

Immersive Stories: How Agency,
Aesthetic and Perspective Effect Player
Experience

Research Proposal

Fenn Ingram

Richard Morgan

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1. Introduction

Immersion is described by Lukka [1] as both the player empathising with their Avatar and as the process by which this empathy is achieved. Immersion can then be seen as the quality of engagement within the world and story of a medium of entertainment. The qualities of immersion have been explored by many, mainly in respect to the realism of the media [2]. The proposed dissertation will seek to explore immersion's relation to the stories being told through the medium of videogames by looking at current literature on immersion and analysing the elements of three specific areas across several examples to discern and create a guide that can be used to create the greatest sense of immersion within a game's story.

2. Background to the Proposed Research

With the introduction of videogames, a new form of entertainment was created, and with it, a unique style of media that offers its audience greater control over their experience [3]. This control began merely as operations for a predetermined character with little substance other than a name and appearance. As games developed, they have grown to rival film in its presentation of story and character [3]. Players now have more control than ever over their avatars and their own actions. And as the worlds within games become more engrossing, immersion has grown. Players now have alternative lives within games and, in some cases, will spend thousands of hours playing them. But what is it that makes these games so immersive?

The qualities of immersion within a game's world and mechanics have been defined by many over the history of this form of entertainment. McMahan [4], states that these qualities are as follows:

1. The game world must match the player's expectations entering it.
2. The players choices must have an impact on the game world, and these actions cannot be restricted to trivial details.
3. The rules of the game world must be adhered to, even if these rules do not match those of the real world.

The above criteria define the qualities required for immersion in a game world and its mechanics, but the list is not expansive. It does not cover, specifically, immersion within the game's story and/or within the player's avatar. It is the qualities of this specific type of immersion that the dissertation will seek to examine.

During construction of the dissertation, research will be conducted into how various established luminaries have defined immersion and its relation to stories. Research will begin with the written works of Chris Crawford and Ernest Adams. Research will then be conducted into a series of keywords. These keywords are Agency, Aesthetic, Perspective, Avatar and Immersion. From these keywords several peer-review journals, articles, books, etc. will be identified, these will be analysed, and their findings will be used to broaden and depth to the research. The priority among this research will firstly be peer-review journals

and articles followed by non-peer-reviewed journals and articles and lastly books that show the progression of the subject in recent years. All these sources will be searched with the use of the previously stated keywords.

Another topic of research is of the Psychology of Immersion, information gathered in this area will help to ground all the other research points and will provide a foundation of understanding that can be used to connect points between each of the three criteria described below.

3. Aims & Objectives

The dissertation will compare the Immersive qualities of numerous games spanning multiple genres and systems, with the goal of discerning which qualities a game needs to be the most immersive. To do this, the dissertation will examine these examples through the following set of criteria:

1. Player Agency. Looking at the control a player has over their avatar and their avatar's actions [5] [6]. From selecting the name and appearance of the avatar, to the choices made during gameplay that effect the ways the game is played and how the story (if any) progresses. Example games: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* [7], *The Sims 4* [8], *Mass Effect: Legendary Edition* [9].
2. Art Style of the Game World. Looking at the effects of varying artistic styles on player immersion. More specifically, the effects of photo-realism versus stylized examples. Whether or not the realism of the Game's World will enhance player immersion. Example games: *Red Dead Redemption 2* [10], *The Witness* [11], *Stardew Valley* [12].
3. In-Game Perspective. Looking at the various types of perspective in story-based games, such as first person, third person, fixed camera, etc. Potentially looking at the effects of Virtual Reality on immersion. Example games: *Resident Evil 2* [13], *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* [14], *Resident Evil HD Remaster* [15], *Nier Automata* [16].

Once the above criteria have been analyzed, the dissertation will make conclusions using the results of the analysis to create a guide for designing a game most likely to create the largest amount of immersion for its players. In doing so, the dissertation will aim to answer the following four questions:

- Does complete freedom and control over the appearance and actions of the player's Avatar increase immersion into the game's storyline?
- Does the realism of the game world's art style impact on the player's immersion within the game's story? And is it a positive or negative impact?

- Which type of perspective (First-Person, Third-Person, etc.) elicits the greater feeling of immersion from the player into the game's story?
- Which of the three above criteria are most important in creating immersion into the game's story?

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