

An example of a game with major branches is CD Projekt Red's *the Witcher 2: Assassin of Kings* (2011). At the beginning of the game the player is presented with a choice that then drastically affects their player experience and the story. In that choice the main story is branched into two and the only way to experience the other side of the story is to replay the game and choose differently.

Creating many major branches is very challenging because the development costs easily becoming very high and because it is difficult to design a story with many major branches. That is why most games with branching narratives focus on creating minor and moderate branches to support the main story branch. (Klug et al. 2011, 181.)

Examples of some popular games that use a branching narrative structure are Dontnod Entertainments' Life is Strange (2015) and Quantic Dreams' Detroit: Become Human (2018). Most modern non-linear narratives that include choices use this narrative structure.

2.4.2 Open world

Open world or sandbox game narratives can be categorized as discovery narratives. In these narratives, the player is free to investigate and experience the game world in any order they wish. They can play most side quests whenever they want, and every now and then, play the main story of the game. Open world games are common in recent triple A games such as CD Projekt RED's the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) and the more recent Assassin's creed series games from Ubisoft such as Assassin's creed: Origin (2017) and Assassin's creed: Odyssey (2018). (Picucci 2014.)

In open world games, the player has control over the pacing of the narrative, thus creating a main narrative for open world games can be challenging and requires its own set of rules. The biggest problem with open world narratives is that the main narrative is often experienced in random frequencies. This makes it difficult for some players to remember why or what they are doing in the main narrative quests of the game. (Jaekle 2018.)

It is also more difficult for the player to get to know or to get attached to main story characters when they only meet them every now and then between many hours of multiple side quests. The main narratives of open world games often follow branched story structures but when combined with the open world of the game an open world narrative is created. (Jaekle 2018.)

2.4.3 Parallel

In parallel narratives the player can complete any task in any order but all of them will lead to the key events in the plot. In these narratives, the key points of the main narrative stay the same irrespective of what the player chooses while

playing. By engaging in tasks outside the main narrative, as seen in below Figure 3, the player might discover secrets or extra story elements. Parallel narratives include the advantage of having player decisions yet keeping the narrative within reasonable limits in development. (Schreiber 2009.)

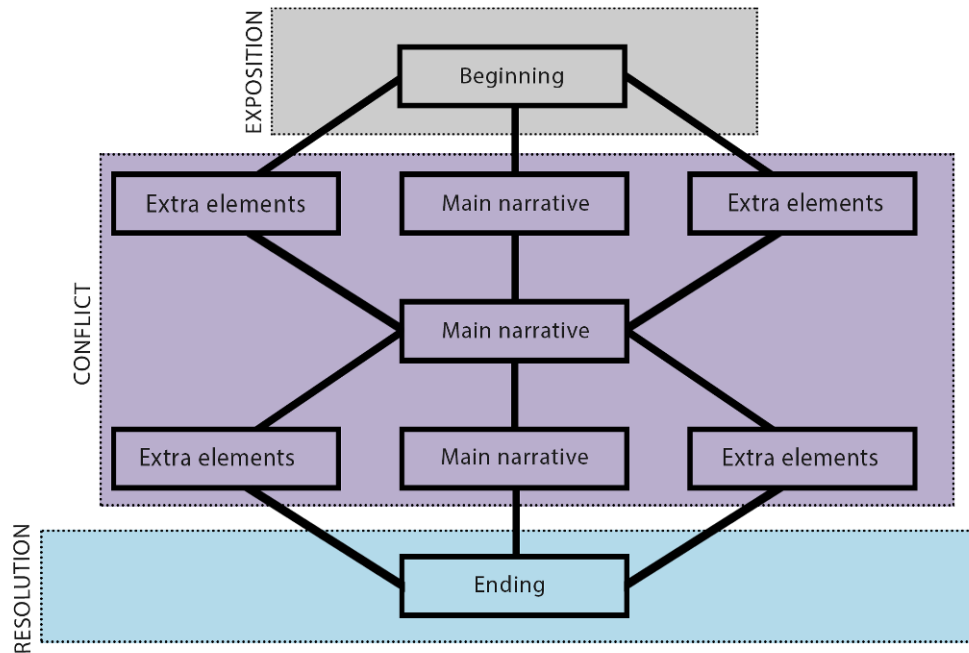


Figure 3. An illustration of a parallel narrative structure

The problem of this structure is that players are forced to, no matter what they did or did not do, to experience the unchanging key elements of the story. This leads to, as Figure 3 above shows, the main narrative still being very linear. (Schreiber 2009.)

3 CHOICE IN NARRATIVE-DRIVEN GAMES

Choosing is the act of overcoming internal conflict. If there is no conflict, then it is not a choice, it is a decision. Choice always requires that there are at least two options to choose from. It is important to understand that choice is different from actions, reactions and calculations. For example, breathing and blinking is an action, not a choice or reaction. Pulling our hand quickly away when touching something hot or when catching a falling phone would be a reaction, while a

calculation is a decision made based on reason and logic. (Alborov 2017; Extra Credits 2012.)

Games are interactive, so players make choices in them constantly. They choose where to go in a level and what gameplay mechanics to use. The focus of this thesis is narrative-driven games, and choice in them is used as a narrative device where the player is at times made to choose between predefined dialogue options or actions. These choices can have consequences that can lead to a game branching, thus creating a non-linear branching narrative. The choice might heavily affect a side quest or even the main story and how it is resolved. For example, some choices might lead to the death of a character while another choice might lead to the character surviving. (Schreiber 2009.)

Within the last century, choice has become a popular phenomenon in video games, partly because giving the viewer control over the media is something unique that only games can provide. It is almost expected by now that the player can choose at least from a small range of dialogue options in role-playing games such as CD Projekt RED's the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015). It is also becoming a norm that games in all genres are starting to implement choice-based gameplay in different ways. For example, some games allow the player to choose the gender of the character they will play but might not have other narrative choices available. However not all choices in games have consequences and their purpose is to make the game feel more personal for the player. (Extra Credits 2013.)

3.1 Basics of the psychology of choice

Humans are constantly presented with choices and we make many choices in a day, sometimes without even realising that we are doing it. Humans, and some human cultures, value the concept of having the freedom to choose what they want, who they want to be and how they behave. Being able to choose what we want is seen as an important factor in our understanding of freedom and free will. However, choice is also connected to culture. Different cultures can however see and experience choice differently. Some value the concept of freedom to choose,

while to some it is much more comfortable if someone else makes choices for them or that certain choices are made together with other people. (Boschi 2018; Iyengar 2010.)

Choice is a complicated cognitive behaviour and from the point of view of psychology it can be viewed in varied ways. Two of the most common theories of choice are, choice theory and rational choice theory. In choice theory choices are made to appease five basic needs: power, love, survival, fun and freedom. Rational choice theory presents that we all have preferences based on self-interests that drive us when making choices. Both theories resonate with people however if we are ever presented with two equally good choices, then everything is up to preferences or in other words biases. We all have preferences and choose based on these preferences. When having a choice between the same shirt and the other shirt is blue while as the other one is red, one will choose the colour that they prefer. If one needs to make a choice about something they know nothing about, then the choice is often made based on the opinion of what we deem as an “expert” in that moment. Thus, a choice is made based on cues. (Figueiredo 2006; Ye 2018.)

Choices can create stress and anxiety, and in some situations, having to make a choice can be mentally paralyzing. The more choices there are the more difficult it can become to choose the best option. This also leads to dissatisfaction for it can be difficult to not think about whether another option would have been better. (Schwartz 2004, 3-12.) This can suggest that having an abundance of choices in a game might be a risk. Choice-based games should provide the player with enough choice that they feel in control but still limit their options enough to reduce the risk of anxiety and stress caused by an abundance of choices.

According to neuroscience, a branch of biology that merges with psychology to focus on the scientific study of the human nervous system and its structures and functions, choice is always an illusion. This hypothesis is based on the studies of Haggart et al. (1999) and Bode et al (2011) who found that the human brain makes choices and decisions before the human mind is conscious of having

started making one. These studies would suggest that choices are always an illusion. (MacKinnon 2016; Psychology Today 2019.)

The study presents the theory, that choice in games is always an illusion. The theory denies the concept that choice is an integral part of our free will, which then goes against other psychological studies about choice and the human conscience. This indicates that choice is complicated, difficult to define and often based on feelings.

3.2 Meaningful choices and consequences

Keeping in mind the complicated psychology of making choices the goal of many game developers is to create meaningful choices in games. A meaningful choice means that the player is fully aware that they are making a choice, the choice has clear noticeable consequences and there are reminders of the choice after the choice has been made. (Morrison 2013.) The most common way narrative-driven games create meaningful choices is by making the player choose between different actions or dialogue options. Many players feel that if a game offers them with choices, majority of them should be meaningful.

The reason why choices are especially common in narrative-driven games is that rarely does suspense and drama in them come from the story itself, they come from the act of choosing and the consequences of those choices. The more a decision weighs, affects the game and causes conflict in the player, the more exciting and suspenseful the game can become. (Fullerton et al. 2004.) This suggests that if a game cannot deliver meaningful choices in an adequate way, the story of the game might not be as impactful.

As Kennedy (2016) explains, to make a choice meaningful, it is important to remember the themes of the game. Kennedy (2016) provides an excellent example of that in CD Projekt Red's *Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011), the player is presented with the choice to either help one of two characters in a combat situation. One of the characters is unarmed and the other armed. The player has had some chance to get to know both characters and some minimal

information about their backstory and what they believe in. The choice is in theory simple and at the same time very human. The player is made to choose between two people and they get to choose which of them they prefer. The choice also creates conflict because they must betray one of the characters to help the other. Thematically the choice is about choosing to either side with the humans or the elves and their allies. Which fit the themes of the game because the narrative focuses on the conflicts between these two groups.

An example of a somewhat bad choice would be a choice between going left, right or straight forward on a road. The choice is simple and most likely not at all rooted to any theme in the story. That is not to say that having a choice such as this is inherently bad, it is simply advised that the choice is connected to a theme. The choice could be between different types of doors instead of just directions. Giving the choice a theme creates some form of conflict even just by making the player choose which one they think is the prettiest. It is even better if there is some history or backstory in the game about them.

It is important to limit the amount of choices if a game wants to have real consequences. Multiple large-scale consequences are difficult to execute and the more consequences there are, the less players care about the consequences. (Kennedy 2016.) This suggests that too many choices have the chance of breaking a games narrative. As Schwartz (2004, 9-10) wrote, too many available choices can create choice overload which can lead to indecisiveness and anxiety.

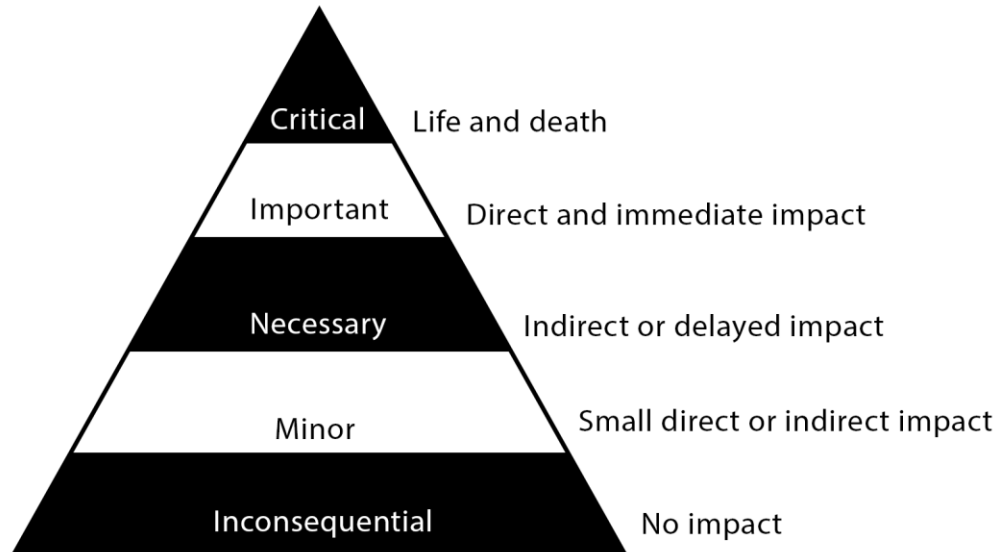


Figure 4. Decision scale (Fullerton et al. 2004)

As seen in the decision scale in above Figure 4, player choices and their consequences can be put into triangular diagram where the most critical choices happen the least but have the heaviest consequence. A more minor consequence can be that the player receives more money from a certain choice, while another choice might have led them to losing money. This is also often a minor branch in a branching narrative. This way the player is either rewarded or punished for a choice. An example of a more critical, top of the pyramid, choice would be a choice between whether a character in a game lives or dies. (Fullerton et al. 2004.)

Rewards and punishments are generally the most commonly used direct consequence. It can be simple to motivate a player based on how they can benefit from certain choices. They can easily be scaled in importance based on the difficulty of the choice. However, because it is the easiest way to create consequences, games can make the player feel that their choices are not meaningful. If there are minor or inconsequential choices the player can be left dissatisfied. Therefore, it can be beneficial to have enough choices that are high on the decision scale. This way by the end of the game, the players can feel that their choices mattered. (Fullerton et al. 2004.)

An example of a critical choice would be a scene in Quantic Dreams' *Detroit: Become Human* (2018). In an intense escape scene, the player character Kara is running away from armed men, with a child character, the player is given the choice between playing dead, fighting, running or surrendering. The scene can play out in multiple ways based on the choices the player makes. Either both characters die, only the player character dies, both characters survive and escape or both characters survive but are captured.

