

**Visual Narrative and Video Games:
A Qualitative Study on the Role of Visual Narrative in Video Games on
Gamers' Storytelling Ability**



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FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INDONESIA**

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Letter of Agreement

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**Visual Narratives and Video Games: A Qualitative Study on The Role of Visual
Narrative in Video Games on Gamers' Storytelling Ability**

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Statement of Ethical Clearance

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**Visual Narratives and Video Games: A Qualitative Study on The Role of Visual
Narrative in Video Games on Gamers' Storytelling Ability**

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Statement of Academic Ethics

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Motto

Do it, or don't do it, both shall be regretted eventually. Savour the moments, with all its absurdity.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to me, mother and sister at home, and the kind people who crossed their path in my life that keeps me walking instead of dying.

Foreword

All praise and gratitude be to my Lord, Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. I also extend my prayers and greetings to the beloved of Allah, Muhammad (PBUH), who guided his people to freedom from the age of ignorance. May we always remain steadfast on the straight path, the path that is blessed by Him. I have compiled this final project report to fulfil the requirements for graduation from the Bachelor of Communication Studies Program at the Islamic University of Indonesia. This final project is a thesis entitled "A Qualitative Study on the Role of Visual Narrative in Video Games on Gamers' Storytelling Ability," using a qualitative method. The author acknowledges that in the process of compiling this scientific work, there have been several obstacles and challenges, whether external or internal. However, the author also recognizes that this scientific work was not written and completed solely by themselves. Beyond those who have been honored and respected previously, there are still individuals whose influence and contribution to the author's continued development of this scientific work are no less significant. Therefore, I would like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to:

1. Dr. Zaki Habibi, S.IP., M.Comms., as an academic supervisor who has guided the author from the beginning of writing the outline, proposal seminar, to the thesis with full patience, dedication, and advice.
2. Two proud academic advisors, Dr. Herman Felani, S.S., M.A., and Ms. Ida Nuraini Dewi Kodratningsih, S.I.Kom., M.A., along with the lecturers of the UII Communication Science study program, who continue to pay attention to us from behind with support and attention that is always available.
3. IPC 21 students, thank you for accepting me with all my quirks. You are all extraordinary. I hope you continue to be good people.
4. Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, Kevin Maherga Surbakti, and Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya. The friendly individuals who responded to the author's S.O.S. signal, being the data source to interview for this final assignment and had shared some unique perspectives in their conversation with the author. If not for their presence, this final assignment might never have been completed until the end of the author's college life

5. To my parents at home, thank you for allowing this piece of flesh to grow up with all its flaws, and to see what kind of life that human made is like. I hope you continue to be blessed with inner peace and unwavering thoughts.
6. To the little friend who hides behind the neck, the author appreciates your support and thought you might deserve a better ear to whisper. For he was afraid he might still not fully comprehend the subtle voices you blew despite your aid to finish this work.

It must be acknowledged that the author might not have felt capable of completing this scientific work with such dedication and confidence if it were not for these several figures and their inspiring advice. The author acknowledges that this thesis exhibits numerous deficiencies. Therefore, the author offers their sincere apologies if these unintentional errors might cause any form of offense. It is hoped that this will prove beneficial to all parties involved.

Yogyakarta, September 30th, 2025

Adam Satria Gibran

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Abstract

Gibran, A. Satria. (21321237). Visual Narrative and Video Games: A Qualitative Study on the Role of Visual Narrative in Video Games on Gamers' Storytelling Ability. International Program of Communication, Faculty of Social and Cultural Science, Universitas Islam Indonesia. 2025.

This study explores how visual narrative in video games influences gamers' storytelling abilities, focusing on two dimensions: identifying the criteria for effective visual narrative elements and understanding gamers' responses and interpretations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three participants and analyzed thematically using reception theory. The results identified six main criteria, namely implied narrative, narrative freedom (player agency), moral dilemmas, character design and animation, environmental storytelling, and story dynamics/elements of surprise, that synergistically encourage gamers' exploration, inferential reasoning, emotional engagement, and narrative reconstruction. Practical implications include design recommendations for developers to pay more attention to elements such as implied narrative, meaningful consequences of choices, and strategic twists. The main limitations of this study are the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data; future research should expand the informant pool, incorporate direct gameplay observation, and analyze community discourse to enable methodological triangulation. The key findings of this study confirm that gamers play an active role as narrative collaborators, shaping meaning through a cycle of perception-inference-testing-reconstruction and participating in discussions of meaning in online communities.

Keywords: visual narrative, video games, storytelling, gamer interpretation, reception theory

Abstrak

Gibran, A. Satria. (21321237). Narasi Visual dan Permainan Video: Studi Kualitatif pada Peran Narasi Visual dalam Video Games terhadap Kemampuan Bercerita Gamer. Komunikasi Program Internasional, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya, Universitas Islam Indonesia. 2025.

Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana narasi visual dalam video game memengaruhi kemampuan bercerita para pemain, dengan fokus pada dua dimensi: mengidentifikasi kriteria untuk elemen narasi visual yang efektif dan memahami respons serta interpretasi pemain. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan tiga partisipan dan dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan teori resepsi. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi enam kriteria utama, yaitu narasi tersirat, kebebasan narasi (agensi pemain), dilema moral, desain dan animasi karakter, penceritaan lingkungan, dan dinamika cerita/elemen kejutan, yang secara sinergis mendorong eksplorasi, penalaran inferensial, keterlibatan emosional, dan rekonstruksi narasi para pemain. Implikasi praktis mencakup rekomendasi desain bagi pengembang untuk lebih memperhatikan elemen-elemen seperti narasi tersirat, konsekuensi bermakna dari pilihan, dan kejutan strategis. Keterbatasan utama studi ini adalah ukuran sampel yang kecil dan ketergantungan pada data yang dilaporkan sendiri; Penelitian selanjutnya harus memperluas kelompok informan, memasukkan pengamatan langsung terhadap permainan, dan menganalisis wacana komunitas untuk memungkinkan triangulasi metodologis. Temuan utama pada studi ini menegaskan bahwa pemain memainkan peran aktif sebagai kolaborator narasi, membentuk makna melalui siklus persepsi-inferensi-pengujian-rekonstruksi dan berpartisipasi dalam diskusi makna di komunitas daring.

Kata Kunci: *narasi visual, video game, storytelling, interpretasi gamer, teori resepsi*

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background

The video game industry has grown significantly in the last several decades, not only in terms of finances and technology but also in terms of narrative complexity and visual sophistication. Sophisticated visual components and compelling storytelling are frequently combined in modern video games to create immersive experiences that impact gamers in many ways. Employing visual components, including pictures, graphics, and animation, to communicate stories is known as visual narrative. Visual narrative, or also known as visual storytelling, is crucial to creating a video game's setting, characters, and captivating plot in the context of video games. According to Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010), a visual narrative is a visual that essentially and explicitly narrates a story where the word "visual" refers to something that can be seen with the eye of a human. Unlike more traditional forms of media such as books or movies, video games enable gamers to actively engage with the narrative, make decisions, and change how it unfolds.

Video games have long been a unique form of visual narrative media. Particularly in this modern day, visual narrative has been adopted through various types of media, including video games. As video games have evolved in narrative depth, gamers increasingly engage in narrative co-creation, transforming from passive consumers into active storytellers. According to Soriani and Caselli (2020), video games reveal the narrative potentials concealed in their storylines and lore in visual components. The narrative content included in video games seems to have its own attractiveness, especially for its enthusiasts, despite its dynamic shifting from time to time. The interplay between game player and visual narrative in video games constitutes a compelling subject for media and communication studies. Particularly relevant is the role of visual narrative in shaping game narratives and influencing gamer interpretation through interactive activities such as dialogue choices and character interactions that allow gamers to affect the course of the story.

According to Follea (2020), video games offer substantial flexibility for narrative structures. Video games enable gamers to explore the designed world and make it their own stories at the same time by assuming a variety of roles presented within. In role-playing games such as Baldur's Gate III, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The Witcher III: Wild Hunt, and Genshin Impact, gamers have an infinite amount of freedom to create their own narratives through visual and interactive systems that allow them to shape outcomes. The freedom of visual interactivity provided through the video game narrative allows gamers who have control over their own narratives through choices and actions in video games to feel empowered. Understanding how video games shape narrative experiences and transform the game players into active storytellers is critical not only for the gaming industry but also for the broader study of interactive media. Jenkins (2004) added that "The relationship between games and story remains a divisive question among game fans, designers, and scholars alike."

The broad storytelling potential provided by video games can also open up more opportunities to cultivate soft skills needed for careers in various industries. Given that storytelling skills are essential across nearly all professional fields for effective communication and knowledge dissemination, storytelling has become a critical competency to master. By expanding the power of storytelling, industries can present their products and services better. Especially in the entertainment sector, which relies on visual narrative aspects such as video games, good storytelling offerings can give an artistic impression with the various stories contained therein.

This is also one of the interesting points of excellence of video games as a unique medium in introducing the ability to tell stories as an element of visual narrative. Visual narrative in video games is important for more reasons than just mere entertainment; it influences gamers' creativity and storytelling abilities. As a result of their gaming experiences, gamers are frequently motivated to create a work of creativity such as writing fanfiction, generating videos, or even developing their own video games. The technological and psychological components of video games have been the subject of much research, but the impact of visual narratives on gamers' storytelling abilities has received less attention. Hence, this study attempts to fill this gap

by employing a qualitative research design to explore how visual narrative in video games influences gamers' storytelling abilities and creative expression.

Video games diverge from linear media in that they involve active co-creation; gamers interpret visual cues, make decisions, and explore consequences, engaging in a cycle of meaning-making that extends beyond the game screen. In this regard, Wibowo and Limanda (2020) demonstrated, through their design and empirical studies, that branching structures, moral dilemmas, and environmental storytelling can shift the gamers' perspectives and encourage reflective narrative practices. Furthermore, Lovita and Rochadiani (2023) posit that narrative-rich games have the potential to function as both persuasive and pedagogical instruments. The authors posit that purposefully crafted visual and interactive components have the capacity to influence playing behavior, moral reasoning, and long-term awareness of various social issues.

The evolution of visual narratives in video games signifies games' potential as sophisticated and interactive storytelling environments, which may have a tangible impact on gamers' storytelling aptitudes. In this context, the presence of reception theory posits that meaning is not solely produced by the text (game) but also by the way the audience reads, interprets, and integrates it into the broader context of their daily experiences. This theoretical framework is particularly pertinent in elucidating the manner in which the user who plays video games aka gamers transform visual-narrative elements into personal narrative abilities. In this regard, Ang (2013) emphasized that audiences are always active and never indifferent to the content they consume, indicating that audience emotional engagement is the starting point for reception analysis.

