

Challenging Gameplay and Its Impact on Player Motivation in Gaming

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 Agustus 2023

Accepted 26 September 2023

Published 26 Desember 2023

ABSTRACT

The Video Game Industry is a subsidiary of the entertainment industry that is still growing. Video Games come in different genres and have unique experiences for every player. One of those unique games is the souls-like genre. The souls-like genre is games designed with a high difficulty level, with a dedicated fanbase that loves games with these genres. In this research, we would like to conduct research about Challenging Gameplay and Its Impact on Player Motivation in Gaming. In this research we used the experimental method to observe players' reaction during the experiment and followed up with an interview. This experiment's result shows that participants who experience setbacks & defeat multiple times still show interest towards playing a game that has challenging gameplay outside of this experiment.

Keywords: Video Games, Motivation, Difficulty, Challenge

1. Introduction

As time passes, entertainment media develops and branches into various categories. Entertainment that we knew in the past, such as television programs or films in cinemas, is now starting to be replaced with new media that are relevant to the technology that society has today. The emergence of the internet has opened the gates to various other entertainment alternatives as entertainment media such as YouTube, Netflix and electronic games or video games, which are no less popular as a choice for people to use as an entertainment or recreational activity. Some study even concludes that using gaming as a recreational activity has the potential to improve real-life skills like learning, reading, creativity and problem solving [1].

Video games have also rapidly been growing since they were first created. What initially could only be played in arcades in the past are now easier to access via various platforms and devices. Now, Video Games act not only as an entertainment to some people, but also as a medium for socializing with other people while also having fun. Not only that playing a game could also be used to experience a narrative and story, based on the Video Game that is played. One of the things that video game players can experience while playing a video game is going through difficulties and overcoming challenges in-game designed by the game developer. The challenge itself is considered one of the most critical components that must be considered in video game development. Even some video game players think that if a video game does not have challenges that can be overcome and failures that accompany it, then the video game cannot be considered a video game. According to [2], extreme difficulty in video games can, at least in some instances, and according to many critics, count toward the excellence of a video game.

Received 24 Agustus, 2023; Accepted 26 September, 2023; Published 26 Desember, 2023

The challenges in a video game are generally placed there by the game developer to evoke certain emotions or feelings to create a gaming experience that impresses the player. According to [3], challenge in video games is an essential factor influencing player involvement in a video game. In general, these feelings or emotions are feelings of happiness & joy, which tend to be categorized as positive experiences, while fear and sadness are categorized as negative experiences. However, several studies regarding these negative experiences have a beneficial influence on the player's gaming experience, contributing to the player's enjoyment of playing video games, thereby causing self-reflection.

Video games known for their high difficulty level were in the arcade game era in the 1970s. At that time, in general, the content of a game was very short therefore, game developers at that time designed games with a very high level of difficulty so that players tended to experience defeat and must spend more money to continue their game. But as time goes by, the video game industry grows wider. It creates video games with various variations so that they become more accessible, and the difficulty level is reduced so that more people can access the games without challenging designs with a high level of difficulty and enjoy the video games.

Along with the emergence of games that are easy to access, several developers still dare to experiment. In 2009, a video game entitled *Demon Souls*, which was developed by FromSoftware and its game designer at that time, Hidetaka Miyazaki, was released on the PlayStation 3 console. The game's difficulty level was designed to evoke the difficulty level of classic games where players are given a challenging experience and experience a feeling of achievement. At first, *Demon Souls* was received poorly by players in Japan, but the video game achieved commercial success among video game players in Western countries while. The game was spread by word of mouth from one player to another due to the difficult battle mechanics in the game and its addictive gameplay. After the success of the *Demon Souls* game, FromSoftware then developed another game called *Dark Souls*, *Dark Souls* is a video game developed by FromSoftware released in 2011 along with its DLC released in 2012 and the remastered version released in 2018 [4]. This game is known for its relentless difficulty level because it is designed. Hence, players experience repeated defeats, go through various challenges with difficult levels and punish players by dropping all the in-game currency that the player has when they die, called Souls. This game would later be known in the Video Game industry as the Souls Franchise which is usually used to compare and measure a game's difficulty in a certain way [5]. Video Games the Souls franchise itself is praised for its high level of difficulty, which can be intimidating or attractive to its players while also having a large world which can be explored (almost) freely, thereby attracting the attention of video game players who are interested in competing and/or exploring. The influence of this "Souls Franchise" was that several other game developers tried to implement the Souls formula in their games. This then led to the emergence of a new genre in video games called Souls-Like Games. Souls-like games are typically roleplaying games including extraordinary dark, baleful atmosphere with horror elements, and these were especially dedicated to the masochist and hardcore gamers [6]. Each souls-like game is given a new touch, which can mean a game with new mechanics, graphic styles, and new ways of playing while maintaining the core elements of the souls-like game, such as the unforgiving level of difficulty, the bonfire checkpoint system and the delivery of the story through a contextual environment. in the game [7].