These choices can be placed high on the Figure 4, decision scale, not only are they very human choices that the player must make quickly and under duress, but the choices can have very heavy consequences if they choose wrong. The fact that the player character can die, becoming unplayable until the end of the game, is a heavy price for failure. It creates conflict inside the player and has the potential to be very emotional. However, too many of these critical choices could cause some players anxiety. Therefore, the decision scale by Fullerton et al. (2004) is an apt way to classify different choices and consequences. However as Kennedy (2016) explains, too many choices with critical consequences can be risky, so it can be useful to incorporate a variety of choices.

Sometimes choices only have narrative consequences, but some consequences can influence the gameplay of a game. For example, in Arkane Studios' *Dishonored 2* (2016), the player has a choice between agreeing to receive supernatural powers or refusing said powers to stay as a normal human. This choice has a dramatic effect on the gameplay of the game. With powers the player has access to multiple different skills such as teleportation and the power to slow time. With powers the player has freedom to experiment and find the playstyle that works for them. Without powers the player is more limited with movement and they have access to less skills, thus the gameplay can become considerably more difficult.

3.3 Player agency through choices

Games are enticing because they tend to promise the player agency over the game. Having choices implies the possibility of different consequences and narrative outcomes that promise the player some level of control over the games events. (Domsch 2013, 3.) Player agency is difficult to define precisely because it can mean different things to different people. For the sake of this thesis it will be defined as: Player's ability and experience of being able to affect the games through narrative choices and gameplay decisions. Player agency can be created through choices and consequences and it is meant to make the game more meaningful and immersive to the player.

As Rigby describes in his Game Developers Conference (GDC) talk (2017), humans are motivated by things that can satisfy basic psychological needs. These needs according to Rigby (2017) are autonomy, relatedness and competence. Games can increase player engagement by satisfying at least some of these base needs. Autonomy, the need for being in control and the needs to be able to affect the things around us is closest to the description of player agency. Because of this needs for autonomy, many players enjoy when games give them a strong feeling of control over the game's events through meaningful choices. However, a game without player agency is not always a worse game than a game with it. Problems arise when player agency is given but then at some point broken or taken away. An example of this is analysed in chapter 5 on pages 40-43 of this thesis. However, if a game succeeds in creating a choice-based narrative that gives the player a feeling of agency over the events of the game, the game is more likely to be successful.

Johnson (2013) in his article describes some designers see that adding choice to a game is an ideal way to have more player agency. Although this can work, it can also be detrimental. The more choices there are the more complex and repetitive the game can become. Every choice takes cognitive energy from the player and if the game cannot deliver a well-balanced and developed choice and consequence structure, the quality of the game experience goes down and so the game loses player agency. This suggests that games should not add choices just

to give player agency. The choices must be thoughtfully designed and as Kennedy (2016) explains, connected to the themes of the game.

3.3.1 Moral player agency

A complicated and difficult way to add meaningful choices and strong player agency is by adding moral choices to the game. Making a choice between what is “good” and “evil and what is “wrong” and “right” challenges the decision maker to reflect on their own morals, experiences, hopes and fears. It is impossible to make sure that every player will consider the choice as a moral choice or if they will experience the player agency it can provide. This leads to the player experience being different from player to player. (Finley et al. 2015, 113-115.)

In moral choices it is vital that the consequence is clear and that it reinforces why the player made that choice. That is why having gameplay ramifications such as rewards or skill advancements does not always work well with moral choices. This forces the player to weight what they morally want to do and how that choice would affect their gameplay. (Finley et al. 2015, 113-115.)

Finley et al (2015, 113-115) present an excellent example, in BioWare’s Dragon Age II (2011), at the very end one of the healer party members essential does an act of terrorism. The player is given the choice to kill him, exile him or spare him. Some players will want to kill or exile the character but because that would mean losing them as a party member they might end up sparing him. This removes some of the weight of the moral decision and forces the players to think practically instead of morally and so some player agency is lost.

4 ILLUSION OF CHOICE

There is a lack of information about the illusion of choice in academic capacity and it is not often discussed officially either. This makes the illusion of choice a topic that is often explained through feelings and experiences. This thesis will focus on how the illusion of choice is experienced, to better understand and explain the topic.

The illusion of choice in video games is a situation where the player feels as if they are making a choice but all choices that are available, are the same choice presented in different ways, thus creating the illusion of making a choice. Another use of the illusion of choice is that the consequence of a choice is very small and has no or very minimal impact on the game itself. The illusion of choice does not have strong consequences in the events of a game. (Extra Credits 2013.)

The goal of the illusion is to simply create a feeling of agency for the player. That way development costs and difficulties of narrative designs can be minimised. Creating multiple choices and their consequences in games is a long, difficult and expensive endeavour due to development difficulties. It is currently impossible to make a game limitless and offer the player full freedom over the events of a game. For this reason, many games aim to create the illusion of choice to players when presenting them with choices. (Alborov 2017; Extra Credits 2013.)

The illusion of choice is used both in the narrative of a game but also in level design and gameplay. Often the player might not even realise that they have encountered the illusion of choice while playing. The illusion of choice as a game development tool has been used for some time but with the rise of narrative-driven games with choices-based structures, it has become more and more commonplace. (Extra Credits 2013.)

4.1 Illusion of choice in game narratives

In the narrative of a game, the illusion of choice is most commonly created through dialogue choices. A simple example of the illusion of choice would be a situation where the player is asked by a character in the game to select either an apple or an orange. If the player picks an orange, the character in the game tells them that they are out of oranges and he was just making a joke, thus the player ends up with the apple no matter what they chose. The player is presented with a choice and no matter what they chose they ended up making a choice with no impact on the game. (Extra Credits 2013.)

The illusion of choice can be used with meaningful choices that have visible consequences. Because creating meaningful choices becomes very difficult and complex the more of them there are, game developers use the illusion of choice to help minimise problems with development and to minimise player exhaustion when it comes to making choices. (Extra Credits 2013.) So from the perspective of the game companies and the developers, the illusion of choice can be a useful and necessary shortcut when attempting to create a narrative with multiple choices.

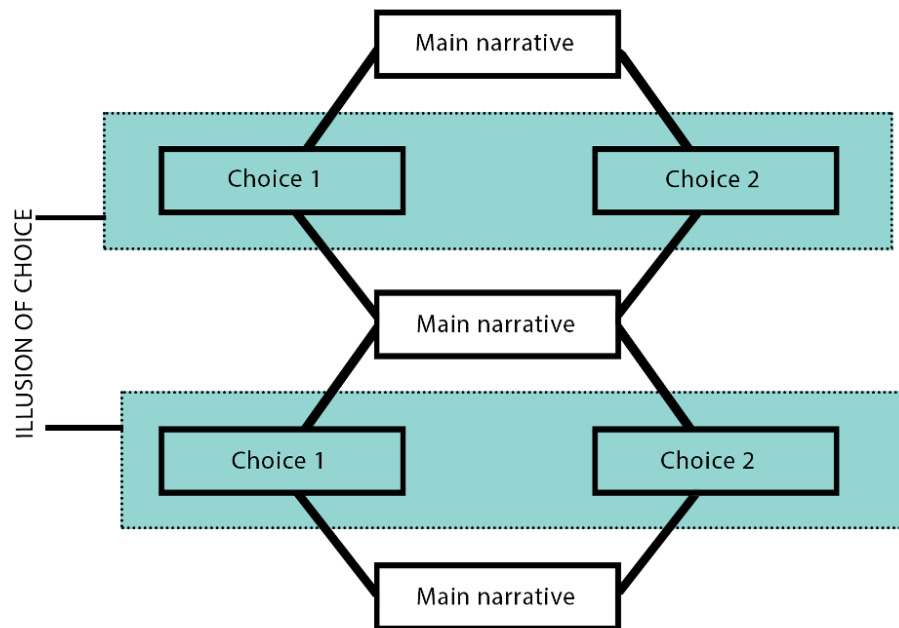


Figure 5. Illustration of the illusion of choice “beads on a string” structure

The illusion of choice is often explained through a “beads on a string” shaped narrative structured as illustrated in the above Figure 5. The main narrative is the “string” in this context. When used with the illusion of choice, the main narrative allows the player to make a choice but then immediately returns back to the main unchanged narrative with no or very few consequences. There might be instances where the player makes a choice and the main story appears to change. Then the player is presented with more choices or events that then force them back onto the unchanging narrative. (Extra Credits 2013.)

Most of the time, choice structures that use the illusion of choice are not there to help the player shape the story the way they want it to be, like meaningful choice does, but to give the player the feelings and the conflicts that making choices creates. It is a narrative device and its main goal is to make the act of choosing difficult and to create a feeling of doubt after the choice has been made. When used well and sparingly it can be used as a useful tool in creating a feeling of uncertainty and curiosity towards the game and its story. (Brohier 2016.)

Alborov (2017) in his article explains that the illusion of choice in many ways is better than choice. It helps lower development costs and in a large number of cases, the player will never find out that the choice they made is just an illusion of one. The way the illusion of choice can create a feeling of player agency, makes the risks of using it worth it. However, the flaw of it is that the moment the player realises that a choice is not meaningful but simply an illusion, they will be left feeling betrayed. This suggests that the illusion of choice can be useful but should be used together with meaningful choices. A game should avoid using the illusion of choice too much, otherwise the chance of the illusion bursting can become higher.

4.2 Illusion of choice in gameplay

With the results of the survey conducted for this thesis, it can be said that most participants consider the illusion of choice simply a tool used in game narratives through choices (Appendix 3). However, the narrative is not the only place the illusion of choice can be used. When playing a level, the player is often guided with devices such as lights, colours, coins and chests to lead them towards certain areas. The level outside the guided path might be free for the player to explore but it might be more barren and less interesting. Most players tend to immediately gravitate towards the interesting better lit areas in a level. Lighting, camera movement, composition and other useful level tricks are a simple way game developers can use the illusion of choice to give the player the feeling that they chose to go where the developers wanted them to go. (Alborov 2017; Extra Credits 2013.)

Extra Credits (2013) in their video provide an example: a road in an open world game. The road might be blocked by enemies far too strong for the player's level when they first encounter the enemies. Most players will likely choose to avoid these enemies and choose an alternative route to get to their goal. In this instance the developers guided the player by giving them the illusion of choice to take the route they want the player to take. This route might be more detailed and better designed than the route that goes through the high-level enemies. Or it might fit the narrative of the game better.

Platformers provide simple examples of the use the illusion of choice in their levels by giving the player a choice between a lower and a higher platform. Both platforms lead to the same place, but the game gave the player the illusion that their choice might make the game somewhat different, thus giving the player a small feeling of agency. In some cases, the illusion of choice can manifest in the narrative, but it is not supported in the gameplay itself. This creates a dissonance between the two game components. (Legler 2015.)

For example, a game might make the player make a moral choice. One choice, in the moment gives the player more resources but is morally wrong, while the other choice is morally more acceptable, but it gives considerably less resources. The player might choose the morally correct route and then be rewarded with the same amount of resources as the morally wrong choice, later in the game. Thus, both choices give the player the same amount of resources but only at slightly different times. This creates an illusion of choice in the gameplay. Narratively the choice might be meaningful but there is a dissonance in the gameplay where the choice did not matter. (Legler 2015.)

4.3 Survey results

A survey was created with the purpose of gathering information about what people know and feel about the illusion of choice. The survey was conducted due to the scarcity of sources about the topic. It was created with Google forms because it was the simplest and most efficient tool that was also the most accessible to many people. The survey was posted on social media sites

Facebook and Tumblr in February 2019 and received 92 answers. The number of participants is not enough to provide purely conclusive data, but it can give referential data and the amount of people work as a small test group about the topic. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 1, and the survey results can be found in Appendices 2-5.

The survey consisted of 15 questions. The first part of the survey asks basic demographic information such as the survey participants' age and game preferences to help understand how different types of players understand the topic. The first part ends with a question about whether the participant knows what the illusion of choice means. The participant had the chance to answer either yes, no or maybe. If they answered no, then they would be directed to the end of the survey because the second part requires the participant to at least vaguely know what the illusion of choice means. In the second part of the survey the participant is asked more specific questions about their knowledge of the illusion of choice to see how much they know and how they feel about the topic.

All participants gave their permission to use their answers in this thesis. Almost all participants answered seriously and thoughtfully. The participants were not restricted by any rules or strict guidelines and were given a free platform to express their thoughts, this resulted in some participants writing detailed answers.

4.3.1 Data about the survey participants

As seen in Appendix 2/1, majority of the participants were young adults between the ages 21-25 (39,2%) and 26-30 (22,9%) years old. The participants' gender was relatively evenly split. 52,2% of them were male, 43,3% were female, 2,2% were other and 2,2% preferred not to say. This allows for an even amount of data from two genders. The goal of the survey was not to gather specific data about the differences between genders but to simply see if there are some differences that emerge concerning the topic.

Two of the survey participants did not reveal whether they work in the game industry or not, this has no effect on the survey because so few chose not to answer that question. Over half of the participants did not work in the game industry when participating in the survey, however enough of the participants work in the industry and comparisons between these participants can be conducted adequately.

As seen in Appendix 2/2, a large quantity of the participants put either role-playing, action or adventure as one of the game genres they enjoy playing. There were no major differences between genders. However, some male participants play more shooters than the female participants. These three game genres are generally the most popular because a vast quantity of triple A games belong in one or two of these genres. Games belonging into any of the three most popular genres in this survey, often have a mediocre to strong narratives. Some of them, like role-playing games are also often non-linear and thus have choices in them.

