The Important Role of Multiple Endings on Game Immersion: An Analysis Based on The Witcher III: Wild Hunt

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Abstract: The significance of immersion in games has been extensively examined and elucidated in numerous papers, focusing on strategies to enhance game immersion and emphasizing its value. However, only a limited number of publications have addressed the significance of multiple-ending design and its impact on game immersion. The objective of this paper is to utilize the methods of literature review, literature analysis, and data collection and analysis to perform a comprehensive examination of the impact of different endings on game immersion, using the Witcher III: Wild Hunt as a case study. The author analyzes the correlation between various endings and the overall gaming experience and immersion by scrutinizing factors such as the game's backdrop and storyline, gameplay mechanics and systems, game evaluation, and player feedback.

Keywords: the witcher III: wild hunt, gameplay, immersion, multiple endings

1. Introduction

Multiple methods for establishing immersion in games encompass physical engagement, spatial manipulation, collaborative participation, narrative engagement, emotional engagement, and fun engagement [1]. Due to technological advancements, video games have transformed from basic recreational tools into a sophisticated creative medium. The inclusion of several endings in contemporary video games is a significant characteristic that empowers players to shape the game's outcome based on their decisions and behaviors. This research contends that this aspect serves as a crucial means to enhance the game's immersion. The Witcher III: Wild Hunt is a sprawling, non-linear, and multi-faceted role-playing game set in an expansive open-world environment. Players assume the position of the protagonist and must make various decisions in the game, which in turn influence the outcomes and ultimately result in diverse experiences. This research utilizes this case as a model to examine the correlation between the quantity of endings and the player's acquired expertise, in order to investigate the impact of many endings on game engagement, and maybe offer novel insights for the realm of game design.

2. Game background and storyline

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt is an open-world role-playing game created by the Polish game firm CD Projekt RED. The game is set in a fantastical realm teeming with enigma and peril. The player

assumes the persona of Geralt, a sorcerer, who embarks on a journey fraught with trials and exploits in order to locate his adopted daughter, Ciri.

2.1. Worldview

The game takes place in a fictional continent where parallel and extra dimensions are interconnected and cohabit. There occur several humanoid beings such as humans, elves, dwarves, monsters, and other similar creatures. Certain individuals with exceptional abilities can undergo a metamorphosis into either magicians or demon hunters. The world lacks harmony and amicability, frequently witnessing the slaughter and oppression of non-human races. Meanwhile, humans are entangled in imperial conflicts as the Nilfgaard Empire, under the reign of Emperor Emhyr var Emreis, launches invasions into the northern kingdoms. The Witcher III: Wild Hunt has several maps, such as the independent city of Novigrad, the Redanian city of Oxenfurt, the uninhabited region of Velen, the city of Vizima, the Skellige islands, and the witcher fortress of Kaer Morhen [2].

2.2. Characters

The main character, Geralt of Rivia, is a witcher who has undergone rigorous training in battle, tracking, and magic since his early years. He has successfully passed the grass test and has become more powerful, quicker, and immune to poisons due to the influence of mutagenic substances. Within the game, the protagonist's primary allies consist of the formidable sorceress Yennefer of Vengerberg, the sorceress Triss Meligold, the minstrel Dandarian, the dwarf warrior Zoltan Chivay, and Geralt's mentor in the art of witchcraft, Vesemir. Geralt sets out on a quest in response to the reappearance of his and Yennefer's adopted daughter, Ciri.

Ciri possesses innate magical aptitude due to her Ancient Blood, which grants her the potential for exceptional magical powers. Following the demise of her parents, she underwent rigorous training by Geralt as a demon hunter, while also receiving instruction in magic from Yennefer. She is the legitimate offspring and sole inheritor of Emperor Emhyr var Emreis. Unbeknownst to her, Emperor Emhyr, who was cursed, concealed his true identity and referred to her by a different name. Ciri absconded for an extended duration to evade the Wild Hunt and severed communication with Geralt some time ago. The Wild Hunt is a collective of elven soldiers under the leadership of Eretin the Elf, who serves as both the King of the Wild Hunt and the primary antagonist of the game. Eretin hails from a parallel dimension.

The character dynamics in the game are intricate and diverse, and they develop and transform in response to the player's decisions. This alteration significantly impacts the storyline to the extent that the player is deprived of the concluding events. These character interactions are commonly found in dramatic narratives, which deeply engage the player with the characters [3].