The present study focuses on reception, particularly through the lens of Ien Ang's framework. This approach situates gamers not as passive recipients but as interpretive agents who shape the meaning of the game's visual narrative. Ang places significant emphasis on the role of the socio-cultural context and the pursuit of pleasure in the act of reading texts. This methodological approach enables the thesis researcher to examine how social background, gaming habits, and aesthetic preferences influence the manner in which gamers recount their gaming experiences. As an empirical comparison, Wibowo (2020) suggests that strong narrative

integration has now become a new pattern in video game development. This integration has been shown to influence gamers' attitudes and perceptions, as well as function as a learning mechanic and a tool for moral reflection.

The reception approach is also relevant when assessing the effectiveness of visual novel-based educational games as learning media. A study by Lovita and Rochadiani (2023) revealed that the implementation of the narrative aspect and visual elements combined as demonstrated in a visual novel format as a learning medium was both feasible and effective in enhancing student learning outcomes, particularly in character education subjects. The integration of these pragmatic development findings with reception analysis facilitates a unification of the design aspect, which encompasses the elements the game presents, and the reception aspect, which involves how game players shape the narrative and glean insights from it.

Furthermore, this study establishes reception theory as the foundational theoretical framework for examining the relationship between visual narratives in video games and gamers' storytelling abilities. Qualitative interviews and thematic analysis are effective methods for capturing the subjective and situated processes through which gamers transform visual prompts into narrative outputs. Moreover, the findings of empirical studies conducted by Lovita and Rochadiani (2023) and Wibowo and Limanda (2020) on the utilization of narrative games in moral education offer cross-domain validation for this research. The researchers' findings serve to reinforce the notion that visual narratives in video games can function as a framework to facilitate the development of storytelling and reflection skills in real-life contexts. A qualitative approach that focuses on gamers' experiences, interpretations, and social contexts will allow for the examination of not only whether games change storytelling abilities, but also how and why these changes occur in gamers' reception practices. The integration of previous studies serves to strengthen the methodological justification and demonstrates that combining text-narrative analysis with empirical reception studies is an appropriate strategy for the purposes of this research. The integration of a visual-narrative perspective with reception methodologies elucidates the visual elements that elicit storytelling and the manner in which gamers transform these elements into novel narratives within personal and communal contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

Building on the study's background, this research focuses on the relationship between visual narrative elements in video games and their influence on gamers' storytelling abilities. In doing so, this study will focus on understanding how gamers give responses and interpretations to the presented elements of visual narrative built inside the video games. The study further investigates how visual narrative elements in video games contribute to shaping the storytelling abilities of gamers. Additionally, it identifies which visual narrative elements serve as an effective influence that affects the way gamers place their responses to it. The research is situated within an online gaming community based in Bandung, a city with a substantial population of active video game enthusiasts. Moreover, online gaming communities serve as dynamic spaces where gamers from diverse cultural backgrounds engage in narrative discussions aligned to the research topic regarding video game narratives. Furthermore, the vastness of the digital environment facilitates the free and authentic expression of individual perspectives on video game narratives. This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. "What criteria define effective visual narrative elements in video games in shaping gamers' storytelling abilities?"
2. "How do gamers respond to and interpret the narrative elements in video games?"

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to understand how different video game affect gamer's storytelling ability. Through examining the unique narrative structures and gameplay mechanics of genres such as RPGs (role-playing games), actions, adventures, and others, study seeks to uncover how these elements shape gamers' storytelling abilities. Additionally, the research delves into specific narrative components in video games that significantly impact gamers' creative expression and storytelling tendencies. The identification of elements such as moral dilemmas, character developments, and plot twists can provide insights into which features of video game narratives gamers find most engaging and how these encourage them to create their own stories. Ultimately, the research aims to explore the extent to which gamers actively participate in and contribute to the narrative development within video games. By analyzing gamers' interactions with video

game narratives, the study evaluates the level of agency and creative expression afforded to them and examines how video game players or gamers influence the stories being told within the games. Furthermore, the aim of this study is also to analyze the influence of visual narratives on gamers' storytelling skills by studying how gamers interpret and respond to these visual narratives. Because gamer interpretation of visual narrative elements reveals the extent of their active involvement in meaning-making, this research examines how gamers are actively involved in forming narratives based on the visual elements presented in video games, as well as how they use visual elements to build their own narratives.

1.4 Research Benefits

The research advances theoretical understanding of the relationship between gamers' storytelling abilities and interactive media, particularly within the context of video game narration. The study sheds light on narrative theory and its use in interactive storytelling by analyzing how various narrative aspects in video games affect gamers' propensity for storytelling. Theoretical understanding of genre dynamics and how they affect video game player experiences is improved by examining how various video game genres affect gamers' narrative abilities. The study's findings advance media studies by highlighting the distinctive role of video game narration in fostering gamer participation and artistic expression.

Furthermore, the research offers practical implications for developers seeking to create narrative-driven experiences that captivate gamers and stimulate storytelling. Developers are able to produce more emotionally charged and engrossing gaming experiences by having a thorough understanding of the narrative components that significantly influence gamers' storytelling abilities. The findings can inform the design of educational games or game-based learning environments that encourage gamers' creativity and narrative abilities. The study emphasizes the cultural and creative value of interactive storytelling in video games by examining how gamers actively participate in and contribute to the story development within the medium.

Additionally, the research provides insights into how visual narrative elements in video games may inform real-world contexts requiring narrative competence. For example, storytelling

techniques derived from video games can enhance brand communication by offering compelling ways to convey ideas and capture audience attention.

1.5 Literature Reviews

1.5.1 Previous Study

A pair of prior studies inform this research: one by Soriani and Caselli (2020) and another by Folléa (2020). "Visual Narratives in Videogames: How Videogames Tell Stories Through Graphical Elements" is the title of the first research article written by Soriani and Caselli (2020). Soriani and Caselli (2020) examine the expressive potential of video games by integrating semiotics with perspectives from game studies, and focusing on specific ideas such as procedural rhetoric and expressive narrative components. Additionally, it offers five distinct frameworks for visual tales that are derived from the video game narrative theory of Henry Jenkins. The study aligns with contemporary current game narrative theories, which expand on conventional narrative theory to comprehend how visual aspects in games convey storylines and how they could influence video game players. It enables an investigation into how narrative in video games encourages its gamers to tell stories in their own words using a condensed theoretical framework. The article's exploration of the narrative possibilities of video game features, its incorporation of game studies, and its semiotic analysis will be especially pertinent to the subject of the research. In order to advance understanding of the narrative potential of video games and how they affect gamers' creative expression, the research examines specific ways in which video game narration encourages gamers to engage in storytelling. It does this by drawing on the insights and frameworks provided in the journal.

The second study, written by Folléa (2020), is titled "Experiencing, Experimenting with, and Performing Visual Narratives." Folléa (2020) identifies multiple approaches to exploring and experimenting with the serial type of narrative presentation that is frequently utilized in video games. The purpose of the study is to increase the level of engagement that video game players have with narrative content and support the creation of personalized narratives based on their gaming experiences. Folléa (2020) also discusses the connection between narrative insights and game design. The author argues that narrative approaches may be employed by game designers

to produce an engaging and visually striking gaming experience. Such strategies include implementing non-linear narrative, giving video game players choices that impact the plot, and giving them a sense of agency within the virtual environment. The article seeks to understand how video game play is oriented towards the future and how the plot influences gamers. The study emphasizes that video games are unique in that they may allow gamers to participate in the plot rather than just watch it unfold. Video game players are encouraged to get more interested in the game's narrative by this active participation, which creates a sense of investment in the plot. Overall, this study provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how narrative in video games influences gamers to become storytellers. By exploring serial narrative structures, the relationship between game design and narrative architecture, and the future-orientation of video gameplay, the study reveals how video games foster immersive storytelling experiences that enables gamers to become more invested in the storyline.

1.5.2 Theoretical Framework

1.5.2.1 Game and Media

Soriani and Caselli (2020) studied "Visual Narratives in Videogames: How Videogames Tell Stories" by encompassing semiotics and game studies perspectives to explore the narrative possibilities of visual aspects in video games. It investigates how visual and graphical components are used in video games, a distinct and varied medium, to create experiences and tell stories. In the field of game studies, the study emphasizes the expressive power of video games by offering a framework of five distinct visual narratives based on Henry Jenkins' video game narrative theory. It addresses particular ideas such as procedural rhetoric and evocative narrative aspects. The research gap identified in this article involves the application of this framework to specific case studies and the examination of how various digital spaces, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) games, employ visual-narrative elements differently. The article also proposes that particular case analysis might lead to a deeper knowledge of how distinct visual narratives can be identified by designers and gamers. This article establishes a theoretical foundation by examining the ways in which video game narration encourages its gamers to tell stories. By doing so, the current research can further creative understanding of the narrative potential of video games and their influence on video game gamers' creative expression

by dissecting the particular visual narratives employed in various games and their effects on gamers.

In a study titled "Experiencing, Experimenting with, and Performing Visual Narratives", Folléa (2020) combines the viewpoints of semiotics and game studies to explore the narrative possibilities of visual features in video games. It investigates how visual and graphical components are used in video games, a distinct and varied medium, to create experiences and tell stories. In field of game studies, the study emphasizes the expressive power of video games by offering a framework of five distinct visual narratives based on Henry Jenkins' video game narrative theory. It addresses particular ideas such as procedural rhetoric and evocative narrative aspects. The research gap in this article concerns the application of this framework to specific case studies and the examination of how various digital spaces, including augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) games, employ visual-narrative elements in different ways. The article also proposes that particular case analysis might lead to a deeper knowledge of how distinct visual narratives can be identified by designers and gamers. This study establishes a theoretical foundation by examining how video game narration encourages gamers to tell stories. The present study aims to enhance comprehension of the narrative potential of video games and their influence on gamers' creative expression by examining the distinct visual narratives employed in various games and their effects on gamers.

1.5.2.2 Reception Analysis on User Responses

Reception theory is a methodological approach within cultural studies that seeks to understand how audiences interpret and derive meaning from messages or communication discourses. This theory is especially pertinent to video games, as it aids researchers in examining how gamers engage with and interpret the narratives, visual elements, and cultural contexts within games. In the realm of video games, reception theory involves analyzing how gamers, as the user who engages in video games, interpret and find meaning in video game content, employing qualitative methods to comprehend the intricate interactions between gamers and game media.