Surprisingly many participants play strategy games. Strategy games often do not have non-linear, choice-based stories, thus the answers from these participants provide interesting comparisons to those who play games with a stronger narrative focus. As seen in Appendix 2/2, almost all participants answered gameplay to be one of the two most important components in a game. The second most popular component was the narrative. This shows that the participants appreciate the game mechanics and the narrative the most, this suggests that many of the play narrative-driven games.

4.3.2 Participants knowledge of the illusion of choice

As seen in below Figure 6, 51 (54,4%) of the participants believed to know what the illusion of choice is. 25 (27,2%) believed to maybe know and 16 (17,4%) believed to not know the topic. Only participants that answered either yes or maybe to whether they know what the illusion of choice is, were directed to the second part of the survey.

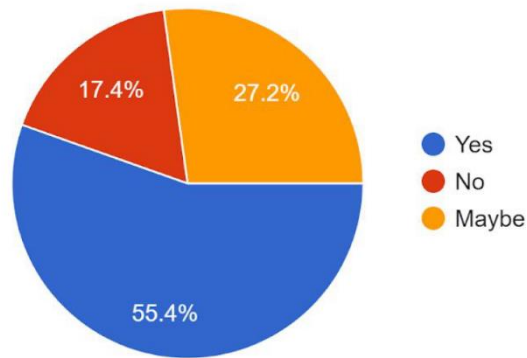


Figure 6. Graph showing the percentage of the survey participant's answers to the question: Do you know what the illusion of choice in video games is?

As seen in Appendix 3, of the 51 participants whom answered yes to whether they know what the illusion of choice is, whether they work in the game industry or not, seemed to understand the basics of the topic. Almost all participants explained the illusion of choice to be something that can be encountered in a game's narrative. Only two people mentioned in their explanation that it can also be used in level design. This tells that many do not consider it to be a game design tool but simply a narrative one. The clear difference between the game industry professionals and players was the vocabulary and tone of certainty used in their answer to the question. Industry professionals expressed clearer knowledge of the topic.

Of the 25 participants that answered maybe to the question, four could not explain the topic in a way that would express knowledge of the illusion of choice. Others either knew the basics of the topic but simply expressed uncertainty. This can be because they are not overly familiar with the topic but have possibly heard the basics of it online.

All the participants that worked in the game industry and answered the question explained the topic relatively well. All the people who could not explain the illusion of choice adequately, did not work in the industry. They were all between the ages of 21-35 years old, three of them play strategy games, and all of them

answered gameplay as one of their two main components and only one of them considered narrative the second component. Thus, it is possible that these four simply have not encountered the topic online or simply have not played many games with clear narrative choices and so have an unclear comprehension about what the illusion of choice means.

Three of the 16 participants that answered to not know what the illusion of choice is, work in the industry so the topic was more unknown to those who were not working in the industry. This is reasonable because industry professionals are more likely to research game development tools and trends.

As seen in Appendix 2/3, when listing games where participants believe to have encountered the illusion of choice, different variety of Telltale Games' products were mentioned. This makes sense because Telltale Games are known for their use of the illusion of choice (Kelly 2018). Other popular mentions were Dontnod Entertainment's *Life Is Strange* game series (2015-2018) and BioWare's *Mass effect* games series (2007-2017) and *Dragon Age* game series (2009-2014). Variety of other games were mentioned but only a few times.

Overall all participants who answered yes to knowing what the illusion of choice is, listed games that use this tool and thus further confirming that they know the topic. Some participants who answered maybe listed games that use the tool less or not at all as far as the author of this thesis knows.

4.3.3 Participants feelings about the illusion of choice

In the survey, participants were asked to rate their feelings on the illusion of choice. 1 meaning they hate it and 5 that they really like it. As seen in below Figure 7, 35 (46,1%) of the participants answered three as their level of feelings and 24 (31,6%) answered 4. This indicates that most participants feel more positively then negatively about the illusion of choice. Most do not feel very strongly either way. Only 11 of the participants answered disliking the illusion of choice and 30 participants like it.

How do you feel about the illusion of choice in video games?

76 responses

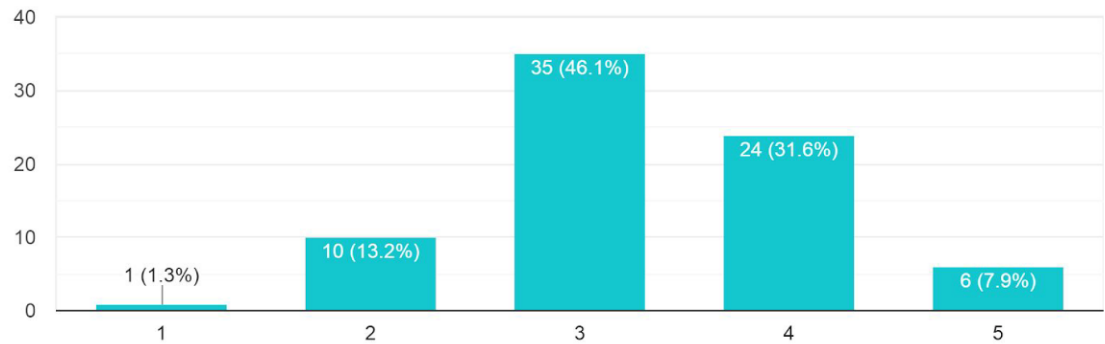


Figure 7. Graph of participants answers on how they feel about the illusion of choice

As seen in Appendix 4, of the 59 participants that answered 3 or 4, that further explained their answer, often referred to enjoying the illusion of choice in some games or at least sometimes. These participants seem to see it as a useful tool when used right and sparingly. They express being in the middle or leaning slightly more on the positive, because the illusion of choice to them has been a positive experience enough times that it does not make them feel negative emotion towards it.

Some participants see the illusion of choice as a lazy or boring tool but understand its purpose. Therefore, if the illusion of choice is hidden, then many of them accept it in video games. Some participants said that they feel less stressed about making decisions when they know that there will not be real consequences.

As seen in above Figure 7, six of the participants expressed liking the illusion of choice very much. Only one of these participants does not work in the industry. Many of them express loving the act of making choices in games and this can mean that they do not always care if the choices are meaningful or if they are just an illusion. One of the participants expressed that the illusion of choice is can be the greatest tool in a writer's arsenal.

The 11 participants that dislike the illusion of choice, many express wanting meaningful choices instead of the illusion of choice in the games they play. Some

of them understand its purpose but they do not enjoy playing games that use it excessively. The one participant who answered strongly disliking the illusion of choice explained that they do not like being fooled and that if all choices lead to the same conclusion why have choices at all.

Overall over half of the participant appear to think about the illusion of choice positively instead of negatively. It is seen as either a necessary or useful tool when used correctly. However, it can be a strongly negative experience if used too much. It is also seen as a negative thing if a game is advertised as having many choices but then almost all of the choices are just the illusion of choice.

The participants' feelings are further supported by the answers to whether the participants think it is better to have the illusion of choice or no choice at all. As seen in below Figure 8, most participant agree with the statement or agree somewhat. Almost all participants that answered between 3-5 in the previous survey question, answered 4 or 5 in this question. As seen in Appendix 4, of the participants that answered 2 to be their level of liking of the illusion of choice, 3 of them also answered either 4 or 5 to this statement. This further supports the majority of the participants' feelings about the illusion of choice being more positive than negative.

How much do you agree with this statement: The illusion of choice is better than having NO choice?

76 responses

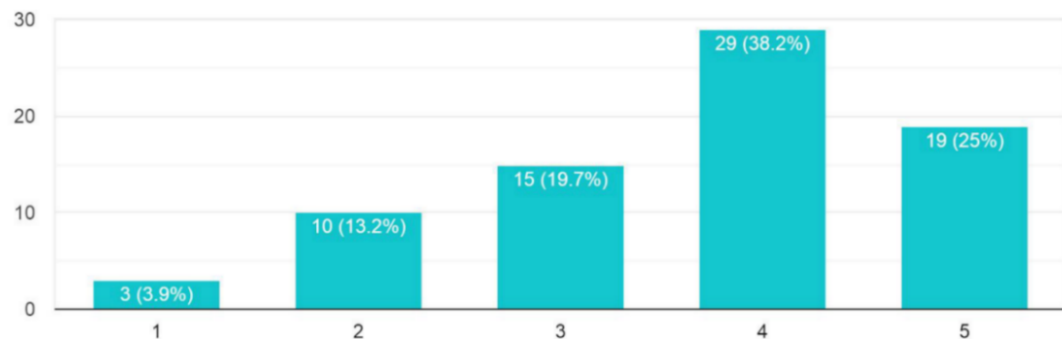


Figure 8. Participants' answers to the statement: The illusion of choice is better than having no choice

Some participants that answered feeling positive about the illusion of choice do not agree with the statement. Many of the participants enjoy choices in video games still more than a game with no choices. In the survey question about whether the illusion of choice is better than having real choices, real choices in this statement means the same as meaningful choices. The statement was changed to say real choices, when test participants of the survey expressed confusion about the phrasing. As seen in below Figure 9, clear majority of the participants do not agree with the statement that the illusion of choice is better than meaningful choice.

How much do you agree with this statement: The illusion of choice is better than having real choices?

76 responses

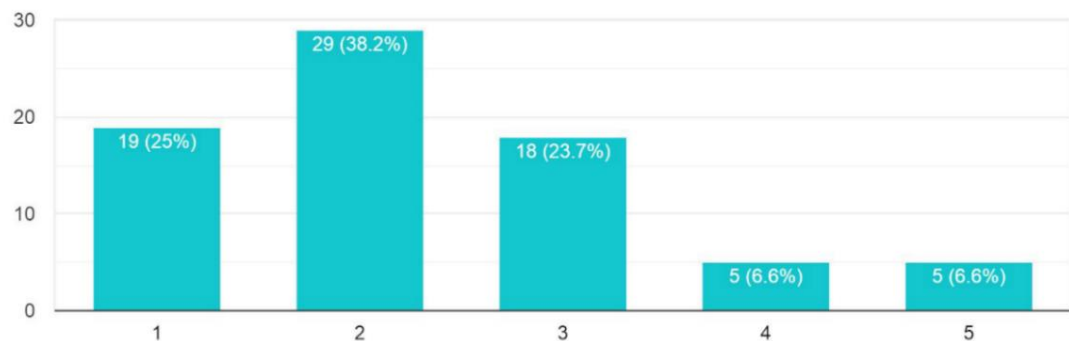


Figure 9. Participants' answers to the statement: The illusion of choice is better than real choices

The participants clearly enjoy meaningful choices more than the illusion of choice. This is only natural because psychologically we enjoy it when our choices matter (Schwartz 2007, 3-12). Interestingly participants that expressed understanding the illusion of choice as a narrative and game design tool strongly agree with the statement. Participants that do not strongly feel anything about the illusion of choice seem to lean more towards disagreeing with the statement. This can mean that these participants lean more towards disliking the illusion of choice but do not feel overly strongly about it.

4.3.4 Survey conclusions

The survey results provide directional result and partly disproves the hypothesis, that players dislike the illusion of choice, of this thesis. The participants do not clearly dislike the illusion of choice, but slightly more than half of the participants do not feel very strongly about it. These participants express disliking it if it is done badly but do not see it as a purely negative thing in games. Games such as BioWare's Mass Effect 3 (2012) and some Telltale Games' products were mentioned in a negative light. From the way participants expressed their feelings, it can be deducted that from the perspective of these players the illusion of choice can be a detrimental experience and it is a tool that ought to be used carefully. This provides directional proof that the hypothesis set for this thesis is correct about the illusion of choice being a game development tool that should be used thoughtfully.

Large quantity of participants have a general understanding of the topic, which means that the illusion of choice is most likely generally known in game communities. Participants that enjoy narrative games understandably had a more defined understanding of the illusion of choice but surprisingly, participants that do not play narrative games also on average had a good basic understanding of the topic. Participants that work in the industry on average have a better grasp of the illusion of choice. Difference between genders can simply be constituted to the fact that more female participants of this survey work in the industry.

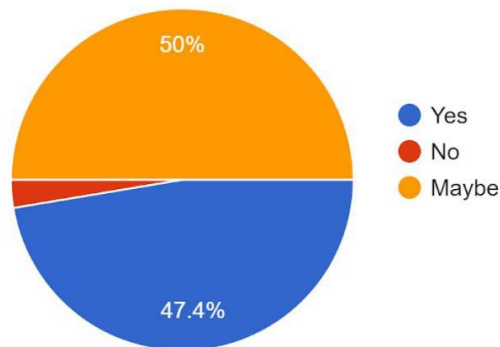


Figure 10. Graph of the participants answers about whether they believe they can recognise if a game uses the illusion of choice

It was to be expected that half the participants were unsure of their feelings about the illusion of choice for it is a rather new phenomenon in video games. If the illusion of choice is successful than the players should not notice it, thus the topic can be confusing. This is even further enforced by the participants' answers that can be seen in above Figure 10, to whether they believe that they can recognise the illusion of choice when it is used in a game.

5 ANALYSIS OF GAMES

Based on the research already presented in this thesis, narrative-driven games use choice in varied ways. The most common way is through dialogue and action options. Choice is excellent in creating player agency and immersion however it can be very difficult to implement. Choice is something humans appreciate, it grants feelings of freedom and control and this is partly why choice is becoming more common in video games. However, the cost of creating large multi branching stories is high. Large choice-based narratives require people, time and finances. Overall, choice complicates the narrative, thus it becomes more difficult to create a successful story. It is currently impossible to create a game with unlimited choices, and so the illusion of choice can be useful. Illusion of choice, if used sparingly, is good at creating player agency.