In addition to the intricate interconnections among these individuals, another crucial method to captivate players is by enhancing the charisma of the protagonist, namely Geralt. According to multiple researchers, Geralt is regarded as cool, highly skilled, and formidable. He fosters a feeling of joy and self-confidence among the players, instilling in them a sense of security [4].

2.3. Storyline

Geralt receives a correspondence from Yennefer and, along by his mentor Vesemir, embarks on a quest to locate her. Following their encounter in the Hundred Orchards, Vesemir returns to their place of residence. Yennefer escorts Geralt to meet Enthir, also known as Enghil. She informs him of Ciri's return and requests that Geralt locate and deliver Ciri to her. Geralt subsequently tracks Ciri's path to three locations consecutively: Willen, Novigrad, and Skellige. The narrative of Willen revolves around the Bloody Baron and the three elderly witches, with various decisions made during the

storyline influencing the outcome of the conclusion. During his time in Novigrad, Geralt encounters Tris and Dandarian, and eventually reunites with Yennefer. Ultimately, he locates Ciri in the Skellige region and escorts her back to Kelmohan. The gang commenced preparations for the imminent assault by the Wild Hunt. The arrival of various individuals to offer assistance would be contingent upon the player's decisions and successful fulfillment of quests throughout the initial stages. Regrettably, the defensive conflict concluded in a resounding loss, as Ciri observed Vesemir perish while defending himself, thereafter succumbing to a fit of fury and repelling the Wild Hunt. Following a straightforward memorial service, Geralt embarks on a mission of vengeance with Ciri, eliminating three elderly witches and the esteemed Grand Admiral of the Wild Hunt. With Avarak's assistance, they establish communication with Gale, who, upon discovering the truth about Eredin's regicide, chooses to withdraw support from Eredin. Gale provides Geralt with instructions on how to call Eredin, who ultimately succumbs to Geralt's superior forces. Nevertheless, Ciri is compelled to enter the White Frost, and the decisions made by the player in the initial phases will affect Ciri's eventual return.

The game's narrative encompasses not just the primary quest, but also numerous supplementary quests, each with its own distinct storyline and conclusive resolution. The intricate narrative and diverse range of outcomes enable players to engage in distinct gameplay and conclude the game in accordance with their personal tastes and decisions, hence intensifying the game's sense of immersion.

3. Methodology

The objective of this experiment is to illustrate and advocate for the significance of incorporating numerous ending aspects in a game as a means to augment the game's immersion.

The researcher extended invitations to a total of 60 individuals, specifically targeting those aged 16 to 28. Among the invitees, there were 32 males and 28 females. These volunteers were previously unfamiliar with or had no prior familiarity with the game The Witcher III. The experiment employed randomization to allocate the 60 individuals into two distinct groups. Group 1, designated as the control group, was granted unrestricted autonomy to engage with the game without any intervention from me. Following a period of 3 weeks, they were requested to complete a questionnaire. Group 2, sometimes known as the experimental group, had some freedom in playing the game, but I had control over the significant plot choices that influenced the game's ending. Group 2, under the author's control, only witnessed the outcome in which Ciri vanished and Geralt and Yennefer were together. The game concludes by completing a question-and-answer sheet that is identical to the one used by Group 1. Throughout this procedure, the author will remain unaffected by any dramatic elements or be provided with any information regarding the game's storyline. Volunteers will remain uninformed about the plot until they complete the game independently. Only participants who did not complete the game were permitted to respond to question 1.

The questionnaire consists of 4 questions. Participants who did not complete the game will only respond to question 1. Only group 1 can answer question 3, while question 4 is exclusive to group 2. Question 1 aims to ascertain whether the player has successfully finished the game, with the intention of excluding as many volunteers as possible who may answer the questions without discrimination. Question 2 will inquire about the player's self-perception as either a spectator or a participant in the story. Undoubtedly, active participation in the game will result in a higher level of immersion compared to passive observation. To address issue 3, the author will inquire with the individuals in group 1 regarding their interest in participating in the game once more. For question 4, the research would pose the identical inquiry to the volunteers in group 2. However, instead of a mere yes or no response, an additional alternative would be presented: the opportunity to replay the game, provided that it is done so without any interruptions.