Throughout the first chapter of the book *Dallas: Between Reality and Fiction in "Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination"* (2013), Ien Ang places pleasure at the core of the reception process, asserting that viewers' responses are not monolithic and can not be reduced to simplistic categories such as "love" or "hate." As she articulates, "Not a single letter-writer is indifferent to Dallas. And they all watch it." (Ang, 2013, p. 14). This observation enables the implementation of two interconnected analytic moves that are pertinent to this research. Firstly, audience statements are to be regarded as symptoms rather than transparent reports of motive. Secondly, pleasure is to be regarded as historically and socially constructed rather than as an individual, natural reaction.

According to Ang (2013), the construction of any form of pleasure and its function are inextricably linked to the specific social and historical context in which it is situated. Ang's methodology is predicated on a symptomatic reading of audience texts, including letters, comments, and diaries. The explicit reasons provided by viewers function as a point of departure for interpreting more profound orientations of identification, fantasy, and emotional structure. In practice, this entails that the researcher must read gamers' narratives not only for their explicit content (denotation) but also for the underlying needs and repertoires revealed by their emphasis (connotation). Ang's analysis demonstrates how fans selectively attend to elements that produce an emotional realism—as opposed to a literal realism—whereby sensational plot events become meaningful because they instantiate recognizable emotional patterns (conflict, longing, consolation). This theory posits that gamers' play-stories and experience notes should be regarded as evidence of affective structures rather than as straightforward usage logs.

A second pillar of Ang's analysis is the distinction between textual affordances and conditions of consumption. She distinguishes the program-as-text (narrative form, character functions, genre conventions) from the surrounding discourses (marketing, gossip, scheduling, social recommendation) and from the viewers' leisure practices (when and how they watch). The aforementioned three-part analytic frame is applicable to the domain of video games. The first component of analysis is game text, which includes mechanics, narrative framing, and visual style. The second component is media ecology, which includes platform, marketing, and community hype. The third component is user routines, which includes session timing and social

viewing/streaming practices. Ang's argument posits that the experience of pleasure is derived from the interplay among these layers. Consequently, this research contributes to Chapter I by proposing that the reception of gamers must be understood in the context of all three layers.

Ang also underscores the dynamic tension between identification and distancing, a phenomenon in which fans oscillate between immersive projection into characters/worlds and a reflective awareness of textual artifice. This oscillation is conducive to productivity, as it enables gamers to engage with their emotions (i.e., to rehearse, vent, and relativize real-life problems) while maintaining a safe distance. This study's analysis reveals that gamers' retellings frequently exhibit a cyclical pattern, characterized by moments of profound identification (i.e., play diaries and role-playing) interspersed with metacommentary (i.e., patch notes and critiques of design). These phenomena hold significant value for the field of reception analysis, serving as meaningful data points that inform our understanding of gamers' experiences and the broader reception of games.

Ang's work provides a defensible theoretical foundation for conceptualizing pleasure as use-value. Rather than conceptualizing enjoyment as an indication of ideological manipulation or as mere escapism, Ang proposes a novel framework for understanding video games as a socially situated use-value. This perspective asserts that the consumption of video games is driven by their capacity to offer specific emotional structures, social practices, and symbolic identifications that gamers deem beneficial in their daily lives. This framework, therefore, presents reception theory in this study as a unifying conceptual framework to link gamers' commentary on the visual narratives to the affordances, framing, and genre expectations inherent in the games.

In conclusion, Ien Ang's reception theory provides a nuanced framework for understanding user engagement with visual narratives in video games. By emphasizing the concept of pleasure as a socially and historically constructed experience, Ang's reception challenges simplistic interpretations of audience responses and encourages a symptomatic reading of gamer narratives. This approach unveils the intricate interplay among textual affordances, media ecology, and gamer routines, underscoring the manner in which these layers collectively influence the emotional and symbolic use-value of games.

Ang's concept of oscillation between identification and distancing provides valuable insight into how gamers navigate immersive engagement and critical reflection. This enables gamers to process emotions safely while maintaining awareness of the game's constructed nature. This theoretical framework enhances the analysis of gamer reception by conceptualizing gamer commentary as a form of evidence that illuminates underlying affective structures. Consequently, it provides a substantial foundation for establishing a link between user experiences and the visual storytelling and design elements of video games.

Therefore, this study focuses on reception theory, mainly Ang's reception analysis, as the main conceptual framework to understand the meaning-making process that occurs when gamers encounter visual narrative elements in video games. This approach focuses on how visual messages are encoded by designers and then decoded by players in various readings—dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—and how game interactivity (player choice, mechanics, and visual interface) mediates this process. The analysis focuses on gamer agency, or the degree of freedom gamers have to make decision-making practices that connect reception theory with empirical evidence of playing experience to build a meaningful interpretation.

Therefore, the present study focuses on reception theory, particularly Ang's reception analysis, as the primary conceptual framework to understand the meaning-making process that occurs when players encounter visual narrative elements in video games. This approach entails a symptomatic reading of gamer texts, encompassing notes, comments, interviews, and transcripts. The explicit reasons provided by gamers function as a point of departure for interpreting more profound orientations of identification, fantasy, and emotional structure. Consequently, the researcher must engage with gamers' narratives not solely for their explicit content (denotation) but also for the underlying needs and repertoires revealed by their emphasis (connotation). This analysis illustrates how gamers selectively focus on elements that evoke emotional realism rather than literal realism, whereby sensational plot events gain significance by embodying familiar emotional patterns such as conflict, longing, and consolation, and how game interactivity (including in-game decisions, mechanics, and visual interface) facilitates this process. The objective of this study is to elucidate the process of gamer agency, defined as the degree of

freedom gamers have to make decision-making practices that connect Ang's reception theory with empirical evidence of playing experience to build a meaningful interpretation.

1.5.2.3 Other Analysis in Game Reception

In "Reception Studies in Game Localisation: Taking Stock" (2018), Carme offers an overview of current reception studies within the realm of game localization. The work explains how game localization adapts video games to suit different languages and regions, aiming to deliver an engaging and immersive experience comparable to that of the original gamers. Carme (2018) underscores that game localization prioritizes user experience, allowing localizers a degree of freedom and creativity to make the game appear as if it were originally developed for the target audience. Despite its significance, the paper points out the need for additional reception studies in this field.

In studying user experience through reception theory, Putra and Annissa (2022) explores how gamers interpret and experience the video game "Among us" using reception analysis theory. This study focuses on how reception theory highlights the active role of users or gamers in interpreting and assigning meaning to media content, rather than merely receiving it passively. Grounded in cultural studies, reception theory investigates the impact of messages or communication discourses on audiences. In their study, Putra and Annissa (2022) emphasize the interpretive experiences of gamers interacting with "Among Us," analyzing how their engagement with the game's narrative, storyline, and characters as part of its visual design leads to the creation of meaning. In her article, "Agency and Companionship: An Art Historical Analysis of Video Games, 2001-2017," Moran (2022) also discusses the application of reception theory to video games. Reception theory focuses on how audiences interpret and find meaning in artworks, including video games.

Moran's article investigates how gamers engage with and interpret the narratives, aesthetics, and interactive elements of video games from 2001 to 2017, considering the diverse experiences and understandings of different gamers. Moran (2022) identifies the concept of agency in video games as the gamer's ability to make meaningful choices and actions that affect the game's world and narrative. This includes interactive storytelling, where the narrative can

change based on the gamer's decisions, creating a personalized experience. She explains that gamer control allows gamers to influence the game's outcome through their choices and actions. Moran (2022) finds that high agency enhances gamer immersion, making them feel more connected to the game world. Consequently, the actions taken by gamers often lead to various conclusions and endings, adding depth and complexity to the gameplay.

An intriguing application of reception theory in video games is found in Mänder's (2017) work titled "Life Is Strange: A Mediated Game Reception Analysis," which examines how gamers interpret and experience the game "Life Is Strange" from a gender perspective. Mänder (2017) employs reception theory to uncover how gamers' meaning-making processes are shaped by gender discourses and their emotional responses during gameplay. The article analyzes gamer interactions from videos on six different YouTube channels where gamers record themselves playing the game. Mänder (2017) explains that the game addresses themes such as female-centric relationships, suicide, euthanasia, and socio-economic issues, providing a platform for gamers to connect, discuss, and raise awareness about these topics. The game explores gender dynamics and stereotypes by highlighting how gamers navigate these within the game's context. Consequently, gamers exhibit strong emotional reactions, which enhance their involvement and investment in the game's visual narrative and storyline.

1.6. Research Method

1.6.1 Research Type and Approach

This research employed a qualitative method because qualitative approaches are particularly suited to exploring complex phenomena, understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, and examining subjective aspects of the topic in depth. The study adopted a qualitative approach involving interviews and participant observation within both online and physical communities of gamers who engage with specific video game titles. This enables systematic observation of interactions, discussions, and narrative sharing among gamers during and after gameplay. Through participant observation and note-taking, the researcher collected multiple data points to examine how gamers include the narrative elements of video games into their own storytelling.

This qualitative research employed purposive sampling techniques as its methodological approach. According to Lenaini (2021), purposive sampling is a non-random technique in which researchers deliberately select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This selection is based on scientific considerations and the suitability of informant characteristics, not to achieve statistical representativeness. Consequently, in qualitative research that emphasizes the depth and relevance of participants' experiences, researchers select subjects deemed most capable of providing insight into the phenomenon under study (Lenaini, 2021). In the context of this research, the use of purposive sampling is justified because the study's objective is to explore the meaning and narrative processes of players who have specific experiences with visual narratives. Therefore, the selection of three informants based on their experience and involvement aligns with the purposive principle, which emphasizes selecting the most relevant participants to generate rich and meaningful qualitative data (Lenaini, 2021).

1.6.2 Research Time and Location

The research was conducted over a six-month period, considering the whole interview between the researcher and the interviewee, as well as scheduling the time needed to open discussion for the interviewee. Since the researcher relied on interviews as the primary data collection method, the research was designed to allow for flexibility in scheduling and format. Interviews were conducted mainly in Bandung, a city located in West Java, Indonesia, due to the reason that the selected interviewees mostly resided in the specified region. Otherwise, interviews were conducted via Zoom as an alternative to offline meetings.

1.6.3 Research Informants

As for the selected research informants, they are individuals aged 17 to 27, regardless of gender, who have extensive experience playing narrative-driven video games across multiple genres. The individuals selected for this interview are also enthusiasts who keep up with game updates and actively follow video game discourse through news outlets, expert commentary, forums, and community discussions. There are three research informants in this study, who were purposively selected to ensure data richness and alignment with the research objectives, based on their firsthand experience and insights into the design of visual narratives in video games. They are Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, Kevin Maherga Surbakti, and Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya.