One of the best ways to study choice and the illusion of it is to analyse games that use it. The analysed games all show clear examples of either meaningful choice, the illusion of choice or both. Some of the analysed games have been received well by the consumers and some have been criticised strongly. The way these games have used choice, or the illusion of it, and how they have been received, will be analysed to provide information about current practices in the game industry and to understand how the theory already presented in this thesis can be used in practice.

5.1 Moral choices in the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

CD Projekt RED's the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) is the third installment in the Witcher game series (2007-2015) that are based on the Witcher books (1993-

2013) by Andrzej Sapkowski. The game is an open world action-RPG, with a branching main narrative. The main narrative of the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is a typical example of a narrative in an open world game. The best examples of branching narratives with many choices and consequences that are not necessarily in the main narrative itself, but in the games' multiple side quests. The main narrative, although branching in structure, is can be considered one of the weak points of the game. Therefore, the focus of the analysis will be on how the game forces the player to make moral choices in many of the side quests in the game.

Witchers are genetically modified humans, with cat eyes and supernatural strength and abilities that hunt and kill monsters in the world. They walk the land in search of jobs. Unfortunately, they are also feared and loathed, for they are not fully human, and some think them monsters themselves. In Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015), a witcher, Geralt of Rivia must find Ciri, a woman with Elder blood, who is like a daughter to him. Throughout his search he must survive the complicated political situation in the land and kill monsters.

The storytelling focuses on the theme that the world is not black and white but different shades of grey. Some choices that in the moment appear good can lead to things going the opposite. Some choices on the other hand might be tough and against the player's moral code but in the end that choice saves an entire village from being destroyed. Most importantly the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) makes it clear that sometimes there are no good choices.

An example of a moral dilemma is the side quest Where the cat and the wolf play. When exploring the world of the game, the player can encounter a slaughtered village filled with Necrophages, monsters that are drawn to corpses. If the player chooses to investigate, they will find out that the villagers were killed by a humanoid. After investigating the village, a child, an assumed survivor is seen running away. If the player chooses to pursue the fleeing child, they will find out that the village was killed by a witcher from the school of the cat. If the player chooses to hunt the witcher down, they can track his location and talk to him.

The witcher tells his story. He was hired to kill a monster bothering the village. After finishing his job, he demanded to be paid according to the agreement he had with the villages. Instead of paying however, the villagers lure him to a barn, stab him in the back with a pitchfork and attempt to murder him. The betrayal induces a rage in him, and he murdered the entire village, except the one child who reminded him of his little sister.

The player has the option to let the witcher go, or to kill him. The choice is about the players morals and neither choice is inherently good. If the player lets the witcher go, there is no telling if he will slaughter again but then again, the player can feel sympathy towards him. He is struggling to live, constantly being feared and loathed, barely making ends meet and then after doing his job the villagers tried to murder him. He has the wound to prove that he was attacked and the signs in the village show that his story holds at least some truth.

Letting him live however means that he will get away with what he did and there will be no justice for the innocent villagers that were murdered in their homes. If the player chooses to kill the witcher, then the player falls to the same level as the cat schools witcher. To some players killing the witcher will be justice, an eye for an eye, but to others there is no justice in killing the witcher who at first simply defended himself. Either you let the man go, hoping they will not murder another village again or you take justice into your own hands and kill the man.

This choice forces the player to consider what they think is the right thing to do. This moment in the game is more about the choice itself and not the consequence of it. If the player lets the witcher live, then the witcher reveals the location of his stash. The player is in part rewarded with some gear, however if the player kills the witcher they can loot the man's corpse and take his gear. And the consequence of letting the man go, is unclear. The player will not find out if the man kills again. This indicates that this side quest is more about the difficulty of the choice itself and what it makes the player feel and think. This choice is not there to present the player with a good and a bad choice. This side quest does

what Finley et al. (2015, 113-115.) explain, it presents the player with a choice that makes them choose based on their morals.

Another side quest in the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (2015) that forces the player to consider their choices happens at the beginning of the game. The player can offer to help a young woman, injured fatally by a griffon. The player can collect ingredients for a witcher potion that has a chance of helping the woman. However, witcher potions can be dangerous to normal humans, and there is no guarantee that the woman will survive. The player can choose to give her the potion or to let her die in peace. To a large quantity of player, giving her the potions is an easy decision. This is because to many, some chance is better than no chance at all. This behavior is observable in real life situations involving sick individuals and new medication and treatments.

The player does not know if the potion helped or not until later in the game if they visit the same area and talk to the family of the woman. They will find out that the woman was getting better but was then taken away by Nilfgaardian soldiers. If the player chooses to investigate, they can visit the Nilfgaardian camp and then be stopped by a soldier who explains that the woman was his lover. She was to meet him before having been attacked by the griffon. When she was getting better the soldier took her away with him. He tells that the woman is alive, but her mind is lost. She does not speak or recognise anyone and sleeps most of the day. The witcher potion had healed her body but broken her mind. The man expresses that he does not know if he should thank Geralt, for saving her life or to curse him because he would not let her die in dignity.

Considering the consequences, the choice becomes much more complicated. Players that chose to give the woman the potion, feel good about their choice in the moment they made it, but then the consequences can make them doubt if it was the right thing to do. This side quest brings into question peoples morals and opinions. This choice focuses heavily on the consequences of a choice that appears morally right but, in the end, becomes more morally grey. It depends

heavily on the person, whether they will still feel that they did the right thing when they gave the woman the potion.

These two side quests are an example of how the *Witcher 3: Wild hunt* (2015) creates moral agency for the players by presenting them with tough morally charged choices. The player will have to make choices based on their own moral compass. The game also challenges the player to think about the consequences and the world of the game. This leads to multiple, even small decisions feeling important, which creates strong feelings of agency for the players. Many games with choice-based systems often offer the player at least with one good and one bad choice. The *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) breaks that and forces the player to consider that sometimes there is no good choice or sometimes there are only bad choices. It is up to the player to simply decide what choice is the lesser of two evils.

However, as Finley et al. (2015, 113-115) explain, moral choice requires that the player knows the consequences of their moral choice. In the example with the potion. The player might not find out about the consequences if they never encounter the characters who inform them of the fate of the woman. If the player never finds out, the morality of the choice is lost. This indicates that the game focuses more the act of choosing and not necessarily in the consequences of that choice.

The world of the *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) is harsh and difficult and the choices reflect that, the game's themes are efficiently enforced in most side quests and the main narrative. As Kennedy (2016) explains in his GDC talk, a good choice enforces and is rooted to the themes of the game. The *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) is praised by players partly due to its moral ambiguity (MacDonald 2015; Metacritic 2019). However, the game is also unpleasant to many players due to the psychological obstacles. Difficult and morally grey choices can be stressful for people. The game can be difficult to play for players that simply wish to enjoy the game and have a break. Because of the heavy nature of the *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) some player's immediately find the

game displeasing. To some however it is the moral ambiguity of the choices that makes them love the game (MacDonald 2015.)

5.2 The Mass Effect series and the ending

The Mass Effect game series (2007-2017) from BioWare involves four games. For this thesis the first three games Mass Effect (2007), Mass Effect 2 (2010) and Mass Effect 3 (2012) have been analysed. These games are excellent examples of meaningful choice and the illusion of choice.-Specific focus is put on the ending of Mass Effect 3 (2012) because of the way illusion of choice was used and how it affected the players.

The first three Mass Effect games tell the story of Commander Shepard, whose first name, gender, backstory and appearance are customizable by the player. This already grants the player choice and makes the game easier to immerse to. The player can make choices through dialogue options and quick-time events. The games are all part of a story where Shepard tries to stop a galaxy wide annihilation by an ancient alien race called the Reapers. In every game the player can make choices via a dialogue wheel and the player can choose to play Shepard either as a Paragon or a Renegade. This system is called either the morality or the reputation system. (Mass Effect game series 2007-2012.)

The first morality option, the Paragon, is a compassionate, peaceful and somewhat heroic Shepard. The other option is the Renegade, where Shepard is more violent, apathetic and sometimes even villainous. The player can also play as a Paragade where they, on average, choose more Paragon options but sometimes go for a Renegade option. The Renegon on the other hand chooses more Renegade options but still sometimes opts for Paragon choices. However, the games strongly encourage playing only one morality. In the game the player can collect Paragon or Renegade points and the more points they collect to one morality, the more dialogue options in that morality will be unlocked. This lessens the weight of the moral choices. As Finley et al. (2015, 113-115) explains moral choices lose their moral weight when the player has to think about the choice through resources.

This morality system is one of the main systems in the Mass Effect trilogy (2007-2012) that provides the player with the ability to affect the narrative. The morality system was removed for the fourth installment in the series, Mass Effect: Andromeda (2017). The player can choose what kind of person they want to play. Although somewhat flawed, because of the amount of meaningful choices in the games, this system provides the player with a relatively solid feeling of agency.

Some choices in the games are very meaningful. Bioware is known for their system, where some choices from the players' playthrough from the older installments of a game series can be moved on to the next installment. This means that some key choices made in Mass Effect (2007) could be transferred to Mass Effect 2 through save game files. In Mass Effect 3 (2012), an interactive comic of the events of the first two games was made, where the player could make the choices and then have the effect of those in Mass Effect 3 (2012).

This system can be argued to be complicated and somewhat flawed because some choices only had minor effects in the side quests of the other games. Because of this system, the writers of the Mass Effect trilogy had to balance multiple different story branches and so it became difficult to keep to the same level of quality throughout the three games. It can be argued that it had a detrimental effect on the final game of the trilogy. (Alborov 2017.)

An example of a meaningful choice happens in Mass Effect (2007). The player must choose between saving one of two characters. The player only has time to save one, so the other character will die if they are not chosen. Both characters are heterosexual romance options which forces a moral element into the choice. This choice is critical and meaningful, because after it one character will no longer be available for the rest of the game. This choice is transferrable to Mass Effect 2 (2010) and Mass Effect 3 (2012). The character is no longer available when the choice is transferred. This means that some players will have to replay the series to be able to experience the game with the characters they let die in their first playthrough. This adds replayability into the game series.

However not all choices in the games are meaningful. Some choices only have small consequences or no consequences at all. Most dialogue choices in the game lead to the same conclusion, and so the illusion of choice. However, because the game includes some meaningful choices, such as romance options and critical choices, the illusion is stable, and the players have a strong feeling of agency. On average the first three Mass Effect games (2007-2012) have a stable player agency created through their choices and the morality system.

The problem with the first three Mass Effect games (2007-2012), was the ending of the third installment. In the ending, the player is made to choose between three options that all have a very similar outcome. The most significant difference in them was the colour of what happens in the ending cutscene. This is problematic because the third installment was hyped to be the grand finale where all choices the player has made in the games will have an impact. In actuality the ending only gave the player three choices with some differences.

Many players were left feeling very betrayed by the ending. Throughout the three Mass Effect games, the focus had been to give the player narrative purpose and meaningful choices that affect the game and give the player a steady feeling of agency. In the ending almost all the meaningful choices the player made were taken away and even erased. This had the immediate effect of removing player agency from the players which lead to heavy disappointment and feelings of betrayal. The way the ending was made attempted to use the illusion of choice, but the attempt was unsuccessful and lead to the game being disliked by many players. The illusion was for many players broken. (Bycer 2015; Rigby 2017.)

This led to the game becoming somewhat unpopular and infamous (Clarkson 2013). The developers attempted to fix the ending by adding a free downloadable content (DLC) that shows some of the consequences of the players' choices at the end of the game. Although this made the ending better, the damage had already been done. In Metacritic (2019) the score of the game is mixed, and the comments of the players indicate that the ending of the game frustrated and even angered many. This indicates that the illusion of choice can be risky to use, and it

can be strongly disliked by players but only when they encounter it. If a game chooses to have a branching, choice-based narrative the design of the ending is critical.

5.3 Illusion of choice in Telltale Games

Telltale Games (2004-2018) was a game company known for games where the story is the gameplay. The analysis will focus on Telltale Games' point-and-click episodic game, the Wolf Among us (2013-2014) because it is a good example of the way Telltale Games constructed their signature story gameplay and how they used the illusion of choice.

Telltale Games' signature gameplay became popular after the episodic Walking dead series (2012-2019) started in 2012. The same basic formula repeats in almost all Telltale Games' after the beginning of the series. In the games the player can make multiple choices that have a varying level of consequences. The Wolf Among Us (2013-2014) is based on the comic book series Fable (2002-2015) by Bill Willingham.

The story is about how fairytale characters, such as Snow White, exist amongst normal humans. Hiding their true forms by using magic and keeping to their own small community they call Fabletown. The main character is Bigby Wolf, also known as the Big Bad Wolf in the land of fairytales. He is the sheriff and must solve the first ever murder in Fabletown.

The game makes the player choose what Bigby says and does, in almost all situations. The gameplay consists of dialogue choices, point-and-click events and quick time events. Almost all dialogue choices need to be made under a time constraint, to make sure that the player answers more instinctively instead of methodically. The game is a branching narrative with some meaningful choices and with a heavy use of the illusion of choice. The game uses the same narrative techniques and game mechanics as the Walking dead game series (2012-2019).

Because the game is based on the player's ability to make choices, the Wolf Among Us (2013-2014) must use the illusion of choice to keep development time and costs within reason. Most dialogue options in the game are simply for flavor and there to give the player the opportunity to make Bigby the character they want him to be. As Alborov (2017) explained, the illusion of choice is useful and creates a feeling of player agency in the Wolf Among Us (2013-2014) but because it is used frequently the illusion becomes easier to realise.



