

The Emotional Use of Role-Playing Game Characters

Mitra Istiar Wardhana¹, Lely Catur Hariyanto², Muchamad Asyif Amirulloh³

mitra.istiar.fs@um.ac.id¹, lely.catur.2102545@students.um.ac.id²,

muchamad.asyif.2102545@students.um.ac.id³

Animation, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia¹²³

Abstract

RPG (Role-Playing Game) is a type of game where players take the role of fictional characters and interact in a fictional world. In RPG games, players have complete control over the characters they play, including appearance, skills, and action options. Because characters in RPG games have an important role, some RPG games also implement emotions in their game system. In real life, emotions have an important role in communication between humans. Even though the types of emotions are very diverse, not all emotions can be applied in games. In this article, we will identify the application of emotions to game characters and compare the extent to which emotions can be applied in an RPG genre game. Identification was carried out on 4 RPG games circulating on the market, namely "The Witcher" Series, "Mass Effect" Series, "Life is Strange" Series, and "Persona" Series.

Introduction

RPG (Role-Playing Game) is a type of game where players take on the role of a character and are involved in the process of character development in the game.[1]. In RPG games, players have complete control over the characters they play, including appearance, skills, and action options. A characteristic of RPG games is character advancement or "leveling up," where players can improve their character's abilities as the game progresses. Typically, players can accumulate experience points (XP) by completing missions, defeating enemies, or completing certain tasks, which are then used to improve the character's statistics and skills.

RPG games were born from the traditional form of a board game equipped with supporting media such as books, novels, guides, and maps[2]. As technology develops, RPG games have developed widely and are available in various forms such as cards, smartphones, computers, tablets, and video game consoles[3]. Technological advances have also made RPG games experience drastic improvements in visual appearance. Improved graphics processing power also supports higher realism[4]. Apart from improving visuals, RPG games also often offer deep and complex stories that can be influenced by the player's choices. Players can choose dialogue, make decisions that impact the storyline, and go on different journeys depending on their actions[5]. This provides players with a high level of freedom and immersion, so RPG games are often considered a genre full of exploration and choice.

Several RPG games implement emotional elements or deeply depict character emotions and have an impact on the story and interactions in the game. Some of these games focus on influencing the storyline based on the player's decisions or showing changes in the character's emotions in response to certain situations. The following are several examples of RPG games that apply emotions, including "The Witcher" Series, "Mass Effect" Series, "Life is Strange" Series, and "Persona" Series. For example, this game applies emotions specifically to regulate interactions between the main character and other characters in the game. In this article, we will discuss how to apply emotions to game characters in 4 examples of these games.

Method

This article was prepared using a comparative study. In this comparative study, the first step taken was to determine the focus to be studied, namely the application of emotions to RPG game characters. The next step is to plan to determine how to get the data. Data was collected through observation and literature study. Observations were made on 4 RPG games that apply emotions to their characters, namely "The Witcher" Series, "Mass Effect" Series, "Life is Strange" Series, and "Persona" Series. The data collected was then analyzed to determine the similarities and differences in the application of emotions in-game characters.

Discussion

The selection of 4 game titles is based on the relatively large number of game users and are games produced by well-known game studios in the world.

"The Witcher" Series: This game series features the main character, Geralt of Rivia, who has complex emotions and varying reactions to the choices made by the player. Each decision can affect the storyline and relationships with other characters, including friends, enemies, and romance.

The application of emotions to the character Geralt of Rivia in the game series "The Witcher" is one of the most prominent and important aspects of the games. Geralt is a complex character with a variety of emotions that are reflected in his responses and actions to the situations he faces. Some ways to apply emotions to the character Geralt in the game "The Witcher" include:

1. Dialogue and Conversation Options: Players have the opportunity to choose different responses when interacting with other characters through dialogue options. These choices will influence Geralt's reactions and emotions towards others and also direct the plot of the story.
2. Moral Decisions: "The Witcher" games often present players with difficult moral situations. Players must choose how Geralt reacts to conflict and decide what actions he takes. Each of these choices has an impact on Geralt's emotions and reputation.
3. Romantic Relationships: Players can influence Geralt's romantic relationships with other characters in the game. Each of these relationships affects Geralt's emotions and also influences how other characters respond to him.
4. Body Carrying and Facial Expressions: Geralt's carefully designed facial expressions and body movements reflect his emotions and feelings. For example, his facial expressions can show confusion, sadness, happiness, or tension according to the situation at hand.
5. Environmental Influence: The environment and events around Geralt can also influence his emotions. For example, when meeting an old friend or encountering a beautiful view, Geralt may show emotions of nostalgia or awe.
6. Dialogue in Quests: When carrying out certain missions or quests, Geralt can show various emotions depending on the context. He may show concern, courage, hatred, or sadness, depending on what happens in the story.

This application of emotion gives depth to Geralt's character and makes him feel more human. This also makes players feel more connected to the characters and storyline in the game. With the diverse emotions of the main characters, "The Witcher" becomes deeper and presents a more interesting and challenging gaming experience.