First, Muhammad Faraj Muzakki is an enthusiast of Indie genre story mode games who provides his experience in observing the storyline and narrative structure that binds a game's mechanics with visual elements, thus providing insight into the process of narrative conceptualization. Second, Kevin Maherga Surbakti is an illustrator who critically evaluates the technical and aesthetic aspects of the creation of visual assets and design decisions that influence how gamers read and respond to visual information, especially from AAA games. Last, Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya is practitioner in visual communication design who bridges theoretical and practical perspectives, such as providing analytical insights into the use of cinematography and visual framing in the narrative of a video game. This diverse composition allows for data triangulation and enrichment of the phenomenological analysis of visual narrative practices in a video game. Information regarding the three research informants is explained further on the informant profiles page in Chapter Two.

1.6.4 Data Collection

Using a conversational interview approach, this study primarily collected data through verbatim transcripts of face-to-face or recorded interview between the researcher and the informants. Additionally, data were collected through participant observation, in which the researcher engaged with participants during gameplay sessions and conducted concurrent interviews to explore the way how gamers interact with the video game. The data collected from the interview were in the form of audio.

1.6.5 Data Analysis

The research employed qualitative data analysis as its analysis model. Bazeley (2020) explains that qualitative data analysis is a systematic process for identifying patterns, themes, and insights in qualitative data such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. This analysis aims to understand and interpret the meaning contained in the data in a deep and comprehensive manner. This process facilitates a comprehensive understanding how visual narratives in video games affect the storytelling ability and creativity of gamers, as well as making valuable contributions to game development and science communication studies. The purpose of using qualitative data analysis is to develop an interpretive framework grounded in the data, involving a systematic coding process applied to interview transcripts and audiovisual

recordings. The objective is to further extend the elaboration of the researched phenomenon through examining the key elements and classifying their relationship to the experimental context and process, which is through the interview.

The present study selected and utilized games that were narratively rich and visually intensive because the objective was to examine how visual narratives foster gamers' storytelling abilities. Specifically, the researchers included three game categories: the first category includes indie games and visual novels with branching linear narratives focused on text, images, and music (e.g., *Hollow Knight*, *Omori*, *Doki Doki Literature Club*, *Stray*). The second category comprises open-world RPGs with environmental storytelling elements (e.g., *The Witcher III*, *Skyrim*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Genshin Impact*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Red Dead Redemption*), which permit visual exploration and narrative reconstruction. The final category encompasses narrative-heavy branching games that exhibit characteristics common to the previous two categories (e.g., *Detroit: Become Human*, *Heavy Rain*, *Life Is Strange*, *Little Nightmares*), which situate game players within ethical dilemmas and branching choices. This selection is predicated on extant literature demonstrating that branching structures and environmental storytelling fuel gamers' narrative inference and reconstruction (Follea, 2020). In summary, the researcher deliberately merged formats that compel gamers to interpret (implied narrative), choose (agency), and retell their visual experiences—three mechanisms pertinent to Ien Ang's reception framework.

The data analysis was systematically conducted through five stages, which were meticulously arranged to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the findings presented in Chapter III. Initially, the transcription of interviews must be conducted, and relevant notes must be collected. These notes may include posts, threads, and fan art, if available. Secondly, the initial reading of transcripts was conducted using reception analysis to identify signs of enjoyment, ambivalence, and social context. Thirdly, the implementation of open tagging is instrumental in the identification of elements of meaning, including moral choices, visual spaces containing narratives, and emotional reactions. Fourthly, thematic mapping illustrated the relationship between visual elements in the game (implied narrative, environmental clues, character design) and storytelling practices with informants, including reconstructions, fan art,

and discussions. The fifth component of the methodological framework involves the triangulation of data. This process entails the comparison of interview results, gameplay observations, and discussions. The objective of this comparison is to validate interpretations. The evaluation stage involves the use of multiple informants. This approach ensures that interpretive outcomes are receptive to their respective social contexts. This approach posits that meaning is not merely "given" by the game text, but rather, it is produced through the interaction between the text, the game player, and the social context. This assertion aligns with Ang's emphasis that the analysis of pleasure and social context is an important theoretical choice (Ang, 2013).

Chapter II

General Description of Research Object

2.1 The Role of Visual Narratives

This study focuses on visual narratives in video games, examining how visual components influence gamers' storytelling capabilities and creativity. Visual narratives encompass aspects such as graphics, character design, animation, and cinematography, which act as the primary medium for storytelling in games. These elements not only enhance the narrative but also deliver an engaging and interactive experience for gamers. Accordingly, video games allow gamers to initiate an interaction throughout the game via interactive visual narrative. Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) explain that "Interactive Visual Narrative" (IVN) is defined as a sub-genre of Visual Narrative that allows user interaction. This means that the audience or gamers can actively participate in and influence the narrative through their choices and actions. IVNs are commonly found in video games and interactive media, where the story evolves based on the user's decisions, creating a unique and personalized narrative experience for each participant. Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) emphasize that Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN) combines visual storytelling with interactivity, making them distinct from static or dynamic visual narratives.

This interactivity enhances the engagement and immersion of the audience, as they become co-creators of the narrative rather than passive observers. This study focuses on the visual narrative in video games, particularly exploring how the visual components of games impact gamers' storytelling skills and creative expression. Visual narrative, comprising elements including graphics, character design, animation, and cinematography, functions as the primary tool for delivering stories within games. These components not only enhance the plot but also create a captivating and interactive experience for the gamers. This research focuses on visual narratives in video games due to their dual role as a source of entertainment and a medium that fosters gamer creativity. The interactive nature of games enables gamers to actively participate in shaping the storyline, transforming them from passive consumers into co-creators of their own narratives. This phenomenon holds significant relevance in communication studies, as it

intersects with visual communication, interactive storytelling, and the influence of digital media on individual creativity. This study aims to explore visual narratives in video games to deepen the understanding of their role in interactive communication. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the creative industry by providing insights that can help develop more engaging and enriching gaming experiences.

In video games, visual narratives enable gamers to engage directly with the storyline, allowing them to make choices that influence the plot. This interactive element provides a heightened sense of agency and participation, setting it apart from traditional media like books or movies, where audiences passively consume the narrative. Elements such as character design, environments, and animations play a crucial role in shaping the game's world and its characters. Well-crafted visuals are able to deepen gamers' connection to the story and characters, enhancing their emotional involvement. Engaging with a game that features a compelling visual narrative can spark creativity in gamers, inspiring them to craft their own stories. This inspiration often leads to activities such as writing fanfiction, producing videos, or even designing their own games influenced by their in-game experiences. The use of visual narratives in video games can contribute to the enhancement of storytelling skills, which hold significant value across various industries. The capability to comprehend and construct engaging narratives is a crucial asset in sectors such as marketing, education, and entertainment. Moreover, well-crafted visual narratives have the power to deeply influence gamers' emotions, fostering a stronger sense of engagement and connection with the story. This emotional resonance can significantly elevate the gaming experience, making the narrative more impactful and unforgettable. By analyzing the mechanisms and effects of visual narrative in video games, this research aims to generate insights into how these elements can be utilized to enhance storytelling abilities and trigger gamers' creativity beyond.

2.2 Effective Elements of Narrative

In the art of visual storytelling, several key components contribute to constructing an effective narrative architecture. According to Jenkins (2004), there must be “narrative architects” who are responsible for building a fine concentrated structure in a story, with several effective elements of visual storytelling in a video game such as spatial storytelling. Jenkins highlights the

significance of spatial storytelling, emphasizing how the design of game environments is instrumental in delivering the narrative. As gamers navigate and engage with these spaces, they gradually uncover the story through their exploration and interactions. Second, Jenkins (2004) highlights environmental storytelling, an approach that integrates narrative details directly into the game environment. Features such as textures, sound effects, and visual hints work together to communicate the story and draw gamers deeper into the game world. For instance, in a pirate-themed game, every auditory and visual element would be designed to emphasize and reinforce the theme of piracy. Since video games frequently draw upon established narrative frameworks, the presence of evocative spaces is also important in tapping into familiar stories or genre conventions to elicit emotional engagement and enhance immersion. For example, a game inspired by *Alice in Wonderland* can utilize gamers' prior understanding of the tale to craft a richer and more resonant narrative experience. It is to be remembered that in video games, gamers have the opportunity to actively engage with or observe key narrative events. Therefore, throughout an enacted story, this may involve participating in crucial moments of the story or watching significant events unfold in the game world. These narrative developments are often directly linked to the gamer's choices and actions, which enhance the overall engagement with the story. Jenkins (2004) argues that micro-narratives—concise, localized story fragments—are essential components that play a role in the broader story. While they may be short, they can leave a lasting impact, deepening the gamer's emotional connection to the game. Examples include a poignant interaction with a character or a pivotal event within the game world. Finally, since video games offer gamers the tools to craft their own stories through their choices and actions, emergent narrative is also highlighted. This type of emergent storytelling creates a customized narrative experience, where every gamer's adventure can be different and personal.

While those elements emphasize the distinctive approach in which video games can tell stories, utilizing the interactive and immersive qualities of the medium to craft engaging narrative experiences, Zarzycki (2015) in *Video Game Narratives: Beyond the Gameplay* contends that contemporary video games such as "Mass Effect" and "Assassin's Creed" offer complex and captivating narratives that compete with those in literature and film. These stories are crafted to be immersive and emotionally resonant, pulling gamers into the narrative on a deep level. A distinctive feature of video game narratives is the gamer's power to shape the story

through their choices and actions. This interactivity gives gamers a sense of control over the narrative, making their experience more meaningful and personal. Furthermore, Zarzycki (2015) mentions that cinematic techniques, such as cutscenes and dynamic camera angles, play a significant role in enriching the storytelling experience. These methods help craft a more engaging and visually compelling narrative reminiscent of cinematic storytelling. Games such as "Assassin's Creed" notably integrate historical and cultural aspects into their stories, offering gamers a rich and educational journey. This inclusion adds layers of depth to the narrative, making the game world more authentic and captivating. Similar to Jenkins (2004), Zarzycki (2015) also stresses environmental storytelling as a crucial part. The design of game environments is essential to storytelling. Visual elements such as architecture, landscapes, and objects within the game world help convey key narrative details and contribute to enhancing the overall atmosphere. Games that feature open-world exploration, such as "Grand Theft Auto" and "Minecraft," enable gamers to craft their own narratives within the game universe. The freedom to explore and engage with the environment introduces a dimension of emergent storytelling that can be deeply captivating. This indicates that powerful visual narratives in video games frequently elicit intense emotional reactions from gamers. This is accomplished through carefully crafted characters, unexpected plot developments, and emotionally impactful moments.