Figure 11. An example of a character reaction that is expressed to the player through a text (The Wolf Among Us 2013-2014)

The game uses a subtle yet simple technique to make some choices seem more important than they are. After certain choices, the game will flash a text in the corner of the screen, telling the player that a character will remember what the player character said or did. An example of this is circled in above Figure 11. Sometimes the text might read that a character trusts the player character more or other similar phrases. These are largely just flavor text and do not have any effect in the game itself. It creates the illusion that a choice has weight, although in reality it has no effect on the game.

This can create paranoia and doubt in the player. Some players will experience anxiety over whether they chose the right thing if a phrase hinting that they have

made a character angry appears. Sometimes the effect is positive and makes the player feel that they made the correct choice. The text is there to create an illusion that a choice will have consequences. However almost, all cases where that text is shown, mean nothing. There are no consequences, the text is there simply to make the player doubt and believe that they have made an important choice. This becomes apparent if the game is replayed, and if the game is discussed with other people who have played the game. It can be disappointing to have the illusion broken. However, during the first and most important playthrough, and if the player is unaware of this technique, the text can be very effective.

The reason the Wolf Among Us (2013-2014) got away with its blatant use of the illusion of choice can be because in 2013, it was not as widely used as it is now. In the game it is not too noticeable until the end of the game when the player realises that there were no consequences to certain actions. The illusion of choice hides in between the rare meaningful choices in the game. The amount of meaningful choices and illusions of choice make the game more replayable. However, the illusion of choice loses its effect the more the game is played.

An example of a clear use of the illusion of choice is when the player is chasing after someone running away from a possible crime scene. The player is given the option seen in Figure 12. Whoever the player is chasing, went through either door. The door that is ajar would suggest that the suspect ran that way but the number on the other door is swaying and upside down, suggesting that the door was closed in a hurry.



Figure 12. The choice between doors during a chase sequence in the Wolf Among Us (Wolf Among Us 2013)

If the player chooses the slightly open door, the game informs the player that it was the wrong choice with the text: "He almost gave you the slip". Going through the other door gives the player the text: "You stayed on his trail". Both choices lead to the same conclusion, thus the choice is only the illusion of one. In the moment however, the player is made to think quickly, and it is rewarding when they choose the correct door, thinking that the other door would have led them to not catching the suspect. Players that chose the wrong door on the other hand will immediately understand that their choice was wrong and will have doubt if they will catch the suspect. This illusion is easily broken if the game or the scene is ever replayed, however in the moment it will most likely be successful and give the player some feeling of player agency.

Telltale games made the illusion of choice a crucial part of their storytelling. The base formula is repeated in every Telltale game and so the illusion became very hard to upkeep. Telltale games continued to use the same narrative techniques in their upcoming games and so one of the main points of criticism became the company's use of the illusion of choice. The problem became more troublesome when the company continued to advertise their games as having choices that matter. This became a point of irritation to some players. (Kelly 2018.)

The most blatant use of the illusion of choice can be said to be the first episode of the game, *Game of thrones: A Telltale game series* (2014-2015). In the first episode the player controls a young boy who must lead his family. During the episode the player is presented with choices. However, at the end of the episode, no matter what the player chose during the episode and during the final scene, the player character is killed. This is a blatant use of the illusion of choice that completely deletes all the previous choices the player made. Players' can feel tricked by this because the illusion is destroyed. As Rigby (2017) explains, when the feeling of agency is taken from the player, the player will very likely be left feeling betrayed. However, it can be argued that the absence of choice can be used as a narrative device to help make a scene more emotional.

As seen in the formula used in the *Wolf Among Us* (2013-2014) and *Game of thrones: A Telltale game series* (2014-2015), the illusion of choice is a narrative tool that can be difficult to use. It can be successful if used sparingly and with the right themes. It is possible that some players can find enjoyment in Telltale games' products because abundant use of the illusion of choice gives a feeling of safety when it comes to choices. To some player's it can be pleasant and less stressful to play a game knowing that most choices are not meaningful. In this instance the illusion however is broken before the game is even started thus the illusion of choice is already unsuccessful.

5.4 Illusion of choice in Bioshock and Bioshock Infinite

The *Bioshock* game series by Irrational Games (2007-2013) consists of three first-person shooter games *Bioshock* (2007), *Bioshock 2* (2010) and *Bioshock Infinite* (2013). The first game *Bioshock* (2007) and the third game, *Bioshock Infinite* (2013) will be analysed, because these games provide excellent examples of different ways the illusion of choice can be used.

In *Bioshock* (2007), the story revolves around a twisted underground city called Rapture. The main character, Jack must survive the city and escape. The main themes of the game are free will, choice and the philosophy that there are no gods or kings, only man. These themes are enforced with the events of the main

narrative. Bioshock (2007) does not have a large choice-based narrative structure. The narrative properly branches only at the end of the game based on the player's choices. Bioshock (2007) is seen as one of the games that were at the beginning of the choice-based systems rise in popularity.

As seen in below Figure 13, in the game the player has a choice between rescuing and harvesting Little Sisters, genetically altered female children that create ADAM, a resource in the game, in their body. Harvesting a Little Sister would give the player a large quantity of ADAM, but the child would die. Rescuing a Little Sister saves the child, but the ADAM is lost. This choice appears to have a narrative, moral and gameplay effect.



Figure 13. Screenshot from a video clip of the choice between harvesting and rescuing a Little Sister (Bioshock 2007)

Narratively if the player rescues all the Little Sisters than the ending of the game is more positive. If the player harvest even one of them, the ending becomes darker. The choice has a moral effect because killing a child to gain resources is ethically seen as a bad thing. In these ways the choice is meaningful, but the gameplay consequence is an example of the illusion of choice in gameplay.

When rescuing the Little Sisters, the player only gains some ADAM, but not long after, the player receives a gift of ADAM and other game resource. These gifts are in value very similar to the ADAM that can be gained by harvesting the Little Sisters. In its essence, the gameplay consequence is only an illusion that is immediately broken if the player replays the game or if they make a different choice at any point in the game. The choice overall supports the theme of free will or the illusion of it that is ever present in the game. However, it is difficult to notice this unless the game is replayed.

In Bioshock Infinite (2013) the player plays Booker Dewitt, a man tasked with retrieving a young woman, Elizabeth, from a floating city in the clouds, Columbia. The story's themes and events focus on many different themes such as alternative universes, racism, parenthood and religion. The game has a linear narrative even though it gives the player simple choices sprinkled throughout the game. None of these choices influence the narrative of the game and are simply either moral dilemmas or a choice over something cosmetic.

The first choice in the game is a moral choice about choosing whether to throw, or not throw a ball at an interracial couple being ridiculed by a mob of white people. Whatever the player chooses the main narrative stays the same and the events right after the choice do not change. In the scene the player is given the message that not throwing the ball would make the mob turn against them. Although both choices lead to this happening, the player is made to feel as if they must choose with either doing what the mob wants and stay safe or by going against them and risking themselves. Choosing to not throw the ball only makes the player feel good about doing what they think is the right thing to do, even if it seems the riskier choice.

If the player chooses to not throw the ball at the couple, the couple will appear later in the game and give the player some supplies as a thank you. This small nod and the feelings created by the choice give the players the feeling that their choice mattered thus creating at least a small feeling of agency for them. The player will not realise that both choices lead to the same conclusion unless they

replay the game or look it up online and so the illusion of choice is successful for the first and most important playthrough. It makes the player do a moral choice.

Another example, as seen in Figure 14, is the choice between a brooch with a cage or a bird in it. The player is given the choice between two different broaches. The choice may seem important because the broaches are given by two characters the player has met before and know to be mysterious and somehow part of the main narrative. Whatever the player chooses, the choice is only a cosmetic change for one of the characters in the game. Choices such as this are sprinkled throughout the game.



Figure 14. Screenshot from a video of the choice between the cage and the bird (Bioshock Infinite 2013)

Bioshock Infinite (2013) is an example of the use of the illusion of choice to give the player a feeling of agency and mystery. The illusion of choice also supports the alternative universe theme of the game which suggests that Kennedy's (2016) theory that meaningful choice needs to be connected to a theme can be applied to the illusion of choice as well. However, the lack of clear consequences can make the player lose their feeling of player agency. Having choices, often can send a message to the player that their choice will have some consequence or effect on the game.

5.5 Case study conclusions

Benefit to having meaningful choices in a game is how it increases immersion, replayability and player agency. Well thought out choices and consequences structure can grant a player a deeper, more personal experience. Choices can however be risky because of how expensive and difficult it is to make large games with meaningful choices. It can also be difficult to create endings that satisfy players. Like in Mass Effect 3 (2012) and in the ending of the first episode of Game of thrones: A Telltale game series (2014-2015) if an ending breaks the feeling of agency that has been given to the player, the effect is likely to be negative. Creating multiple satisfying endings can be difficult, and the more branches there are in the narrative the more difficult it becomes. This is why the illusion of choice is used but using it in an ending of a game is risky.

The illusion of choice is a useful way to create player agency and it can be used to lessen development costs in choice-based games. Large quantity of players will not notice the illusion of choice if it is used correctly. However, the illusion can be easily broken when the illusion of choice is used as if it were meaningful choice or if it is used too often. It appears to work best when used together with meaningful choices and if a game only gives the player choices that are an illusion, it should be used sparingly. It is only beneficial if the illusion of choice fits the themes of the game.

6 CONCLUSION

This thesis was partly successful. The research done shows that choice is a complicated concept, not only in games, but also psychologically. Due to the complexity of the topic, in the given timeframe the study can only present general statements. This was one of the risks of the study, with more time and resources, the topic could be studied more thoroughly. The thesis studied and analysed the basics of choice and the illusion of it in narrative-driven games and based on this answered the research questions presented at the beginning of the thesis.

The amount of survey participants was small, so it cannot provide definite statistical data about all players. However, the data can be used to provide directional conclusions. With more time the topic could be studied more thoroughly. Despite this the research on this thesis provided enough data to formulate valuable information about choice and the illusion of it, in narrative-driven video games.

The survey conducted for this thesis showed that players understand the concept of the illusion of choice on a general level. It is considered a narrative tool by most, thus its usefulness as a game design tool is shadowed by what it can do to the game narrative. Players do not feel very strongly about the topic and this partly disproves the hypothesis set for this thesis. Players do not clearly dislike the illusion of choice. However, research and analysis showed that it can easily become a negative influencer if used too often or at the wrong time. In part the hypothesis is correct, the illusion of choice is something that should be used thoughtfully.

Overall, it can be stated that the goals of the thesis were reached to an acceptable extent. Choice in relation to narrative-driven games was explored and explained to provide information about the topic.

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Illusion of choice in narrative-driven video games (Bachelor's thesis survey)

Hello my name is Verna.

This survey is about the illusion of choice in video games. The information is gathered for a Bachelor's thesis about the topic and the point is to collect basic data about what people know and how they feel about the illusion of choice in video games.

This survey is anonymous and it will only take 5-10 minutes to fill out. The more in depth answers you can give, the better. It is alright if you are not very informed about the topic, you can still participate in the first part of the survey and that information will still be very useful in the thesis.

Thank you in advance for participating in this survey!

Do you understand and agree that your answers will be used and analyzed as part of my Bachelor's thesis research? *

☐ I agree and give permission to use my answers in the thesis.

Player profile

All of this is anonymous and will be used to create a better understanding of players and their understanding of the illusion of choice.

Age *

1. Under 15 years old
2. 15-20 years old
3. 21-25 years old
4. 26-30 years old
5. 31-35 years old
6. 36-40 years old
7. 40+ years old
8. Prefer not to say

Gender *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do you work in the game industry? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What types of games do you play? *

- ☐ Action
- ☐ Adventure
- ☐ Shooter
- ☐ Role-playing
- ☐ Strategy
- ☐ Simulation
- ☐ Mobile
- ☐ Other...

Survey questions

What are the TWO most important components in a game to you? *

☐ Gameplay

☐ Narrative

☐ Characters

☐ Graphics

☐ Art style

☐ Sound and music

☐ Other...

Do you know what the illusion of choice in video games is? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

Illusion of choice

This part of the survey is specifically about the illusion of choice in video games. If you can, please answer as in depth as you can, it will be highly appreciated.

Can you give a short description of what the illusion of choice means to you? *

Long-answer text

Are there games where you have encountered the illusion of choice where you liked or did not like it? *

Long-answer text

How do you feel about the illusion of choice in video games? *

1	2	3	4	5
I strongly dislike it				
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I really like it				

Please tell more about your answer if you can.

If you can, please explain why you like it, do not like it or do not feel strongly either way.

Long-answer text

How much do you agree with this statement: The illusion of choice is better than having NO choice? *

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly				
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agree strongly				

How much do you agree with this statement: The illusion of choice is better than having real choices? *

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly				
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Agree strongly				

Do you think you would notice if a game uses the illusion of choice? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

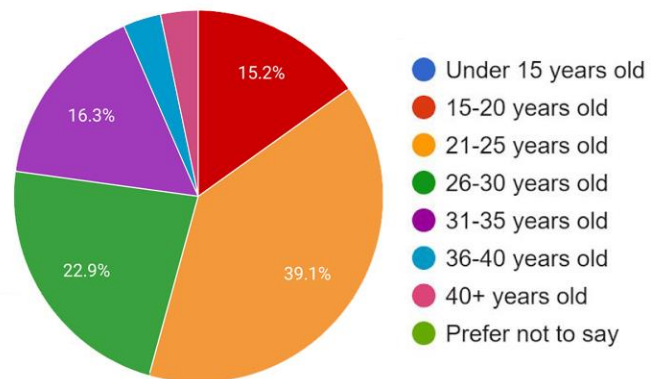
Do you have any opinions, feelings or experiences about narrative games and/or the illusion of choice that you would like to share?