"Mass Effect" Series: This game series features Commander Shepard, allowing the player to choose his responses and social interactions. The emotions and relationships between the characters in this game greatly influence the story and game experience.

The application of emotions to the character of Commander Shepard in the "Mass Effect" game series is a very interesting and influential aspect of the gaming experience. As the main character in the game, Commander Shepard can express emotions and interact in a variety of ways, which affects how the story progresses and how other characters respond to him. Here are several ways to apply emotions to the character Commander Shepard in the game "Mass Effect":

1. Dialogue Wheel: The game "Mass Effect" uses a dialogue system with a "dialogue wheel," where the player can choose a response from the various options presented. These options include a variety of emotional expressions, such as anger, sympathy, humor, logic, or assertiveness. These dialogue options allow the player to determine Shepard's personality and emotions in various situations.
2. Influence of Player Decisions: Dialogue choices made by the player, including chosen emotional expressions, can influence how other characters respond to and interact with Shepard. This can affect relationships with other characters, including crew members and romantic characters.
3. Paragon and Renegade Reputation: The game "Mass Effect" has a reputation system that divides Shepard's choices into two categories: Paragon and Renegade. Paragon represents heroic action, empathy, and kindness, while Renegade represents decisive, impulsive, or even cruel action. Players can choose to be a Paragon, Renegade, or a mix of the two, which affects how other characters respond to Shepard.

4. Influence of Emotions on Storyline: Emotions and dialogue choices made by players can influence the overall storyline. Shepard's emotional decisions can lead to various consequences and changes in the narrative and character development.

5. Romantic Interactions: The application of emotions is also very noticeable in the romantic relationships that Shepard can build with other characters. Players must manage emotional interactions with potential romantic characters to build strong relationships.

6. Action and Reaction in Battle: The application of emotion is not only visible in dialogue but also in combat. Shepard's actions and decisions in battle can reflect his emotions, such as taking courageous actions or showing compassion towards an enemy.

By applying deep and varied emotions to the character of Commander Shepard, the "Mass Effect" series provides a level of freedom and complexity in playing the role of a protagonist and facing the vast and dynamic world in this game.

"Life is Strange" Series: This game is an interactive narrative RPG that emphasizes narrative and player choice. The emotional decisions made by the main character, Max Caulfield, influence the storyline and outcome of the game.

The application of emotion to Max Caulfield's character in the game "Life is Strange" is a very significant element in driving the story and gaming experience. Max Caulfield is the protagonist in this game and can control time, which allows him to change past and future events. Several ways of applying emotions to Max Caulfield's character in the game "Life is Strange" include:

1. Dialogue and Interaction: Players can choose Max's responses and dialogue in various situations which influence how other characters respond to him. These dialogue options include various emotional expressions such as sympathy, hatred, confusion, happiness, or fear.

2. Moral Decisions: Max is often faced with difficult moral decisions, and the player must choose the actions he takes. These decisions affect the storyline and how Max's emotions develop as the game progresses.

3. The Influence of Time: Max's ability to control time provides an additional dimension to his emotional expression. When he changes past events or sees snapshots of the future, Max's emotions can change and develop.

4. Relationships with Other Characters: Max's relationships with other characters, including his close friend, Chloe Price, and other characters around him, are affected by the choices and actions he takes. These emotional interactions create complex dynamics in the game.

5. Self-Reflection and Character Growth: Over the course of the game, Max experiences significant character growth. Her emotions reflect growth and self-reflection, especially as she has the opportunity to see how the decisions she makes affect the world around her.

6. Actions in Crisis Conditions: Max is involved in dangerous crises, and his choice of actions and emotional expressions in these situations have a major impact on the story and the fate of other characters.

The application of deep and varied emotions to the character of Max Caulfield gives a strong psychological dimension to the game "Life is Strange". This helps create an emotional connection between the player and the character, allowing the player to feel and understand Max's feelings, as well as explore the emotional implications of decisions and actions in the game. Apart from that, emotional elements also play an important role in building an atmosphere and narrative that arouses feelings in this game.

"Persona" Series: This game series combines RPG elements with social life simulation. Players must establish social relationships with other characters in the game to influence the main character's abilities and combat capabilities.

The application of emotions to characters in the "Persona" game series is one of the most prominent and influential aspects of the story and game mechanics. The "Persona" series is an RPG game that combines role-playing elements with real-world social life simulation. Some ways to apply emotions to characters in the game "Persona" include:

1. Social Links: One of the main mechanics in the "Persona" series is "Social Links" or "Confidants." Players can build social relationships with the characters around them, including classmates, teachers, and other characters. Each relationship has different levels of emotion and progression depending on the interactions and choices the player makes. The closer the social relationship, the higher the bonuses and abilities that can be given to Persona characters.
2. Decisions in Social Relationships: Players are faced with decisions that affect the development of social relationships with other characters. The emotional response the player chooses can influence other characters' feelings towards the protagonist and the progress of their relationship.
3. Character Personality: Each character in "Persona" has a different personality, and they show emotions differently in various situations. Interactions with these characters strengthen the player's understanding of the characters and reveal deeper layers of emotion.
4. Combat and Personas: During combat, the main characters use Personas, manifestations of aspects of their psyche. These personas often reflect a character's emotions, beliefs, or traits, adding a psychological dimension to combat.
5. Events and Stories: The "Persona" series offers various events and stories that involve the characters in emotional and personal events. These events help develop characters and deepen their emotions, which contributes to the overall game experience.
6. Alignment Between the Real World and the Other World: Most "Persona" games have two worlds: the real world where the characters interact with the people around them and live their daily lives, and the other world containing mazes and monsters. The application of emotions occurs in both worlds and shapes the overall storyline.