2.3 Studied Video Game Characteristics

The video games examined in this study are those that prioritize visual narratives as a core component for developing their stories. By incorporating elements such as graphics, character design, animation, and cinematography, these games craft immersive and engaging worlds. These visual components not only enhance the storyline but also deliver an interactive and dynamic experience for gamers. Hence, the video games analyzed in this study primarily belong to genres such as Role-Playing Games (RPG), action, and adventure, which allow gamers to shape the narrative through their decisions and actions. Notable examples include Baldur's Gate III, The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The Witcher III: Wild Hunt, Genshin Impact, among others. These games often present gamers with moral choices, character progression, and intricate plot developments, all of which contribute significantly to the storytelling experience. A defining feature of these games is their interactive narratives, where gamers move beyond being passive observers to take on an active role as "narrators," shaping the plot through their choices.

This level of interactivity enables gamers to craft a unique experience, with each decision they make directly influencing the story's progression. The visual and narrative elements in these games not only serve as a source of entertainment but also stimulate gamers' creativity and storytelling skills. Experiences within the game often inspire gamers to craft new stories, whether by writing fanfiction, producing video content, or even designing their own games. This blend of compelling visuals and interactive narratives establishes video games as a distinctive and intriguing medium, making them a valuable subject for research in communication and media studies.

Video games with visual narrative elements possess several key characteristics that make them effective in storytelling through visuals. They often incorporate settings or elements familiar to gamers, tapping into pre-existing stories, a concept referred to as evoked narratives. Enacted narratives emphasize the gamer's actions and movement within the game world, where the design of the environment can influence the pacing of the story, either accelerating or slowing it down. Developers use visual elements to subtly guide gamers toward certain actions or storylines, a technique categorized under enacted narratives. Additionally, embedded narratives involve visual elements strategically placed by the developers to convey crucial information about the game world or storyline. Lastly, emergent narratives emerge from gamers' ability to personalize or create new elements within the game, such as in "Minecraft," where gamers can construct their own worlds and craft unique stories through their creations and interactions (Soriani & Caselli, 2020).

In line with this, video games featuring visual narratives possess distinct characteristics that make them unique storytelling mediums. These games blend localized gameplay missions with expansive narratives that can span hundreds of hours, resembling the episodic structure of TV series, while employing visually immersive and cinematic imagery akin to blockbuster films. Despite their potential for interactive storytelling, many AAA games adhere to linear and teleological narrative frameworks rooted in traditional storytelling methods. Gameplay mechanics often disrupt this linear structure, enabling gamers to experiment with causality and craft their own brief narratives through actions such as saving, reloading, dying, and retrying. While AAA games prioritize the creation of visually stunning storyworlds, independent games

are increasingly exploring innovative interactive storytelling approaches that emphasize gamer interactivity. AAA titles frequently draw upon cinematic aesthetics and techniques, resulting in visually impressive but sometimes less interactive experiences (Folléa, 2020).

Hence, the video games examined in this study are characterized by several key visual narrative elements that effectively enhance gamers' storytelling abilities. Among these elements is the inclusion of moral dilemmas, which challenge gamers to make complex decisions with far-reaching consequences for the storyline and character arcs. These choices not only deepen emotional engagement but also prompt gamers to reflect more thoughtfully on the unfolding narrative. Furthermore, robust and intricate character development, featuring well-defined backgrounds, motivations, and progression, fosters a stronger connection between gamers and the in-game characters, increasing their emotional investment in the outcomes of their actions. Another notable feature is the use of plot twists, which introduce unexpected developments that keep the narrative dynamic and intriguing. These surprises capture gamers' attention and sustain their engagement with the evolving story structure. Additionally, visual interactivity plays a pivotal role by enabling gamers to engage directly with elements such as dialogue choices, puzzle-solving, or actions that influence the storyline. This level of interaction empowers gamers with a sense of agency and control, enhancing their involvement with the narrative.

The detailed design of game environments and worlds significantly contributes to setting the mood and providing context for the story. Elements such as landscapes, architectural styles, and visual effects act as narrative cues, offering gamers a deeper understanding of the game's universe. Similarly, well-crafted dialogue and compelling narratives are critical for effective storytelling. Interactions between characters and narration delivered through text or voice serve to convey vital information about the plot and characters. Moreover, the use of symbolism within visual elements adds layers of depth and meaning to the narrative. These symbolic visuals often represent overarching themes, emotions, or abstract concepts, enriching the gamer's storytelling experience. This study highlights that such elements not only make video game narratives more engaging but also enhance gamers' creativity and ability to construct stories. By recognizing and applying these elements, game developers can craft gaming experiences that are both immersive and captivating.

2.4 Gamer Participation Analysis

The gamers' participation in the video game is important to investigate the degree to which gamers engage with and contribute to narrative development in video games. This analysis examines how gamers interact with game narratives and examines the levels of agency and creative expression they are afforded. Through their choices and actions, gamers influence storylines and character arcs, shaping the narrative in unique ways. The freedom to explore game worlds allows gamers to uncover hidden narrative details, enabling them to construct personalized stories based on their discoveries and experiences. Video games frequently confront gamers with moral dilemmas and challenging decisions, often leading to significant consequences for the unfolding storyline. Beyond direct interaction, gamers express creativity by crafting their own narratives, writing fanfiction, or producing related content inspired by their gameplay. The ability to influence the narrative heightens gamers' emotional connection to the story, fostering a deeper bond with its characters and plot. Far from being mere passive observers, gamers actively shape and direct the story, creating distinct and personal narrative experiences.

Schäfer (2022) contends that video game players' engagement and interactions play a vital role in shaping the narratives of video games. The relationship between a gamer and their in-game character is both dynamic and reciprocal, where each influences the other, crafting the story through their interactions. At the core of the narrative experience lies the gamer's decision-making, embodied in the concept of the altercharacter that shaped by the gamer's choices and decisions. These choices are deeply influenced by the gamer's personal experiences, interpretations, and emotional involvement with the game. Emotional engagement is a key factor in this relationship, as video game players' emotional reactions to their decisions and the storyline strengthen their connection to the game world and its characters. Through interactive storytelling, video games provide its gamers the opportunity to actively influence and participate in the narrative, fostering a stronger sense of agency. Additionally, the process of choice-making is embedded within a larger cultural framework of gaming norms and literacies, meaning that gamers' actions are shaped by their cultural background and gaming history. This highlights that video game players' participation and interaction are fundamental in defining the narrative of video games, resulting in a more personalized, immersive, and impactful gaming experience.

This study also includes an attempt to examine how gamers interpret and engage with visual narrative elements in video games. Components such as graphics, character design, animation, and cinematography contribute to creating a narrative experience that is both immersive and interactive. Exploring gamers' interpretations of these visual elements is crucial for understanding how they actively participate in shaping the story through the visuals presented. This perspective aligns with communication studies, as it delves into the interaction between visual media and its audience. Gaining insight into how gamers perceive visual narratives can help game developers craft more engaging and immersive experiences, while also guiding the creative industry in leveraging visual storytelling to enhance audience appeal and interaction.

According to Zarzycki (2016) in *Epic Video Games: Narrative Spaces and Engaged Lives*, gamers interact with and interpret visual narrative elements in video games through various means. Immersive visual designs draw gamers into the game world, fostering a sense of presence and allowing them to experience the narrative as though they are living it. These narratives often elicit strong emotional responses, enabling gamers to form meaningful connections with characters and the game environment. Gamers actively influence the storyline through their decisions and actions, making each experience personal and distinctive. The opportunity for exploration and discovery further enriches the narrative, offering additional layers of context that deepen gamers' understanding and engagement. Cinematic techniques, such as cutscenes and dynamic camera angles, enhance the storytelling by creating visually captivating narratives that maintain gamer interest. Games such as *Assassin's Creed* exemplify this by weaving historical and cultural elements into their narratives. These features not only provide an engaging and immersive experience but also enrich the story's depth, making the game world feel authentic and educational.

By analyzing gamer responses to these visual components, the study aims to uncover the influence of visual narratives on gamers' comprehension of the storyline, characters, and game world. Additionally, the research investigates how gamers extend these visual narratives beyond the game itself, such as by writing fanfiction, creating video content, or designing their own

games. This creative process highlights not only the level of gamer involvement but also their role in expanding and reimagining the stories originating from video games.

2.5 Informant Profiles

The objective of this study was to investigate the insights provided by informants regarding the criteria that render visual narrative elements in a video game influential on the storytelling abilities of video game players, otherwise referred to as gamers. The investigation further sought to ascertain the responses of gamers and their interpretations of the visual narrative elements displayed in a video game. Before presenting the findings, this section provides detailed profiles of the three informants to contextualize their responses and illuminate their perspectives on the role of visual narrative in constructing a meaningful story in a video game. The researcher employed the conversational interview method to select informants for the study. In practice, the interview method was carried out using connections or acquaintances from both the researcher and the informants to determine the next informant. Interviews were conducted as audio-recorded conversations to capture rich qualitative data relevant to the research objectives. Eligible informants were individuals with extensive experience playing narrative-driven video games, especially genres and titles that are specific to the research. This research seeks to establish a relationship between visual narrative and storytelling among video game players.

The research process began with an interview with Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, a student in his seventh semester at the Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing YAPARI ABA (YAPARI ABA College of Foreign Languages), majoring in Japanese. Interviews were conducted offline using a laptop and external microphone setup. During interviews, questions were presented verbally, with supporting prompts displayed on-screen via the laptop to aid clarification when necessary. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations and at different times, depending on the availability of the informants. Prior to commencing the research interview, the researcher verified that the informant met the selection criteria, particularly with regard to their experience engaging with video games that emphasize visual storytelling. This verification ensured the relevance and richness of the data collected from each interview with the informant.