Long-answer text

Survey result graphs

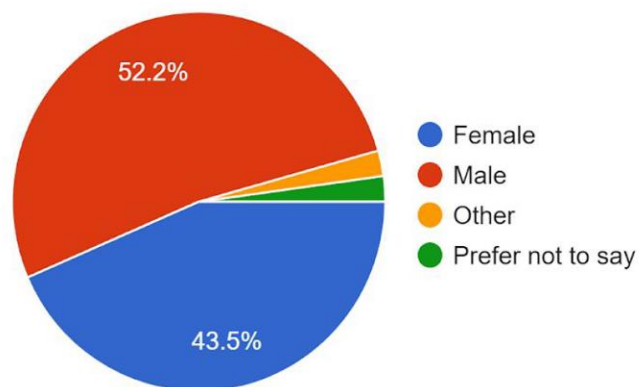
Age

92 responses



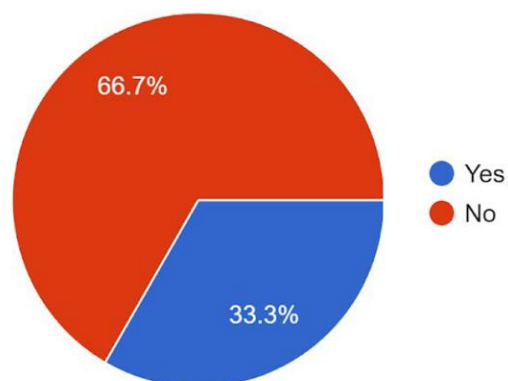
Gender

92 responses



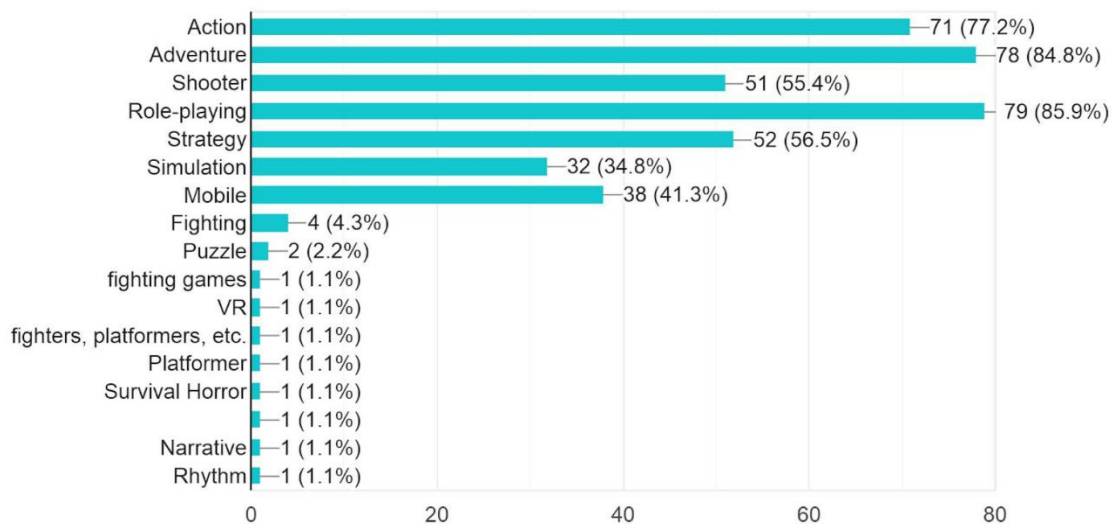
Do you work in the game industry?

90 responses



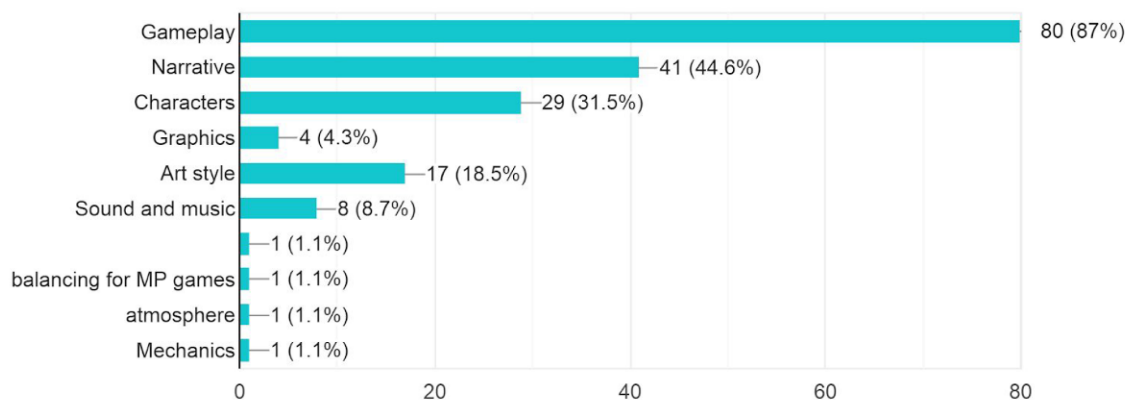
What types of games do you play?

92 responses

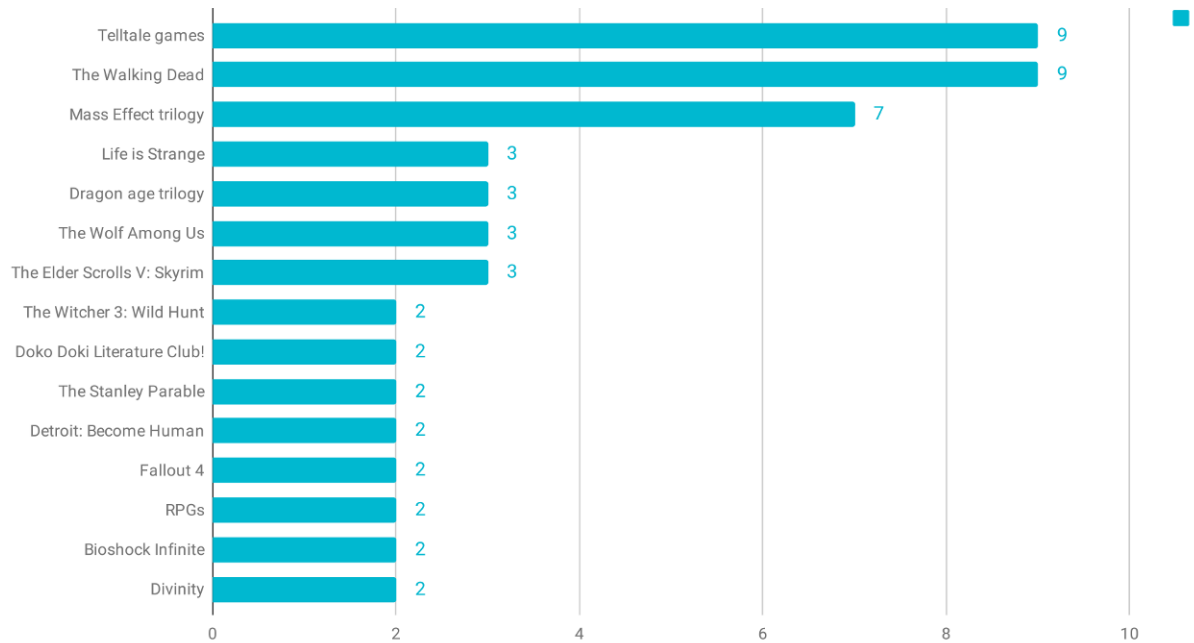


What are the TWO most important components in a game to you?

92 responses



The most mentioned game titles to survey question: Are there games where you have encountered the illusion of choice where you liked or did not like it?



List of games only mentioned once:

Bioshock	Fallout	Fallout 2	Fallout 3
Final Fantasy VII	Tom Raider reboot	Horizon Zero Dawn	Legends of Zelda: Skyward Sword
Starcraft 2	Baldur's Gate	Heavy Rain	Quantic Dream games
Kingdom Come: Deliverance	Classic JRPGs	Dating Sims	Zero Escape
Batman: The Telltale Series	Nier: Automata	The Council	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Justice for All
Saints Row V	Blade Runner	Diablo 3	Diablo
Virtue's last reward	Syndicate	The Secret of Monkey Island	80 Days
Tales from the Borderlands	The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild		

Written survey answers a

Gender	Do you work in the game industry?	Do you know what the illusion of choice in video games is?	Can you give a short description of what the illusion of choice means to you?
Female	No	Yes	The game let's you make decisions, but in the end they don't really matter that much.
Male	No	Yes	It refers to the fact that the choices a player makes in any game do not often have the impact that players may believe or be led to believe they have. In other words, many points in a game's narrative or general progression are fixed. Therefore, the "meaningful" choices that the player makes have no impact, little impact or only a short-term impact on the game's narrative or progression. Thus, the choices that the player is presented are an illusion. In some cases, I believe this can also apply to gameplay mechanics, but that is another matter entirely, at least depending on how deeply the mechanics are tied to narrative progression.
Male	No	Yes	No
Male	No	Yes	Not that much. I am given a choice but I know it doesn't actually mean anything. I'm still quite OK with it, maybe because I've learned to live with it, but it does not excite me. If I could choose, I'd prefer not having any decisions if they do not mean anything.
Male	No	Yes	Player choice can affect how events play out but the end result is fundamentally the same with small or no variations. Some choices might have larger effect and might divide game to different narrative routes but basic elements of story are the same.
Male	No	Yes	Being offered a choice that has no (or no meaningful) impact on the outcome of the story or game, but gives you a feeling of influence.
Other	No	Yes	Being given a choice that feels like it'll somehow affect the narrative of the game, but in reality all choices lead to the same conclusion.
Male	No	Yes	It means that there is certain decisions that actually don't affect the the conclusion or storyline .
Male	No	Yes	Illusion of choice means that the game gives you a choice but it doesn't change anything in the narrative, characters, gameplay etc. It's like if you were asked whether you wanted apples or oranges, but you get a banana regardless of your answer.
Male	No	Yes	A perceived player agency over narrative elements, course of plot or gameplay options greater than what they might actually be.
Male	No	Yes	To me, "illusion of choice" has a negative connotation to it, like you're given choices which you believe will impact how the game progresses, like choosing a character or deciding on the behalf of your character, but ultimately none of your choices actually end up mattering.
Female	No	Yes	Illusion of choice to me means that the game gives you an option to choose but no matter what you choose, the outcome will be the same
Male	No	Yes	Its when you think you solved a task on your own in a game when in reality you were guided to this conclusion all along. For example in spesific parts of the map are more highlighted so you go there(for example in uncharted games when you are in a chase scene you think you actively decide where you go by locating things to climb on. In reality the game has this all figured out and you just point to the right direction).
Male	No	Yes	Presenting the player with a choice, but the option picked doesn't (considerably) affect further events
Male	No	Yes	A narrative experience trick, by which the subject is encouraged to think they are making a choice, while the final outcome is predetermined.
Male	No	Yes	I believe it can be a useful tool, but having utilizing it in essential parts of story driven games can make your effort feel irrelevant.
Male	No	Yes	When the game throws a seemingly important choice for you to make but whatever choice you end up making turns out to have little to no impact on the stroy.
Female	No	Yes	It's when the player is given a choice that ultimately affects the plot of the game very little - a choice that branches the story path briefly but ultimately returns to the essential story path.
Male	No	Yes	E.g. To think u have the choice of different story lines while u dont

Appendix 3/2

Female	No	Yes	The game at certain points gives player freedom to choose from multiple options to which way to lead the story. The game's narrative seems to be affected by the choices player makes, but in truth the story doesn't branch much if at all.
Male	No	Yes	I find the "illusion of choice" to be unsatisfying to the players as they would get the same ending if they choose a different path. If they choose something bad, they should strive to not do the same on the next run of that certain game.
Male	No	Yes	It's the expectation that the choices you make will greatly change the course of the story. But in the end the choices only affect very small parts of the game.
Male	No	Yes	All choices leading to set events in RPG's or the meta being defined enough to rule out options so everyone will fall into cookie cutter choices.
Male	No	Yes	The game seems to give me a choice of how the game narrative continues but all of the different choice paths lead to the same pre decided conclusion.
Male	No	Yes	it means that while it feels like the choice the game gives you means something it ultimately leads to the same goal thus making the choice meaningless.
Male	No	Yes	Being asked to make a decision, despite the options being heavily weighted (bias) to one choice.
Male	No	Yes	It when in the game it seems that you have different choices but in the end all of those are controlled and limited by that world and sometimes they don't even affect the outcome of the game
Other	No	Yes	An interaction that appears to affect the gameplay but actually doesn't
Male	No	Yes	Having the feeling of meaningful decisions while they don't have much consequences, not altering the way the game plays significantly.
Female	No	Yes	Illusion of choice in games is where the player is made to believe that they have an effect over the story-line, but meanwhile it is just "cosmetics".
Female	No	Yes	Illusion of choice, when done well, gives the feeling that what you pick matters.
Female	No	Yes	you feel that you can make choices but you only follow a few possible plotlines
Male	No	Maybe	When it seems like you're given a choice but in the end it doesn't have any effect on the outcome.
Male	No	Maybe	Its that i get the feeling the choises i make in the game are big and changes the outcome of the story. Tell tale games's walking dead is a good example where you feel you have freedom of choice but in the end its actually quite railroaded just with a twist.
Male	No	Maybe	Where a choice you can make in a game doesn't affect the game at all
Female	No	Maybe	The player is lead into believing their choice matters, affects the story and has consequences, when in fact it does not.
Male	No	Maybe	Illusion that you have a choice in video games. The name describes it pretty well.
Male	No	Maybe	It means having a choice but only 1 particular answer is the best option.
Male	No	Maybe	Toi can Make choices, however, the outcomes are still The same.
Female	No	Maybe	Not sure, but maybe it refers to situations in many interactive (roleplaying, narrative, strategic...) games where you can choose from few options which action to perform or how to respond to a situation. But those few options are very limited (whereas in real life one would have thousands of options how to respond), maybe less than 10 options to choose from. So the options are very limited, but still it feels like one could have the freedom of choice, and this is probably the illusion of choice.
Female	No	Maybe	The game gives you choices that changes the narrative and supposedly the ending, but when you actually get to the ending you notice that your choices didn't matter much at all in the end. There aren't multiple endings or what you did doesn't drastically change the outcome anyway.
Female	No	Maybe	To me it means either well or poorly written stories/dialogues where you get to choose something but it won't affect the outcome.
Female	No	Maybe	I suspect it means the way the game gives you "freedom" or choices that feel meaningful but in reality the game progresses the same no matter what you do.
Male	No	Maybe	I'm unsure, probably about having a choice but it doesn't do anything?
Prefer not to say	No	Maybe	To me it's how you are made to believe that your choices matter, when everything ultimately leads to a certain goal no matter what you choose.