4.   Result analysis and discussion

Three weeks later, the academics got comments from the volunteers. A total of 57 individuals successfully completed the game out of a total of 60 participants. Among the 3 individuals who did not complete the game, 2 belonged to Group 2 and 1 belonged to Group 1. Out of the 57 individuals who finished the game, 31 identified themselves as active participants in the story. Among these participants, 23 belonged to Group 1, while 8 belonged to Group 2. We can immediately examine the data shown in charts, specifically figure 1 and 2.

Furthermore, in question 3, a total of 18 individuals expressed their desire to partake in the game for a second occasion. In question 4, a total of 16 individuals expressed disinterest in this game, while 9 individuals expressed a desire to experience the game without any restrictions, and just 3 individuals were eager to replay the game using the same controls as the ending.
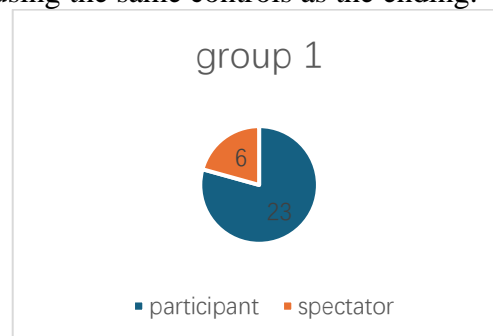

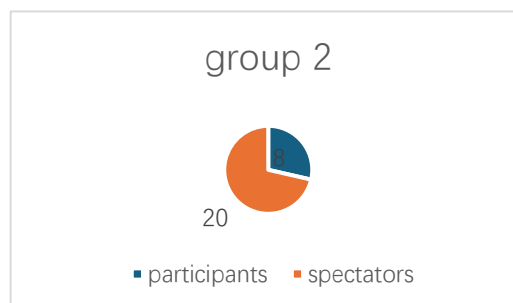Figure 1: Group 1 people as participants or spectators

Figure 2: Group 2 people as participants or spectators

It is evident from the aforementioned experiment that the inclusion or exclusion of different endings in a game, while maintaining similar fighting systems, sound systems, and graphics, significantly impacts the player's satisfaction and engagement with the game. Games including numerous endings enhance player immersion in the characters they portray and motivate them to replay the game. The inclusion of various endings enhances the sense of immersion and hence extends the longevity of the game [5].

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt has garnered significant acclaim from both gamers and the press since its launch. A significant number of players expressed that the game's incorporation of various endings heightened their level of engagement and provided them with an unprecedented sense of immersion. Many experts think that The Witcher 3 is highly adept at examining ethical dilemmas because of its incorporation of fantasy elements, portrayal of human behavior, and complex narrative paths. Interactivity enhances player engagement and involvement by transforming them into active players in the game's narrative, rather than passive observers. Despite criticism of its fighting systems, this game effortlessly captivated gamers and earned their affection [6].

The game received widespread acclaim, earning excellent ratings from both the specialized gaming press and the average gamer. Several media outlets perceived the game as an immersive experience that presented players with a narrative containing unexpected developments, despite the fact that it necessitated players to invest their own time in exploration [7]. Players particularly complimented the fighting system, exploring system, and dialog system of the game.

The players' feedback was overwhelmingly favorable, with many expressing that the game's multiple-ending structure heightened their engagement and provided an unprecedented level of immersion. They encountered the exhilaration of liberty and autonomy within the game and perceived the consequences of their decisions and deeds on the game's universe. As a result of these emotions, The Witcher III: Wild Hunt has an extended lifespan that sets it apart from other games. Despite being initially published in 2015, this product continues to sell approximately 10 million units per year after 8 years [8].

5.   Conclusion

By examining reviews of The Witcher III: Wild Hunt game and conducting the experiments, it becomes evident that the significance of many endings in enhancing the immersive experience of the game cannot be overlooked. The inclusion or exclusion of multiple endings in a game, even with the same combat system, sound, and image system, can significantly impact the player's experience. This feature allows players to influence the outcome of the game through their choices and actions, transforming them from passive spectators into active participants. This enhances the level of engagement in the game to the extent that it prolongs the game's lifespan, ultimately leading to an increase in revenue for designers and companies. Nevertheless, the insufficiency of data collection and absence of inquiry in this paper necessitate additional research on this topic in the future. However, due to the limited understanding, the research the author made now may have been modified throughout time by the fresh studies conducted by other brilliant researchers. Overall, this is a matter that warrants additional investigation for game makers at large.

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