This study involved a series of interviews with three informants. The informants were selected from a several sample of Indonesian citizens who were pursuing higher education at various levels and who demonstrated a keen interest in a range of genres and titles of video games, with a particular emphasis on those that utilized visual narrative as their primary medium. The three informants are Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, Kevin Maherga Surbakti, and Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya. The following data and profiles are provided for the three informants:

NAME	DOMICILE	SEX	OCCUPATION	Age	Institution	Interview Date
Muhammad Faraj Muzakki	Margahayu, Bandung	Male	Undergraduate Student	22	STBA YAPARI ABA	12-03-2025
Kevin Maherga Surbakti	Antapani, Bandung	Male	Undergraduate Student	21	Universitas Katolik Parahyangan	09-04-2025
Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya	Adipura, Bandung	Male	Undergraduate Student	21	Universitas Islam Nusantara SGD	17-04-2025

Table 2.5 Informant Profiles

Chapter III

Finding and Discussion

Chapter Three is structured as an effort to answer the two research questions formulated in Chapter One. These are concerned with the criteria for visual narrative elements in video games that are effective in influencing gamers' storytelling abilities, as well as how gamers respond to and interpret these elements. This chapter will present findings from in-depth observations and interviews, building on the theoretical framework and literature review discussed in the previous chapters. The analysis employs a visual communication and narrative participation approach to understand how visual elements in video games not only convey stories but also open up space for gamers to become active narrators in their gaming experiences. Therefore, chapter three functions not solely as a presentation of data but also as an interpretative foundation, establishing a linkage between theory and practice. Furthermore, it elucidates the contribution of visual narrative to the development of storytelling abilities in the context of interactive media.

Henceforth, all findings obtained from the research will be presented in detail in Chapter Three. In conducting this study, the researcher employed a qualitative approach as the methodological framework to facilitate the data collection process. The qualitative approach encompassed direct face-to-face discussion on the spot, by conducting interviews with the relevant sources, and the collection of supporting documentation.

This chapter uses a Reception Theory approach to explore the visual and narrative elements in gameplay, focusing on how player agency / gamer agency plays a role in meaning. The analysis looks at how player choices, controls, and interactions do more than just show passive interpretations; they actively shape, negotiate, or reject the messages put forth by the designer. This approach examines three types of reading —dominant, negotiated, and oppositional—and how they relate to moments of agency. This includes when and how player actions support the intended narrative, add context, or create alternative interpretations. Methodologically, Chapter III turns this framework into analytical themes that connect insights from interview transcripts and player stories, including how they shape meanings with

decision-making mechanisms in their gameplay experience. It identifies points where player actions change the intended visual meaning, leading to different interpretations that will be analyzed further.

3.1 Video Game as New Storytelling Media

Video games have evolved into a complex narrative medium, combining visual elements, interactivity, and emotion to create a profound experience for game players. Within the domain of visual communication, video games function not only as a passive conduit for storytelling, but also actively encourage gamers to engage with the narrative, shaping its progression and experiencing it actively. Visual storytelling in the context of video games is characterized by the integration of various elements, including character design, environment, animation, cinematography, and visual symbols, which collectively serve to convey meaning and emotion. As elucidated by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010), visual narrative is defined as a story conveyed through visual elements that can be perceived and interpreted by humans. In the context of video games, these elements serve two primary functions. Firstly, they reinforce the atmosphere and setting of the story. Secondly, they serve as the primary tools for building a living world and characters.

In this study, video games are positioned as a new medium of storytelling that is interactive and participatory. Games such as *The Witcher III*, *Skyrim*, and *Baldur's Gate III* provide gamers with the freedom to make moral decisions, form relationships between characters, and determine the direction of the story. This interactivity gives rise to an emergent narrative, wherein each gamer is afforded a unique and personal narrative experience. As Soriani and Caselli (2020) emphasizes, the latent narrative potential inherent in video games is embedded within visual elements such as lore, world design and character interactions. It is evident that gamers do not merely consume stories; they also engage in the creation of new narratives based on their personal experiences. This phenomenon is exemplified by gaming communities that engage in the active production of fan fiction, the creation of original content, and even the design of their own games. Consequently, video games function not solely as a medium of entertainment, but also as a platform for creative expression, thereby cultivating storytelling skills. In an era that is increasingly dependent on visual and narrative communication

skills, video games emerge as a pertinent and transformative platform. The present study aims to explore the influence of visual narratives in video games on gamers' storytelling abilities, as well as the manner in which they interpret and expand narratives through their gaming experiences.

As stated in the researcher's interview with Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, Faraj's Perspective on video games transcends the realm of mere entertainment, perceiving them as a 'new storytelling medium' that enables the game players to actively engage in the process of constructing the narrative. In the mind of Faraj, he emphasizes that indie games frequently employ graphical limitations to reinforce latent narratives, thereby evoking curiosity and emotional engagement among many game players.

*"Menurut saya game itu bukan cuma jadi bahan main game aja, tapi kan bisa jadi media storytelling baru ya sepertinya."
(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)*

*"It is my belief that games are not solely for playing, they can also function as a new medium for storytelling, I would posit."
(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)*

The experience of playing games such as Hollow Knight and Cyberpunk 2077 led him to the realisation that a robust narrative, particularly when coupled with significant choices, has the capacity to generate personalised storytelling pathways. Faraj also perceives that digital platforms such as YouTube and Discord are playing an instrumental role in the deepening of the narrative experience through the facilitation of discourse on lore and theories with other participants. Conversely, Kevin Maherga Surbakti articulated his perspective by underscoring interactivity as the primary strength of video games in comparison to traditional media throughout every gameplay video game players make. In his comparison between games or films, he stated:

*"Kalau kita satukan naratif visual dengan game, gue bisa bilang game can be much more fun in telling a story than a film is. Game memberikan option kepada player untuk membuat filmnya sendiri (dengan memainkannya)."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)*

"If we combine visual narrative with games, I can say that games can be much more fun in telling a story than films are. Games offer players the opportunity to create their own cinematic works (through gameplay)."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

For Kevin, his experience with Skyrim during his teenage years introduced him to the concept of "narrative freedom" in the virtual world. He cites the RPG genre as the strongest example of a new storytelling medium because it balances gameplay and narrative, allowing gamers to interpret and bring their own stories to life. With the vast freedom of game narratives such as in the RPG genre, Kevin believes that video games that combine gameplay and meaningful choices have been shown to encourage emotional and intellectual engagement that linear films cannot achieve.

In accordance with Kevin Maherga Surbakti's perspective, Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya contends that video games synthesize the merits of both novels and films by offering narrative autonomy. The author is at pains to emphasize:

"Game berbeda dengan film atau buku karena kita mainin sendiri, kita dive into story dan punya opsi untuk memilih jalur naratif sesuai proses kreatif kita."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Games are different from films or books because we play them ourselves, we dive into the story and have the option to choose the narrative path according to our own creative process"
(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

Furthermore, he draws attention to the moral dilemmas in Cyberpunk 2077 and Detroit Become Human as evidence that games have the capacity to present emotional depth that encourages self-reflection. For Delda, this interactivity serves to reinforce the status of video games as a "new form of storytelling media" that not only entertains but also invites gamers to design and experience the story directly.

3.1.1 Implied Narrative: What Triggers the Curiosity to Explore

Beginning with Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, in his interview with the researcher he contends that narratives that are not explicitly presented can encourage video game players or gamers to actively seek out lore and story details. Such as in the game entitled Hollow Knight, the act of reading in-game journals or item descriptions serves as a catalyst, prompting gamers

such as Faraj to delve deeper into the intricacies of the game world. This pedagogical approach fosters a strong sense of curiosity, prompting gamers to refine their ability to retell stories in their own style. In his quote, Muhammad Faraj Muzakki states the following:

“Storytelling dalam gamenya tuh cukup tersirat karena kita harus baca beberapa jurnal (in-game), baca beberapa item description gitu atau bahkan item-item kayak senjata-senjata yang emang ada description-description nya gitu, jadi benar-benar tersirat lah. Dan mungkin juga saya cukup beruntung dimana beberapa kali saya main game yang strong visual naratifnya tuh di game ini gitu, karena benar-benar memunculkan curiosity saya buat game-game lain gitu. Itu bagi saya benar-benar membuka dunia baru waktu saya main game itu, karena saya gak tau gitu kalo game bisa sebegini luasnya ternyata gitu.”

(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

“The storytelling in the game is quite implied because we have to read some journals (in-game), read some item descriptions like that or even items like weapons that have descriptions, so it's really implied. And maybe I'm also lucky enough to have played several games with strong visual narratives, like this one, because it really sparked my curiosity for other games. It really opened up a whole new world for me when I played it, because I had no idea games could be this expansive.”

(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

This suggests that every journal or item description, ranging from a mundane scrap of paper to an ornate weapon, contains sporadic fragments of lore, compelling gamers to explore every corner of the map in order to collect pieces of the story. This process engenders moments of profound revelation, as gamers endeavour to comprehend the theoretical underpinnings of the fallen kingdom that serves as the narrative crux of Hollow Knight's storyline, the interrelationships among its characters, and the genesis of enigmatic creatures that coalesce to form a comprehensive narrative. Faraj defines the concept of the implied narrative as a storytelling technique in which the majority of the world's information and plot are not conveyed through direct dialogue or explicit cutscenes. Rather, these elements are dispersed throughout environmental elements, which require the gamer's initiative to discover and piece together. Rather than being explicitly "told," gamers are invited to become investigators by reading notes, observing artefacts, and interpreting visual clues to understand the entire story within the game. The implied narrative approach has also been demonstrated to engender long-term curiosity. Faraj then goes on to recount his experience of how, following his own gameplay, he sought out videos discussing the game's lore on YouTube.

"Karena waktu itu saya main, ya main aja gitu kan, saya gak banyak mikirin apapun tentang visualnya segala macam gitu. Sampai akhirnya saya ketemu video di YouTube yang emang membahas khusus tentang lore, lore itu cerita-cerita (knowledge) dalam si gamenya lah gitu ya, cerita yang terkandung dalam gamenya secara rinci gitu. Jadi ada suatu channel Youtube juga yang dia tuh emang ngebahas khusus tentang lore-lore yang tersirat dalam game tersebut gitu sampai akhirnya saya nonton videonya semua, akhirnya saya seperti, 'oh gitu' dan mulai tertarik lah sama dunia game yang seperti ini."

(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

"Because at the time, I was just playing, I didn't think much about the visuals or anything like that. Until I found a video on YouTube that specifically discussed lore. Lore is the stories (knowledge) within the game, the detailed story contained within the game. There was also a YouTube channel that specifically discussed the lore implied in the game, so I ended up watching all the videos. I was like, 'I see,' and became interested in this kind of gaming world."