The application of deep and varied emotions to the characters in the "Persona" series gives the games a strong dimension. It also allows players to connect with characters, explore emotional development, and influence the storyline and outcome of the game. The "Persona" series has become one of the most highly praised RPG game series for its unique approach to the emotions and social interactions of characters in the games.

Although the games "The Witcher" Series, "Mass Effect" Series, "Life is Strange" Series, and "Persona" Series have different settings, storylines, and game mechanics, there are some similarities and differences in the application of emotions to the characters main in the four-game series:

Similarities

1. Dialogue and Conversation Choices: All four-game series use a dialogue system that allows players to choose the main character's responses and emotional expressions in various situations. These dialogue choices influence how other characters respond and also direct the plot of the story.
2. Moral and Ethical Decisions: All of this game series emphasizes the moral and ethical decisions that the main characters face. Players must choose actions that suit the character's values and morality, which then impacts the character's emotional development and storyline.
3. Social Relationships and Interactions: These four-game series feature complex social relationships and interactions between the main character and other characters around him. Players can build emotional relationships with other characters, influence character development, and create diverse interpersonal dynamics.
4. Influence of Player Decisions: The decisions and emotional responses taken by the player in various situations influence the storyline and development of the main character. The choices you make can have positive or negative impacts, depending on the situation and relationships with other characters.
5. Character Growth: In these four-game series, the main characters experience psychological growth and development as the story progresses. The emotions experienced by the main characters are key in depicting their development and transformation as characters.
6. Romantic Relationships: Most of these game series include the option to build romantic relationships with other characters in the game. This application of emotions in romantic relationships influences the narrative and character development.

Difference

1. Setting and Genre: These four-game series differ in setting and genre. "The Witcher" and "Mass Effect" are RPG games with more serious fantasy and science fiction worlds, while "Life is Strange" is an interactive narrative game with elements of mystery and magical realism. "Persona" is an RPG game with social life simulation elements and unique fantasy and supernatural elements.
2. Dialogue and Decision Systems: Each game series has a different dialogue system and the way player choices affect the storyline. "The Witcher" and "Mass Effect" have a "dialogue wheel" with emotional and moral choices that influence how the story develops. "Life is Strange" also has dialogue choices that influence the storyline and character relationships, while "Persona" has a "Social Links" system where players build social relationships with other characters to influence game mechanics.
3. Focus and Theme: Each game series emphasizes a different theme and story focus. "The Witcher" focuses more on morality and the consequences of actions, while "Mass Effect" emphasizes influence and relationships between characters. "Life is Strange" highlights aspects of moral choices and the consequences of time manipulation powers, while "Persona" focuses more on social interactions and character growth in the real world and the supernatural world.
4. Social Interactions: The "Persona" Series features deeper and more complex social interactions, where players can build relationships with other characters, which impacts gameplay and combat mechanics. This differs from the other three series, which place more emphasis on narrative and character development through dialogue and moral choices.
5. Type and Intensity of Emotions: The characters in these four-game series have different types and intensities of emotions. For example, "The Witcher" and "Mass Effect" often display more serious and deep emotions, while "Life is Strange" and "Persona" tend to explore teenage emotions and social aspects.
6. Visual Style and Presentation: Each game series has its own unique visual and presentation style. "Life is Strange" features a unique art style with distinctive colors and atmosphere, while "Persona" features striking character designs and a strong anime style.

Conclusion

The application of emotions to RPG game characters has developed widely. Currently, RPG game characters are not only equipped with physical attributes but are also equipped with emotions. The role of emotions applied to game characters includes conversation, decision-making, interactions with other game characters, and character progress. Although the application of emotions to characters is sometimes different in each game, each game has its unique approach to conveying the gaming experience and depicting its characters. This makes each game series have a different appeal and feel for the players.

References

- [1] M. D. Childress and R. Braswell, "Using Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games for Online Learning," *Distance Educ.*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 187–196, Aug. 2006, doi: 10.1080/01587910600789522.
- [2] J. P. Williams, S. Q. Hendricks, and W. K. Winkler, *Gaming as culture: Essays on reality, identity and experience in fantasy games*. McFarland, 2014.
- [3] A. Tyachsen, K. Newman, T. Brolund, and M. Hitchens, "Cross-format analysis of the gaming experience in multi-player role-playing games.," in *DiGRA Conference*, 2007.
- [4] M. Barton and S. Stacks, *Dungeons and desktops: The history of computer role-playing games 2e*. CRC Press, 2019.
- [5] J. P. Zagal and R. Altizer, "Examining 'RPG elements': Systems of character progression.," in *FDG*, 2014.