Thus, from the information provided above, we would like to carry out an experimental action to allow several people to play the game *Dark Souls 3* from the Souls Franchise to observe the player's reactions through playing the game with an unforgiving level of difficulty and its effect on the player's motivation and conduct interviews after the players have finished playing the game regarding the level of enjoyment and motivation of the players while they are playing the game. The data that has been collected will later be summarized by us in an article with the title "The effect of high levels of difficulty in video games on player motivation" with the hope that this research can introduce the nuances of games with the souls-like genre to Indonesia in the form of research articles with the hope that in the future it can help readers with information about the interest in the video game market in Indonesia.

2. Literature review

In the research entitled "The Effect of Difficulty as a Factor that Influences Players' Motivation to Play Games," we took some inspiration from several previous research to be used as a foundation for this research.

2.1 Literature Review

research conducted by [7], discusses the correlation between positive reviews, playing time, design, and game mechanics in games of the "souls-like" genre. This research aims to study and analyze the "souls-like" game mechanics players like by comparing reviews on Steam. The method used in this research is through a literature review and a quantitative approach where we collect reviews from Steam pages using the Steam review Python package. The data obtained is then analyzed to determine how the mechanics collected from the Steam pages correlate. The results showed a moderate to strong correlation between positive reviews and players' playing time.

The following research was conducted by [3], which discussed the influence of visual background complexity and task difficulty on the performance of action game players. This study investigates how visual background complexity and task difficulty influence players' performance in performing typical video game missions. The method used in this research is an experiment which is divided into two types of experiments: the first is designed for AVGPs action game players, and the second is for non-action game players (NVGPs); these two groups will carry out target shooting missions with manipulated levels of difficulty and the complexity of the manipulated visual background. Results show that AVGPs perform the task better than NVGPs, and both mission and background complexity affect mission performance but not player skill.

The following research was conducted by [8], which discussed the effectiveness of using the Quizlet application as a medium to increase student's motivation in learning vocabulary. The method used in this research is an experimental method where the researcher uses an unequal control group design consisting of 65 students divided into an experimental group and a control group. Student motivation was observed using an observation checklist, and the Wilcoxon test was used to process the data. The results of this research are that the Quizlet application is effective in motivating students to learn vocabulary.

The following research was conducted by [2], which discussed the argument from extreme difficulty in video games. This study discusses how extreme difficulty in video games can disturb our ability to aesthetically appreciate such video games while also introducing the concept of aesthetic striving play and how it can be applied to video games. The author discusses and explores different arguments and positions regarding the aesthetics of video games and extreme difficulty by relying on conceptual analysis, philosophical reasoning, and conceptual analysis. The author concluded how significance of maintaining high standards in control precision and twitch gameplay in modern video games, even as they incorporate complex narratives, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of video game aesthetics.

The following research was conducted by [4], which discussed the disruption of natural order in the video game dark souls. This research discusses the environmental issue distortion of the game dark souls using Garrard's ecocriticism theory and uses the qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data from the game dialogues, screenshots and also video through the narrative inside the game Dark Souls. Results of this research conclude that Dark Souls depicts the destruction of its nature through the background environment and subtle storytelling that is concluded through one's interpretation. Pointing out that video games can be a literary device to express and even give a concrete experience to those that play the game.