Appendix 3/3

Male	No	Maybe	Presenting the player's choices as something that will or may impact events later on in the game (or immediately after the choice is made).
Female	No	Maybe	You can make choices during the gameplay which feel important, but won't influence the ending or much of the rest gameplay ultimately.
Male	No	Maybe	-
Male	No	Maybe	Not sure but I think it means that the game offers situations where you can choose what happens next.
Female	Yes	Yes	The ability to make a choice even if that choice has no impact on anything and is thus an illusion.
Female	Yes	Yes	Presenting the player with options that feel significantly different or divergent yet they are designed to lead them to a fixed outcome or to guide them towards a specific choice. In effect those player choices don't really matter for the narrative design itself, they just make the experience more meaningful for the player if they are executed well.
Female	Yes	Yes	When a game gives the player a choice and then the choice actually means nothing and has no actual consequences. Also you can use the illusion of choice in game and level design... i think.
Female	Yes	Yes	I have a love-hate relationship with the illusion of choice, meaning the feeling that your decisions will impact the overall narrative and story even if they don't. I understand how it can help narrow the scope of development, but as a player, being deceived into thinking that my choices (which can sometimes be stressful) have no meaning in the end is disappointing.
Female	Yes	Yes	Game presents options that appear to have consequences, but really don't actually make much difference.
Female	Yes	Yes	The player feels like they are making choices that affect the story greatly, when in reality it does very little if anything to the eventual outcome
Female	Yes	Yes	The game gives you choices to makes it seem like your actions have an effect on the story. Often no matter what you choose, you end up in very similar results, just through different routes.
Male	Yes	Yes	It means using the narrative and game play of a game to create the feeling of free will in the player through the characters. Making the player believe that the decisions matter and once they are made, it will have consequences and will affect the course and / or ending of the game. It's called an illusion because, as any story created, the ending (even when different iterations are created) are limited and always the same, no matter the decisions made in the game, the outcome in the end will be the same.
Female	Yes	Yes	When you feel you have the control of the story or character as they're many variables given as choices, but the outcome of them are not so different from other options.
Female	Yes	Yes	When you are given a choice of A or B, but in reality, things are set so that in reality you can only choose one of them. OR A and B both produce the same result.
Female	Yes	Yes	Three things: An alternative path in a level which ultimately ends up to the same point in the end of the level (e.g. Super Mario levels always end up at the same point regardless if he took the high road or advance on the ground) or a dialogue / choice tree e.g. in an adventure or narrative heavy game which contains choices but ultimately take the player through the same main stream of the story (e.g. Telltale's Walking Dead contains choices but ultimately the story advances through the same main events regardless of the choices), the third one has to do with progression, e.g. in the first Bioshock the player can decide to harvest or rescue the little sisters for Adam, for the end game there's not much difference but morally it is a big decision, same thing goes pretty much for the older Bioware games (Jade Empire, KotOR), any Diablo game (player chooses what skills / abilities to upgrade but they always proceed with the same battles / levels).
Female	Yes	Yes	Having multiple choices which usually lead to binary results rendering the choices you made into moot.
Male	Yes	Yes	It makes us believe that we are responsible for the outcome of our choices.
Male	Yes	Yes	To me, it's about the game providing options to advance in the storyline, while the outcome is still predetermined.
Female	Yes	Yes	It means that the player has the feeling that they can choose what to do and what might happen instead of feeling the game is railroading you towards something that they might not have chosen themselves.

Appendix 3/4

Male	Yes	Yes	The player is given superficial options that matter only in the immediate future, but not in the long run e.g. the ending.
Male	Yes	Yes	As it is not currently possible or perhaps even desirable to completely simulate an interactive narrative, designers use many different tricks to give players the feeling that they are in control. In many cases players can make choices, but they end up leading to the same or very similar conclusions.
Male	Yes	Yes	That you feel like you have agency despite the game world/simulation's constraints, environment limitations rules.
Male	Yes	Yes	It means that the player is given multiple moral choices that all lead into few predetermined conclusions.
Female	Yes	Maybe	I get the feeling my choices make a difference of the outcome of the game, although either choices are very limited or different choices lead to a similar consequences.
Female	Yes	Maybe	The feeling of being able to make each gameplay feel "my own". Also it means that I can affect the way the story progresses. The word "illusions" implies that I only get the feeling that my choices matter for the gameplay when in fact they're just a roleplaying element.
Female	Yes	Maybe	To give a player a choice that's seemingly important, but the outcome is the same/very similar no matter what the player chooses.
Female	Yes	Maybe	As much as I understand, the illusion of choice refers to narrative-driven game with multiple choices how the story could branch out, but always ends up in the same point (usually, just one ending) no matter the choices the player makes. Might be a bit over-simplified, but that's how I would explain it.
Female	Yes	Maybe	when the player is given options, but the story is predetermined, and the player's choices affect very little
Female	Yes	Maybe	-
Female	Yes	Maybe	The designer of a video game creates a contained system where all the possible actions a player can take are prescribed by the designer. When the player makes choices, the choice-taking feels autonomous, even though the choosing was designed (hopefully) by the creator of the system, and the player can't make authentic choices within the contained system that would create an entirely new choice for the player, that the designer didn't include in the system to begin with.
Female	Yes	Maybe	Even though decision is made the end result is the same.

Written survey answers b

Gender	Do you work in the game industry?	Do you know what the illusion of choice in video games is?	How do you feel about the illusion of choice in video games?	Please tell more about your answer if you can.
Female	No	Yes	3	I kind of like it. I understand why someone might not; but I don't see it as a problem. (I do like games with real choices as well) I like being in control of little things, without being afraid I'll absolutely ruin my endgame. However, if I THINK I have bigger control than what I actually have, I'll get stressed, and then in the end when I realize nothing mattered I'll get frustrated.
Male	No	Yes	3	I refer you to my answer above. It's good for engagement, and it can even make the "real" choices stand out as well as mask which choices are meaningful and which aren't. Mixing up "real" and "meaningless" choices can make the player pay more attention to each choice, since they don't know which one will affect the story, but there might be less pressure for each choice in total. It can be compared to the way in which movies mix CG and practical effects: if both are used at the same time, they blend into each other better, and neither one stands out, while the filmmakers can save resources and place emphasis on the parts they want.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	
Male	No	Yes	4	While the choices given do not change the course of story enough to affect gameplay a lot or change the narrative route by much, they do have other very visible consequences or reveal information not available otherwise.
Male	No	Yes	3	Depends on how it is done. I do of course mostly like the idea of choices mattering, but it can be extremely difficult and resource consuming to make all choices matter properly. To me it's about a balance. Little hints that a choice you made "mattered" keeps the immersion, which in the end should be the purpose of them.
Other	No	Yes	3	It can definitely be done well and enhance the gaming experience, but it also feels quite redundant once you finish the game and find out it didn't really matter.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	Illusion of choice is something that writers have to use either because they have lost the track of all the other possibilities that can branch out of previous player choices or the writers are incompetent and want to fake depth in the narrative. Since it's just an illusion, it's usually not pretty when you find out you've been duped and really, when I want oranges, I won't be that happy when given a banana.
Male	No	Yes	3	It is case dependent to me. If the game (or marketing) emphasizes a freedom of choice, then it will bother me if I notice I do not actually have any agency. It comes down to setting expectations and then either fulfilling or breaking them, and how that impacts my experience.
Male	No	Yes	2	If you can make choices in the game, I feel like they should always have some kind of an impact. However, I'm not strongly opposed to it, as things that I like in video games such as character customization could technically go under "illusion of choice" the way I understand it since often none of it matters.

Female	No	Yes	3	Of course it's the best if the game gives you actually significant options like for example in Until Dawn, but then again it takes a lot of extra work to do more options and outcomes for games. So I understand why some games would go with illusion of choice. And illusion of choice is a better option than feeling like you're not making any choices.
Male	No	Yes	4	Well designed set pieces or puzzles are often more enjoyable for me than open ended tasks. I often find open ended games you can play in many ways a little dull, because often all the ways you can play it in, are not developed to their full potential. On the other hand, the best scenarios are when you can do a scripted sequence in many ways. This gives the game more depth and replay value. its better to have the illusion of many choices than just having one choice and not hiding it thou. All in all too much freedom in doing a task seems pointless and too much handholding is just insulting. So freedom of choice works quite well in my opinion.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	While the design is lazy (when obvious), it often serves to define self (customise) within the game. e.g.: Inconsequential dialogue options are as much illusory as choosing what one's character wears, if neither affects gameplay.
Male	No	Yes	2	I think it can be worthwhile, but only in less important parts of a fully fleshed game.
Male	No	Yes	4	Due to time constraints I play few narrative driven games these days. I also have never played a game for escapist reasons. I play narrative driven games to enjoy the story and characters, not to create my own. I am also somewhat of a completionist so I hate the idea of not being able to experience the game in its entirety in one experience whether it is the first or a subsequent one. I would much rather have a bunch of completely different stories woven into one than to risk having to play perhaps the whole long game with little difference again just to see a different, more satisfying ending. This is why I have not played a single Western rpg and only play visual novels that are recommended to me and have accounted for the repetitiveness in a smart way. For every amazing VN there are ten not worth my time and I don't have the time to take risks.
Female	No	Yes	4	It depends on the game. Providing extensively branching stories can create an immersive experience with great replay value, but pushing so much choice to the player can also be somewhat stressful. As someone who usually plays RPGs only once, I like having a story that has only two or three outcomes instead of ten or more. It provides a more condensed story experience that doesn't require tens of hours of replay. It can also be frustrating to feel like your choices as the player amount to nothing, but personally, I'd probably take that over having to explore the dozens of branching story paths.
Male	No	Yes	1	I dont like to be fooled.. If different choices leads to the same happening why put different options at all.
Female	No	Yes	2	In some games with a very strong narrative the illusion is not that immersion breaking, but it almost always affects the replayability. If the game's marketing is based on "your every action affects the story" and I find out it's all just immersion, I easily start to disrespect the developers.
Male	No	Yes	2	I said 2 since I would rather have a game with decisions that lead to different paths then the other. I put 2 because sometimes developers may not have time/money to implement all those decisions which could create the illusion of choice within their game.
Male	No	Yes	3	I explained in the second question.

Appendix 4/1

Male	No	Yes	2	I dislike it but in some cases it is a necessary evil but usually it just dominates the experience if its obvious or i have knowledge of it.
Male	No	Yes	4	
Male	No	Yes	3	If its done well then I don't particularly mind. Especially if there are other things that you can change (equipment, upgrades, etc.). However, if I am made to feel like a choice should matter and then it actually doesn't I will feel cheated.
Male	No	Yes	3	It works for some games i.e if you are playing as a character rather than as your persona
Male	No	Yes	4	Well if done properly the player actually has to ponder the options to see the possible outcome if not basically you know that it doesn't matter what you do, you'll end up in the same place
Other	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	As long as the player feels the choices are meaningful, it doesn't matter if they really are or not. But it's always better if they actually are meaningful and you can really see the effects.
Female	No	Yes	4	
Female	No	Yes	4	I think it's hard to make every single choice in a game have impact. No matter what you do, as a developer, you want your player to see all the cool cutscenes you made, or experience all the gameplay. Sometimes this is to the benefit of the game, like in Until Dawn, which-no matter what you do- it ramps up the horror, which is a good choice for the genre. On the other hand, it can feel bad when it's too vague, like in Fallout 4, where you just don't understand enough about your choices to make an informed decision every time.
Female	No	Yes	4	
Male	No	Maybe	3	While it's not really an integral part of a game, it can still make the world feel a bit more believable.
Male	No	Maybe	4	I really like it if its done well and does not feel like its just surface.
Male	No	Maybe	3	I don't really care, since I haven't been exposed to it that much
Female	No	Maybe	3	Not great, but some games might lack without it
Male	No	Maybe	3	I like choices in games, but not particularly the fact that they are not "real". It depends on game how obvious it is that they are artificial.
Male	No	Maybe	4	I like it for example in overwatch. Certain heroes are the best in a current meta. I like to play heroes that are out of the meta and still be usefull. So kinda going against the obvious option.
Male	No	Maybe	2	I prefer not to have Illusion of choices. But it is really hard to Make a narrative based game without it.
Female	No	Maybe	4	I like it because it makes the game more interactive and more personal or "real", and I feel that I can influence something in the game. And I understand that it would be very difficult and exhausting to create a game with endless options, or let's say 50 options to choose from. It could be demanding to play such a game, too.