(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

This kind of cross-media engagement has been demonstrated to expand the scope of storytelling, transforming game players into active explorers who search various sources to complete their understanding. With regard to storytelling ability, implied narratives instruct gamers in the art of rearranging fragmented information into coherent narratives. Rather than adhering to a conventional linear narrative, gamers are required to interpret non-verbal cues, formulate their own theories, and subsequently narrate the story in accordance with their unique perspective. This ability is of particular value when gamers attempt to articulate their gaming experiences to others, as it enables them to convey their experiences in a more nuanced and detailed manner. From the standpoint of Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's theory on implied narratives, this approach aligns with Soriani and Caselli's (2020) concept of embedded narratives. This concept posits that narrative elements are methodically positioned within the game environment for gamers to reconfigure. Both of these texts place significant emphasis on the role of the gamer as a researcher, with the information being stored in visual artefacts rather than being explicitly presented by the narrator.

Soriani and Caselli (2020) define Embedded Narratives as the strategic placement of narrative elements, such as lore, visual cues, or artefacts, within the game environment. Video game developers have adopted an alternative approach to narrative delivery in which fragments

of the story are 'hidden' within graphical objects, thereby encouraging gamers to explore and gradually uncover narrative information. Within the proposed framework, Embedded Narratives are defined as a narrative approach that relies on static visual elements, such as icons, artefacts, or short texts like in-game journals, as mentioned by Faraj, to convey lore within a game. In practice, video games that rely on this narrative style require gamers to actively interpret the scattered story threads throughout the game in order to piece them together into a cohesive narrative. In this regard, the common ground and correlation between Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's perspective and that of Soriani and Caselli (2020) lies in the active role of the gamer. Faraj, who adopts the role of a gamer, becomes an 'investigator' who reads journals and item descriptions to understand the entire story. This is due to the emphasis placed by Soriani and Caselli (2020) on the fact that embedded narratives are designed to encourage gamers to be proactive, especially in exploring the game environment to uncover the lore behind it. Subsequently, Faraj methodically amasses every piece of lore he encounters, be it in the form of notes, journals or weapon descriptions, as he progresses through the game. This practice bears resemblance to the method employed in the game *Hollow Knight*, wherein story fragments are revealed. It is evident that games which rely on embedded narratives in their storytelling tend to break the story into a multitude of visual fragments. Each gamer is tasked with piecing together every fragment they find during their gameplay journey, as was the case for Faraj in his gaming experience.

In his gaming experience, Faraj also recounts how each fragment he finds tends to give rise to his own hypotheses about the setting of the game *Hollow Knight*, namely a setting that tells the story of a fallen kingdom, which can lead to 'Aha!' moments as a result. This phenomenon has been delineated by Soriani and Caselli (2020) as a benchmark for the efficacy of story types utilizing an embedded narratives approach, as it is evaluated by the extent to which self-discovery moments can elicit emotional and cognitive engagement. This provides Faraj with a form of personalised storytelling practice, as he uses accumulated knowledge to retell the story of *Hollow Knight* in his own style. The concept of embedded narrative provides a bespoke lore framework, meaning that each gamer can build a unique narrative based on their exploration path. This renders Faraj's case a concrete exemplification of the manner in which each concealed (embedded) item, fragment, and in-game journal has the capacity to engender implied

interpretations, thereby enriching the argument that video games empower each gamer as co-narrators. Moreover, it serves to affirm that the placement of hidden narratives within visual game elements prompts gamers to construct, interpret, and ultimately retell the story from their own perspective.

While also discussing implied narrative just through different examples, Kevin Maherga Surbakti deems the symbiosis between gameplay and story conducive to the efficacy of a game's visual narrative in articulating its narrative. According to Kevin, the efficacy of visual narrative is contingent upon the symbiotic operation of gameplay and story, whereby they concurrently reinforce each other's flow and interactions within a video game. As Kevin highlighted, it is an uncommon occurrence for a game to successfully amalgamate these two aspects in a harmonious manner. In an interview with the researcher, he stated:

"Dan, apa namanya, menurut gue dua hal itu (narrative and gameplay) merupakan dua kesenangan yang berbeda tapi jarang ada game yang menawarkan dua hal itu (secara apik) di satu medium yang sama."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"And, what to say, I think those two things (narrative and gameplay) are two different pleasures, but it's rare for a game to offer both (sophisticatedly) in the same medium."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

He expounded that the true essence of an ideal video game transcends the mere depiction of aesthetically pleasing graphics or engaging gameplay mechanics. Instead, it encompasses the ability to seamlessly integrate all visual components into the storytelling experience of the gamer. It is evident that, upon attaining this objective, the visual narrative assumes a pivotal role in motivating gamers to not only complete each mission presented but also to genuinely engage as "storytellers" within the game world.

In his explanation, Kevin expounded on the notion that the efficacy of visual narrative in a new video game is most potently experienced when the elements of gameplay and story are seamlessly integrated into a unified, inseparable experience. In the interview, he cited the example of *Uncharted*, where the small, rambling dialogue between characters, heard every time the gamer moves through the environment, transforms ordinary exploration moments into a

moving narrative bridge. In contrast to the conventional approach of distinguishing between "path" and "cutscene", *Uncharted* employs a continuous integration of narrative within the actions of the gamer. This ensures that the gamer remains perpetually immersed in the narrative, even during actions such as shooting or climbing. In this study, Kevin drew parallels between his experience of playing *Uncharted* and that of many other RPGs, which tend to strictly separate action and story. In this particular instance, the elements of combat, grinding, and side-by-side quests with long cutscenes do not appear to be integrated with the narrative being conveyed. In his view, the game mechanics of a game, such as free mobility, as seen in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, or moral choices that alter the storyline, as in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, as well as the advent of emergent bugs, which give rise to unanticipated narratives, has emerged as the predominant medium for conveying the plot within the context of video games. Consequently, the video game player undergoes a transformation from a passive recipient to an active participant in their own gaming experience.

Furthermore, Kevin emphasized the pivotal function of audio and music in enhancing the visual atmosphere. He frequently cites *Final Fantasy XV* as a prime example, wherein the melancholic and longing soundtrack instantaneously engenders a bittersweet atmosphere, even prior to the commencement of the game's initial scene. The auditory backdrop, which periodically intensifies during combat sequences or diminishes during moments of reflection, serves to accentuate the visual impact of the characters and animations. In this particular instance, the gamer is able to empathise with the protagonist's sadness both within the game's narrative and as a direct experience. According to Kevin, the ideal symbiosis for enjoying visual narrative offerings in a video game is the combination of two elements: gameplay that demands continuous in-game interaction, expressive visual displays through non-verbal animations, and music and audio effects that can touch the emotions of gamers playing the game. The interplay of these three elements, working in unison, forms a visual narrative that is not merely recounted but also experienced in its entirety by every gamer who engages with the game.

In his explanation, Kevin Maherga Surbakti emphasized that one of the core strengths of a video game lies in the symbiosis that combines every gameplay mechanism that must respond to the narrative, and the narrative that must guide every choice and action of the gamer. In a

sub-chapter of this research, Kevin posits that when gamers realise that every moral decision, exploration, or interaction in the game truly opens up a new story path, it is the result of the combination of gameplay and plot that mutually enliven each other, making the narrative feel unique due to its balanced immersive quality. In a systematic review by Zeng, Lombardi, and Dounas (2023), the RPG game creation method is described through three main phases: planning, task allocation (Art and Asset Creation, Programming and Game Implementation), and integration (Level Design and Content Creation). The integration phase is of particular significance in this context, as level designers utilize pre-prepared assets to convey the narrative through the game space, thereby establishing a robust connection between the gameplay mechanical elements (e.g. items, interactions, and missions) and the background narrative. This model ensures that modern RPG games do not merely present fancy cut-scenes, but rather embed the narrative in the game's mechanics and environment, thereby facilitating a "symbiosis" between the gamer's actions and the storyline during play, as Kevin perceives.

Furthermore, Zeng et al.'s (2023) explanation in their work highlights the term "experience design" proposed by Reardon and Wright (2021), an approach that utilizes various sensory stimuli in scene design that serves to foster a sense of emotional immersion and convey a powerful narrative. In their research, Zeng et al. (2023) also cite Bormann and Greitemeyer (2015), who found that RPGs with superior storytelling are able to trigger different emotional impacts in each scene, thereby strengthening the narrative through gameplay feedback. These findings lend support to Kevin's assertion that narrative in a game is not a standalone element, but rather, it becomes productive when meticulously crafted in conjunction with game mechanics. This, in turn, serves to reinforce the concept of agency or the sense of freedom experienced by gamers, who perceive that the choices they make in the game they are playing have a profound impact on the storyline. Consequently, despite the journal compiled by Zeng et al. (2023) placing greater emphasis on RPG creation methods and didactic narrative architecture, it implicitly corroborates the necessity for intimate collaboration between game mechanism design or gameplay and storytelling. According to Kevin, the term 'symbiosis' is employed to denote a state of interdependent relationship, in which the elements constituting gameplay, such as level design, asset creation and verbal/visual interactions, are meticulously crafted to

complement each other. The integration of gameplay and narrative elements fosters the creation of an immersive and compelling experience, thereby ensuring an optimal user engagement.

3.1.2 Gamer Agency: What Gives the Narrative Freedom

Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya considers the presence of narrative freedom in gamer agency as crucial, in enabling a game's visual narrative to be conveyed effectively and influencing storytelling. In Delda's opinion, a significant choice, such as being "good" or "evil" in a game, can engender a sense of true immersion in the narrative, thereby stimulating gamers' inclination to recount their distinctive experiences while playing. As in Red Dead Redemption 2, for example, as was mentioned in his interview with researchers. When asked to what extent his decisions and actions in the game influenced the story's development, Delda stated:

"Nah itu ngaruh banget di RDR (Red Dead Redemption) sama Cyberpunk 2077. (Terutama) kalau di RDR tuh kamu bisa milih buat jadi orang baik atau orang jahat. Karena dia kan emang nomad kan? ... Terus emang kerjaannya ya kalau nomad gitu lah ya, mencuri. Cuman, apa ya, karena Saya cukup berempati kalau sama orang gitu ya, jadinya waktu main RDR 2 saya memilih jadi orang baik. Jadi kita memposisikan diri sebagai main characternya gitu, dari games tersebut. Jadi ... Saya tetap jadi milih orang baik gitu."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Well, that really has an impact in RDR (Red Dead Redemption) and Cyberpunk 2077. (Especially) in RDR, you can choose to be a good person or a bad person. Because they're nomads, right? ... And then, as nomads, their job is, like, stealing. But, what precisely is, Due to my capacity for empathy towards such individuals, when playing RDR 2, I chose to be a good person. So, we position ourselves as the main character in those games. Hence ... I still choose to be a good person."
(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

Delda asserts that narrative freedom and Gamer agency are pivotal elements of effective visual narratives, as they empower gamers to assume an active role in the narrative, rather than remaining passive observers. In his interview, Delda emphasized that meaningful choices, such as being a "good" or "evil" character, engender a sense of true existence within the game world. When gamers are granted autonomy in shaping the progression of the narrative, they do not merely follow a predetermined path; they also contribute to the creation of their own unique narrative based on the decisions they make. Delda cited Red Dead Redemption 2 and Cyberpunk 2077 as examples of games that have successfully implemented this principle. In Red Dead

Redemption 2, gamers have the option to assume the role of either Arthur Morgan, characterized by compassion, or a more ruthless and opportunistic figure. These choices are not merely decorative elements that contribute to the narrative; rather, they have a direct and significant impact on the manner in which the character is perceived by Non-Player Characters (NPCs), the progression of the storyline, and the ultimate conclusion of the narrative. A comparable phenomenon is observed in *Cyberpunk 2077*, wherein the narrative trajectory of the game is contingent on the moral decisions and affiliations of the protagonist, V.