Based on the past research that we have collected; we will conduct an experiment based on the experiment done in [3] & [8] research about video game experimentation using observation and interview. We would also use research with similar topics such as research conducted by [7] about Souls-like, research done by [2] about extreme difficulty in video games & about the game we used on our research which is Dark Souls [4].

3. Research Method

In this research we used experimental methods and collected qualitative data. Qualitative research can be broadly defined as a kind of inquiry that is naturalistic and deals with non-numerical data [9]. In this research we gathered these data through observation and interviews. The sample for this research was 34 video game players, or gamers in Batam City. The sampling technique used in this research was purposive sampling, where we assessed and selected individuals from the population determined to take part in the experiment. According to [10], Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selects only those subjects that satisfy the objectives of the study based on the researcher's conviction. The experiment that will be carried out in this research uses a video game titled Dark Souls 3, where the experimental participants will create a new character and go through the tutorial part of the game where, in the end, the participants must defeat the tutorial boss of the Dark Souls 3 game, namely Iudex Gundyr, to complete the experiment in the research. According to [11], experimental method is a simulation in the internal environment the possibility of the external environment is different so it becomes a limitation of research on the environment outside the research, which means that research results may differ due to external factors that are not accommodated in the study. The experiment will be carried out using a laptop provided by us and a gamepad or controller to play the game. OBS is a software that can be used to record video and broadcast live which is then connected to a website [12]. While the experiment was running, we used OBS or Open Broadcast Software to record the experiment's results in the form of the player's reactions and the results of the experiment participants' gameplay footage to observe it. After completing the experimental part, we will invite the experiment participants to conduct an interview regarding their experience playing the game Dark Souls 3, which is known for its high level of difficulty. At the data processing stage from interviews, we will use contextual analysis methods to understand the answers given by the participants. According to [13], contextual analysis as a phase of natural language processing following semantic analysis whose purpose is to elaborate the semantic representation of what has been made explicit with what is implicit from the context. After the data collection process, we will analyze the data that has just been collected and produce conclusions based on the existing information.

Table Hardware Specifications

Name	Specification
Computer	Lenovo Gaming Laptop 3i
CPU	Intel I7-10750H
Memory	16GB DDR4 3200 Mhz
Graphics Card	Nvidia® Geforce GTX™ 1650
Microphone	HyperX Quadcast
Gamepad	Logitech F710 Wireless Gamepad

interview is a systematic way of talking and listening to people and another way to collect data from individuals through conversations [14]. The researcher or the interviewer often uses open questions. Data is collected from the interviewee.

Questions that were asked when conducting interviews with participants who had completed the experiment.

1. How often do participants usually play games & what games do they usually play?
2. How difficult is the tutorial of the Dark Souls 3 game for participants & why? (To make it easier for participants, the difficulty level may be indicated from 1-5.)
3. According to the participants, what is the most difficult part of the Dark Souls 3 game tutorial?
4. Outside of this experiment, would participants try playing the Dark Souls 3 game themselves if the opportunity arose?
5. What usually drives participants to play video games?

According to [15], observation is the act of recognizing a fact or occurrence, which frequently involves measuring with an instrument for weather observation. After the experiment we will conduct an interview with the participants.

Guidelines for observing participant motivation in playing the Dark Souls 3 game are as follows:

Aspect 1

How long does it take participants to complete the Dark Souls 3 game tutorial?

Score 4 participants completed the tutorial >45 minutes.

Score 3 Participants complete the tutorial in 31-45 minutes.

Score 2 Participants complete the tutorial in 16–30-minute.

Score 1 Participants complete the tutorial in 1–15-minute.

Aspect 2

How many times did participants experience defeat or death while playing?

Score 4 participants died 20> times in game.

Score 3 participants died 11-15 times in game.

Score 2 participants died 6-10 times in game.

Score 1 participant died 0-5 times in game.

Aspect 3

How often did participants manage to avoid enemy attacks?

Score 4 participants managed to dodge enemy attacks 45> times.

Score 3 participants managed to dodge enemy attacks 31-45 times.

Score 2 participants managed to dodge enemy attacks 16-30 times.

Score 1 participant managed to dodge enemy attacks 0-15 times.

Aspect 4

How often do participants fail to dodge enemy attacks?