Appendix 4/2

				<p>Sorry for choosing the boring middle ground answer, but I think my answer would pretty much depend on the game. With the Mass Effect trilogy I really felt betrayed, because I had spent over 100 hours playing the trilogy, I had agonized over almost every choice and fought tooth and nail to keep all of my crew members alive, I had tried my damn hardest to be the best Shepard I could be and I was so, SO invested in the game, only for it to give me a crappy ending with three equally crappy choices as a reward. I really loved the third game, but the ending just seemed lazy, even if I do somewhat get that they needed to keep the ending similar for everyone if they ever wanted to make a sequel and not like three different games depending on the ending you got (although when they did make a sequel it was set in the past heh).</p> <p>But in general I don't think that I mind the illusion of choice in games that much. Because I do like it that I can have some say in how the story plays out, and it makes the game more immersive if I can make some choices in it, even if it doesn't drastically change the outcome. It's fun to have choices, and usually it's just in one game, and not in a trilogy, so that you don't get that invested in it even if you do get somewhat invested haha, I don't know if that makes any sense. But it is different, and I don't mind it that much in general. Which is why I think I'm going to change my answer to 4, sorry.</p>
Female	No	Maybe	4	
Female	No	Maybe	3	<p>It can be done well and participating in conversations and things during the game add to the gameplay even if it didn't affect the outcome or story in a huge way. It's done well so rarely that it just feels like writers/devs don't seem to understand basic human/social interaction sometimes... Game having illusion of choice might deter me from trying it, but ultimately a good story and characters are good no matter the other stuff.</p>
Female	No	Maybe	4	<p>As long as it's well implemented, ie. not too obvious, the narrative is good enough and there's actual depth in it, not like "what do you want for breakfast, yoghurt or porridge?" (although I guess that can work too, in the right context). Some of the most memorable moments in my gaming history have been amplified by the illusion of choice and when it's done well, I really don't mind it.</p>
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Prefer not to say	No	Maybe	3	<p>I think it depends on the game so much, that I end up somewhere in the middle. Some games do it well, some not.</p>
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Female	No	Maybe	4	<p>Even if it's an illusion, the game feels more interactive when you can make choices yourself and it makes it more emotional when your choices affect the characters at the game.</p>
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Male	No	Maybe	5	<p>It feels more real like in real life I do choices. Having no choice but one isn't fun.</p>
Female	Yes	Yes	3	
Female	Yes	Yes	4	<p>It depends on the context of a choice and the way they are executed. Development resources are scarce, i would rather have the writers invest time on a tightly knit, consistent story with choices that *feel* meaningful but don't waste resources, than go overboard with meaningless options.</p>
Female	Yes	Yes	2	<p>When I notice it it's really annoying, if I don't really notice it's kinda alright.</p>

Female	Yes	Yes	2	As I said, I understand why this approach is used from a development standpoint, especially with limited resources, but ultimately I'd prefer if it wasn't used since I feel like it takes away more than it gives. If the illusion is good enough that the player doesn't realise it, it gets a pass since my experience then isn't "ruined" in the end.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	It's often better to have illusion of choice than no choice. Not all games benefit from the illusion though, this depends very heavily on the game.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	If done well, it's great! And by that I mean it takes a few playthroughs to figure it out. If done poorly, players know from the start that it's an illusion and get annoyed.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	I like that the player feels like they're a storyteller in the game.
Male	Yes	Yes	5	I like to be surprised with the outcome. I like to be driven into a story that will unveil situations that I would never be able to create for myself. I love to have a free mind, but I enjoy when a story plays with me and take me to unexpected situations. I like when the illusion of choice is smart and intriguing.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	I like getting the grasp of the story and feel like I am making a difference in their universe
Female	Yes	Yes	3	Sometimes you think your actions have an impact, but when the wall is broken, it gives a bad taste in the mouth. Why ask me at all?
Female	Yes	Yes	5	Even though I like the Quantic Dream games, still I've never had the patience to play the same game to see all endings, some of the choices in these games have pretty dire consequences and making the wrong choice always makes me feel stupid. I rather like the fact that there is some subtle choices in dialogues, paths you can take, strategies you can utilize but ultimately everyone experiences the same main story line. It's much easier to discuss with people about the experience as well when everyone doesn't have a different ending / path and for game developers too much choice is a bitch to handle.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	Completely depends on the implementation. When the illusion is a well-made and you won't notice it (unless you know the 'meta' XD) it's done right.
Male	Yes	Yes	3	
Male	Yes	Yes	3	I don't play many story-driven games, but I don't really feel strong about the illusion of choice. What matters to me is how the choices are executed and how they affect the story (and gameplay), not how strong the illusion is.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	
Male	Yes	Yes	5	When the illusion is done right, it makes the whole experience so much deeper even if the ripple effect is on a surface level. Good example is the dishonored series. There is only 2 endings to each of the games, but small differences in the endings can be affected by player actions during the gameplay.
Male	Yes	Yes	5	Illusion of choice can be the greatest tool in the writers arsenal if they can wield it correctly. To paraphrase Jon Ingold, it's more about weaving a tapestry of small choices instead of splitting players into large branches that do not interconnect.
Male	Yes	Yes	4	Generally speaking the game mechanics constrains suit the purpose of the illusion, like old point and click adventures, here's a set of verbs, use them to interact with the world we created, the illusion is that you can do anything with them except there's only one correct answer, push button, pick up item whereas "talk to" door doesn't work.

Appendix 4/4

Male	Yes	Yes	4	The illusion of choice is a limited attempt to give the player further agency in the gaming experience. Not just gameplay wise, but also narrative wise.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	It's hard for me to say if I dislike it or not, on the other hand it feels relieving that my choices aren't so important hence I don't need to stress about them too much and can enjoy the story more, on the other hand sometimes it's frustrating and makes actual playing feel futile.
Female	Yes	Maybe	5	I love games that make you choose. They're my thing. They help me get invested and immersed into a game.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	It really depends on how it's executed.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	I do not think it is necessarily a bad thing, although there are times when it is kind of frustrating to see the choices I make do not really matter in the end. I mean, sometimes it would be nice that the choices would affect the game more than just "this scene plays slightly differently if you do this"-thing, but I can understand that not all games can have multiple endings/branching storylines without it being too hard to develop or mess up the story too much. Overall, if the story itself is engaging enough, I do not really mind.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	depends on the game
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	It can be good, it can be bad. Depends on who creates and what, specifically. I also like jumping in platformer games, and hate jumping in Dragon Age Inquisition. It's really just a game mechanic feature.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	Keep it hidden and I'm fine with it.

Written survey answers c

Gender	Do you work in the game industry?	Do you know what the illusion of choice in video games is?	How do you feel about the illusion of choice in video games?	Do you have any opinions, feelings or experiences about narrative games and/or the illusion of choice that you would like to share?
Female	No	Yes	3	Said it all in the above to be honest :D
Male	No	Yes	3	I think it's sometimes better to have no choices and to serve the player a focused narrative and strong characters, so both can go through well-defined arcs. The same applies to character writing. It might be better to have a protagonist or other character with a clear goal, motivation, and relationship to the world and other characters than to have a game built around a character/characters that can be anything at any moment. Poorly implemented choices can, at worst, result in a story that makes no statements or presents no worldview, because a series of varying real - and especially meaningless - choices result in no ultimate commitment to any single idea.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	I want my actions and thus choices to have consequences.
Male	No	Yes	4	Illusion of choice has greater effect if it is combined with real choices. This has upside of more immersion but if long combinations of choices are needed for some outcomes it can have the downside of obfuscating where the meaningful choices are and that could be also frustrating to some.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Other	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	Illusion of choice seems to be a product of the games industry and the boom that the Walking Dead game caused, to make new games more appealing to the crowd who play games for the stories and the narratives. It's something that the higher ups want to be slapped onto every damn game nowadays and it's just rubbish. Games should be made with passion and care, and not like gotta do this and add this and collect the next paycheck. Illusion of choice usually also means that the game lacks much polish and finer details, while games that have actual choices usually take into account every choice that you make, and that's just good gamemaking in general.
Male	No	Yes	3	I think illusion of choice works fine with games that are meant to be played once, as it can be masked better. And sometimes the "process of choosing" (evaluating your options) can be more enjoyable than the outcome itself. However, if the story can be told more effectively and more tightly in a linear manner, I do not think adding non-consequential options will do any good for the experience.
Male	No	Yes	2	
Female	No	Yes	3	Not anything I didn't already mention... ☐
Male	No	Yes	4	I dont really play narrative driven games that much
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	Feeling like you have influence is a great feeling, but is best when accompanied by actual influence.

Appendix 5/2

				A big QoL feature that could be adopted by all games revolving around real choice would be to have a menu open, once you have finished one route, that lets you instantly jump into each and every moment of key choice that you have encountered during your playthroughs (in the playthrough you encountered it so your stats and whatever match the initial moment). That way you would instantly know where you actually made difference and the developer could insert big choices with drastic outcomes even super deep into the route without trusting the player to manually save frequently and on multiple savefiles.
Male	No	Yes	4	
Female	No	Yes	4	
Male	No	Yes	1	
Female	No	Yes	2	I don't always hate the illusion of choice in video games, but when it's too obvious or affects too strongly to the replayability, I don't want to support it. I certainly prefer strong narrative with no choices.
Male	No	Yes	2	Not really apart from the Fallout 4 beginning.
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	2	You probably got plenty of those, so id rather elaborate on the non narrative illusion of choice cases. When a game has a system where you build a character to function as you want it to but instead of a balanced outcomes from different options you get a handfull of "option sets" that produce a superior outcome and therefore all options outside those are not going to yield comparable results.
Male	No	Yes	4	
Male	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	Low budget or older games need it as they can't possibly keep a good story line going through so many options. Higher budget games like fallout have the resources to follow up on choice decisions.
Male	No	Yes	4	Talking about zelda and Detroit, Zelda they put you in an open world and basically the whole idea of the game is you're free to do whatever you want, and it's partially true but in the end no matter what you have to defeat the beasts and defeat the final boss, so they make you believe there is a choice where there isn't much of one. In Detroit the choices affect the outcome of the game and you get different endings and story plots depending on those choices, but they limit you to a certain amount of paths and basically you can't decide what you want to do or how would you do things, it's more of a you have this 3 options what do you think the character would do? Both are great games and very enjoyable but not much choice if you really think about it
Other	No	Yes	3	
Male	No	Yes	3	
Female	No	Yes	4	
Female	No	Yes	4	the illusion of choice can help the player feel like he or she matters. It makes them feel important and involved. Most games should include it, at least in a small way, to make the player more invested.
Female	No	Yes	4	in baldurs gate the are two possible outcomes no matter what choices you have made
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Male	No	Maybe	4	Actually Fall out 4 felt it could have been better without a choice at all in some conversations as the illusion of choice was done quite poorly.
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Female	No	Maybe	3	

Appendix 5/3

				You have to wonder... are there actually any real choices in video games? All of the actions are predetermined in a way. Even though you can control the character, the abilities of that character and the areas that he/she can visit are beyond player's choice. But maybe that is going a bit too philosophical. :D
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Male	No	Maybe	4	
Male	No	Maybe	2	
Female	No	Maybe	4	The examples above :) divinity, skyrim
				I think I have said pretty much everything I wanted. But one of the statements above got me thinking, "the illusion of choice is better than having real choices?" because first I was like, well that's definitely a 2, but then I got to thinking that maybe not. Again, it depends on the game, but in general I love happy endings, and I think a lot of games want to give us at least a satisfying ending. But if the choices were real and you could possibly screw up your whole story by making one or two bad choices, that could be pretty devastating as well. So maybe the illusion of choice gives to me at least a certain type of safety net, so that I can play in peace and make choices and still know that if I screw up a choice it's not the end of the world and I can still get a happy or satisfying ending. Otherwise I would probably have to use a guide at all times to tell me what the "right" choice is for getting the best ending. So I will make my answer number 3 to that question.
Female	No	Maybe	4	
Female	No	Maybe	3	I do understand the reasoning behind creating the illusion of choice and I do think it can be done well, but story wise it's not "less work", as the story needs to be even stronger and more reliable etc... It's no "easier way out" than other options.
				Sometimes it's obvious but often only the second play through breaks the illusion. Which is a bummer, since these days there are so many games to play and you're probably pretty invested in a game to play it through for the second time. Using illusion of choice instead of actual choice is pretty understandable, as developing huge dialogue trees etc. is probably a horrible resource drain (especially if only a small minority of the players is ever going to see any of it). Another question altogether is whether or not I, as a player, should be worried about a game developer's resources...
Female	No	Maybe	4	
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Prefer not to say	No	Maybe	3	
Male	No	Maybe	3	
				Having choices during the gameplay gives the game more value as you feel like you can play it many times by choosing different outcomes, even when you won't or making a different choice makes you feel bad.
Female	No	Maybe	4	
Male	No	Maybe	3	
Male	No	Maybe	5	Do you have any opinions, feelings or experiences about narrative games and/or the illusion of choice that you would like to share?
Female	Yes	Yes	3	
				Super Mario Odyssey has the interesting choice of picking where in the world to go next. I am not sure how the content creation was handled, difficulty wise but making this choice felt really important every time.
Female	Yes	Yes	4	Good luck with your thesis!!
Female	Yes	Yes	2	

Appendix 5/4

Female	Yes	Maybe	3	
				As can be seen from my answers above, I have quite a neutral opinion on this subject. I guess it really depends on the game, sometimes illusion of choice fits the game's narrative, sometimes not. It would be nice to have more narrative-driven games with multiple choices/endings that differ from each other significantly, but sometimes just the illusion of it is enough for me.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	Not at the moment.
Female	Yes	Maybe	3	Batman is unable to save factory from explosion no matter how the situation is strategized.