Score 4 participants failed to dodge 45> times.

Score 3 participants failed to dodge 31-45 times.

Score 2 participants failed to dodge 16-30 times.

Score 1 participant failed to dodge 0-15 times.

Aspect 5

Number of Positive Reactions that participants showed verbally while the experiment was in progress.

Score 4 participants reacted positively verbally 15> times.

Score 3 participants reacted positively verbally 11-15 times.

Score 2 participants reacted positively verbally 6-10 times.

Score 1 participant reacts positively verbally 0-5 times.

Aspect 6

The number of positive reactions shown by participants through their behaviors while the experiment was in progress.

Score 4 participants reacted positively through their behavior 15> times.

Score 3 participants reacted positively through their behavior 11-15 times.

Score 2 participants reacted positively through their behavior 6-10 times.

Score 1 participant reacted positively through their behavior 0-5 times.

Aspect 7

The number of Negative Reactions that participants showed verbally while the experiment was in progress.

Score 4 participants reacted negatively verbally 15> times.

Score 3 participants reacted negatively verbally 11-15 times.

Score 2 participants reacted negatively verbally 6-10 times.

Score 1 participants reacted negatively verbally 0-5 times.

Aspect 8

The number of negative reactions shown by participants through behavior while the experiment was in progress.

Score 4 participants reacted negatively through their behavior 15> times.

Score 3 participants reacted negatively through their behavior 11-15 times.

Score 2 participants reacted negatively through their behavior 6-10 times.

Score 1 participants reacted negatively through their behavior 0-5 times.

In this research, we observed an experiment using a video game titled Dark Souls 3 with indicators provided on the observation checklist sheet and showing the accumulated scores obtained by participants. The total value of the observation results will be calculated in table form, which will be used from research that has been previously carried out by [8].

4. Results and Analysis

At this stage, we conducted an experiment using the video game Dark Souls 3. Of the 34 participants who have taken part in the experiment regarding Challenging Gameplay and Its Impact on Player Motivation in Gaming, we found that of the 34 participants who have taken part in the experiment tend to feel that the game Dark Souls 3 is challenging and also fun, the majority of the participants in this experiment expressed that if there was another opportunity or free time, they could see themselves playing the game individually.

4.1. Experiment Results

The following are the results of observations from experiments in this research:

Table observations results

	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4
Aspect 1	8	18	5	3
Aspect 2	10	13	8	3
Aspect 3	7	13	6	8
Aspect 4	13	15	2	4
Aspect 5	16	15	3	0
Aspect 6	31	3	0	0
Aspect 7	18	3	2	11
Aspect 8	27	7	0	0

Judging from the data obtained through experimental observations using the game Dark Souls 3, based on the results from aspects 1-4, the results of the experiment show that the general performance of participants in this experiment is on a spectrum of values 2. Aspects 1-4 themselves are indicators that relate to the player's performance in mastering the mechanics in the Dark Souls 3 game, such as playing time, number of deaths, how good the player's dodging technique is, and how often the player fails to dodge enemy attacks.

Apart from that, based on the results of observations from indicators such as aspects 5 & 6, it can be seen from the table above that there are very few positive reactions from the participants in this experiment, where many of the participants in this experiment are on the spectrum of values 1 and 2 where they very rarely experience events that trigger positive reactions. Such results is within expectation since the participants are playing the Dark Souls 3 game, which is known for its high level of difficulty.

Lastly, in the observation indicators for aspects 7 and 8, based on the observation data table above, most participants in the Dark Souls 3 experiment tend to show a slight negative reaction when playing the Dark Souls 3 game. Still, it can be seen in aspect 7 that there are quite a few participants who very often show reactions. Negative when playing, which can be seen in the value of 4.

During the implementation of this experiment, we also found several unique cases in this experiment. One example of this unique experiment result was a participant who had a very long time to complete the experiment of 1 hour 40 minutes. Even so, the participant continued this experiment and kept trying Continuously during this time and finally completed the tutorial.

We also found participants who did not want to continue the experiment because they experienced death repeatedly, even though they had a comparatively higher mastery of mechanics than other players. Not only that, but the experimental participants were also the participants with the highest negative reactions among the other players.

Several participants showed positive reactions when they experienced defeat. For example, when the participant first fights the tutorial boss of the game Dark Souls 3 and directly experiences death or when the player sees the transformation carried out by the enemy boss and is hit by an attack that seems impossible to overcome.

From the information above, we can conclude that, in general, most of the participants in this experiment performed in the middle spectrum in mastering the game's mechanics. Still, if we look at the positive reactions of players when playing the game, players tend to show either positive or negative reactions rarely, but there are still several reactions. Quite significant negative. Apart from that, there were also several unique cases. One of them is the participant with the longest experiment time of 1 hour 40 minutes, participants who stopped because the game difficulty level was too difficult for them, and several respondents with unique reactions, such as showing positive reactions when they experienced defeat.

4.2. Interview Results

After the experiment has been completed, we will invite the participants of this experiment to conduct an interview. Of the 34 interview participants, most answered that the Dark Souls 3 game was at a difficulty level of 3 out of 5. Most participants answered that the Dark Souls 3 game was difficult to play at first, but after fighting the Dark Souls 3 tutorial boss, they realized that this game has simple mechanics and felt it was starting to get easier. It should be noted that many interview participants from this experiment are people who play video games very often, and not only that, but they also have a lot of experience playing games from various genres such as Moba, FPS, RPG, Action RPG, and so on. The other most frequently heard answer from interviewees regarding the game Dark Souls 3 was concerning the Control of this game. They stated that one of the problems they needed to overcome was getting used to the unconventional buttons on the controller/Gamepad provided. Apart from that, most interview respondents answered that they were interested in playing the Dark Souls 3 game in their free time if they had the opportunity.

On the other hand, there are several interview results with unique answers, one of which is a source who answered that he wanted to play the Dark Souls 3 game. Still, he felt the game took a lot of time to play, especially because the Dark Souls 3 game is a game that needs to be played patiently. It is also necessary to study the enemy's attack patterns and because of that he is not sure if he wants to play the game in his spare time, especially when he has little playing time due to work schedule.

There was also a participant who said that he did not want to play this game anymore and recommended people not to play the Dark Souls 3 game because the difficulty level was so high and said that playing this game only caused stress.

From the information above, we can conclude that most of the experimental participants in this study were interested in playing this game outside of this experiment. Still, some participants felt that the game was challenging and a waste of time. Some even advised others to not play this game as it only causes stress.

4.3. Analysis

Based on the two results in this research, we will discuss the importance of challenges in a video game. Dark Souls 3 is a game that is known for its very high challenges. Based on the results of our experiments, observations and interviews with participants who played the Dark Souls 3 game, we saw that most players experienced various challenges that caused them to react negatively when playing the game. Still, when players have successfully passed the biggest challenge of this experiment, specifically the Dark Souls 3 tutorial boss Iudex Gundyr, we see that most of them react positively, especially when they have experienced consecutive failures.

That way, we realize how important a challenge design is in a video game so that players can feel more enjoyment when they overcome challenges that have halt their progress upon playing a and obtain a memorable and emotional playing experience.

Video games with the Souls-like genre itself are one example where players are tested with various challenges so that players can get this enjoyment. The Souls-like genre game itself proves that a game with a formula with a high level of difficulty is very popular because of the experience that the player can feel, namely the feeling when the player feels fulfilled and happy from conquering difficult challenges inside the game. But please note that not everyone can tolerate the feeling of failure, which can cause some other players to become annoyed and not want to play games in that genre in the future. But for the players who have conquered this challenge, they obtained a unique and satisfying playing experience.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results, we can conclude that video games with a high level of difficulty can influence the player's motivation. This can be seen from the results of the experiment we conducted, where we observed gamers in Batam City who played games with a high level of difficulty, namely Dark Souls 3 and through interviews we conducted with experimental participants playing Dark Souls 3, where the experimental participants in this study showed positive reactions in conquering the challenges provided in the video game and also the participants' desire to play the Dark Souls 3 game outside of this experiment.

We realize that there are still many things that can be researched from this research; therefore, it is highly recommended that future research be related to topics around games with high challenges while being more accessible to more people. Similar research is also highly recommended to investigate this research topic through various other indicators.

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