Delda asserts that this narrative freedom engenders profound emotional engagement, as gamers assume the role of the protagonist. Gamers are not merely passive recipients of the game's narrative; rather, they actively influence the progression of the plot through their actions and decisions. The concept of Gamer agency, defined as the ability to make choices, react to and influence the environment, serves as a catalyst for more personal and reflective storytelling. The unique nature of each gamer's experience, as shaped by their own personal style and interpretation, is a defining feature of this genre. In essence, the concepts of narrative freedom and Gamer agency serve to broaden the scope of storytelling within a game, expanding it from a unidirectional narrative conveyed by the game to a co-created narrative that emerges through the actions of the gamers. This is the foundation upon which the potency of visual and interactive elements in games as instruments for constructing immersive and personally meaningful narratives is revealed.

As previously stated, in their discussion of Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN), Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) explain that a narrative in a game progresses as a result of interactions initiated by the game's players. This suggests that gamers possess the autonomy to dictate the progression and rhythm of the narrative, contingent on the decisions and actions they select from the available options within the game. It is important to note that the definition of IVN is a visual narrative that involves interaction from the audience. In this context, gamers are not merely spectators who witness the storyline of the game they play; they also participate in creating their own storyline as the main character driven through dialogue choices and in-game interactions. In accordance with Delda's perspective on narrative freedom and gamer agency, Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) concurred that the progression of the narrative is contingent on viewer

intervention. The viewer has the capacity to influence the pace at which the story unfolds. Furthermore, it is explained that the spectator has the capacity to influence both the sequence and the pace of viewing on occasion. Both statements highlight user agency as a crucial point, a notion also emphasized by Delda. Gamers or players of a video game are not merely entities that passively consume the narrative display presented; they are also parties who have the freedom to shape and control the course of the narrative in the game, or at least the fate of the characters played by gamers who play the game.

In alignment with Delda's perspective, In the context of a narrative video game, such as those belonging to the RPG, open world, action, adventure and similar genres, Kevin also viewed the importance to consider the level of freedom that a gamer experiences in the actions they can perform. In addition, it is crucial to examine the consequences of each action taken within the game's narrative. Kevin emphasized that two key elements determine the extent to which a video game player is given freedom to experiment with each decision made and the consequences of that choice. It is evident that both of these elements have the capacity to transform a game. Through the utilisation of interactive visual storytelling, there is a possibility for this medium to evolve into a form of storytelling that appears to be both alive and immersive. In the interview with researchers, Kevin advanced the argument that the effectiveness of visual narratives is contingent upon two factors: the degree of freedom and the consequences of choice that should be presented by a story mode video game. Furthermore, he critiqued games with a linear narrative style, suggesting that they tend to feel like "feeding" the story without affording gamers the opportunity to act freely in the game. He stated:

*"Kadang gue merasa kayak game-nya yang ngajak gue untuk menunjukkan cerita akhirnya ya. Kayak gue dituntun oleh game, bukan gue nuntun game. Itu kalau cerita linear ya ... Tapi kalau kita (lihat) dari apakah tindakan gue benar-benar mempengaruhi cerita dalam arti bisa berubah? Not that much ... Kayak the developer doesn't trust you enough to enjoy your own story you make."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)*

*"Sometimes I feel like the game is inviting me to show it the ending. It's like I'm being guided by the game, not me guiding the game. That's if the story is linear... But if we look at it, do my actions actually affect the story in the sense that they can change it? Not that much... It's like the developer doesn't trust you enough to enjoy your own story."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)*

Conversely, when players of a video game are given the opportunity to experiment, such as designing their own plot or experiencing the real impact of the moral choices they make, according to Kevin, this can increase the effectiveness of the visual narrative level in a video game by making gamers feel more involved in the narrative they play through their game. In this regard, he emphasized that the freedom of action that engenders a moral dilemma must be effective if the consequences of gamers' choices are to influence the playing experience, rather than serving merely as superficial embellishments.

As Kevin Maherga Surbakti asserts, the possession of a certain degree of autonomy in the execution of actions within a game environment constitutes the opportunity to construct one's own narrative, as opposed to merely adhering to the primary quest or mission that has been delineated. For Kevin, the opportunity to engage in unconstrained gameplay in a video game also affords the liberty to probe the intricacies of software flaws, as exemplified in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* or *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall*. In the event of meticulous exploration, there is the potential for the fortuitous discovery of an unanticipated narrative trajectory within the game. The opportunity for exploration without linear benchmarks, such as the consequences of interacting with non-essential NPCs (Non-Player Characters), is a significant benefit of unlimited freedom. While the impact on the game's storyline may be minimal, it provides gamers with the opportunity to engage with the game world in a more open-ended manner. Kevin further posited the notion that the liberty to engage with a game in a manner that aligns with one's personal inclinations should engender in gamers a sense of agency, akin to being the architect of their own narrative. In this context, the story transcends the mere creation proffered by the video game developer, becoming a product of one's autonomous forays into the game's terrain. It is anticipated that this liberty will engender a "sense of ownership" due to the fact that the narrative is not wholly dictated by the game developer. In particular, players of story mode type games have the capacity to devise a distinctive narrative that is challenging to compare with others.

This finding is consistent with Moran's (2022) conceptualisation of agency, which closely aligns with Kevin's perspective on freedom of action and the consequences of choice or morality. In the context of video games, Moran (2022) offers a definition of agency as the gamer's capacity

to make significant decisions that exert a tangible influence on the game's world and narrative. This influence is particularly pronounced in games with intricate storylines, thereby facilitating the creation of a highly personalised and immersive experience for the gamer. It is posited that the extent of narrative control exercised by a gamer in a story game is directly proportional to their level of emotional involvement and sense of ownership over the game's narrative. This assertion is supported by the premise that increased diversity in dialogue and action options, or the presence of more concrete moral implications, is associated with heightened emotional engagement and a stronger sense of ownership among gamers. Moran (2022) also emphasized how game design that prioritize gamer agency, through branching systems and dynamic responses to gamer actions during play, results in the formation of strong emotional bonds between gamers and characters interacting in the game world, and extends the narrative's vitality through discussion and community creation around the game's narrative.

3.1.3 Moral Dilemma: What Drives the Emotional Consequences

In conjunction with elements such as the consequences of choice, which involve emotional attachment and responsibility, Kevin emphasized that an action or choice is effective when it truly feels impactful and not merely illusory. For instance, in the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, the act of declining a mission that necessitates gamers to invite an unanticipated encounter with a boss imposes upon them the moral implications of their actions. In this regard, contemporary games frequently eliminate the repercussions of delayed actions, leading to decisions that appear insubstantial and eroding the emotional bond that gamers establish with the game's narrative. In order to devise an efficacious and exhaustive visual narrative within a gaming context, it is imperative that every gamer's actions engender a discernible consequence. This suggests that the visual narrative in the game has the capacity to evoke feelings of loss or regret, as well as feelings of victory or satisfaction, in response to each action selected by the gamer. In conclusion, these substantial repercussions have the capacity to engender profound significance, typified by the capacity of video game players to experience sentiments of "guilt" or "pride" in response to each decision made.

The apparent correlation between visual narrative and the concept of freedom of action, as well as the consequences of those actions, is that visual storytelling not only enhances the

aesthetic appeal of the world in which the narrative is set, but also functions as a conduit through which the consequences of the choices and actions made by the gamers are communicated. For instance, according to Kevin, this could be the animation of a character visibly distressed upon seeing an NPC (Non-Player Character) family weep, as depicted in the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. The concept of can be defined as the occurrence of branching cutscenes that reflect a gamer's choices and actions. An exemplary illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the video game *Detroit: Become Human* and other titles developed by Telltale Games. The interplay between visual narrative and the concept of freedom of action, as well as the repercussions of gamers' actions within the game, can be illustrated through the utilisation of open world design. This approach unveils novel areas for exploration and introduces Non-Player Characters (NPCs) that exhibit shifts in disposition in response to the moral choices made by gamers during the course of a video game. Consequently, by integrating open world design, animation, and dynamic dialogue, a game can facilitate gamers' comprehension of the consequences of their decisions, obviating the need for extensive textual exposition.

It is evident that the impact on the storytelling abilities of video game players has resulted in gamers assuming the role of active narrators. This is due to the fact that the story is not provided in its entirety by the game developer, but rather is constructed from various elements such as exploration experiences, decisions that yield different consequences, and visual moments that provide elements of surprise. It is evident that the fan community of a video game, particularly those of narrative games, has the capacity to disseminate distinctive accounts of their personal experiences. This phenomenon fosters discourse concerning both the implicit and the abstruse elements of the game's lore, as well as theories proposed by enthusiasts. These theories possess the capability to prolong the narrative arc of a game beyond its initial conception.

In this research, the two elements presented by Kevin Maherga Surbakti are analyzed. The first element is the degree of freedom given to each player of a video game. The second element is the weight of the moral consequences of each choice they make. These elements are emphasized as one of the main strengths of video games, which lies in the design of the narrative writing. In his experience of playing RPG genre games, such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, Kevin has perceived that morally weighted options, including saving NPCs (Non-Player

Characters), sacrificing a character, or pursuing a side quest, can result in the opening up of different story paths and the rendering of the plot as "your own". This freedom is not merely a variation in gameplay; it also presents an opportunity for each video game player to formulate the narrative of the game they play personally. It is the contention of Kevin that, upon realising the significance of every decision made by gamers, which can result in tangible changes to the game, whether in terms of character alterations, alternative endings, or reward items, gamers are prompted to adopt a more critical thinking process. This, in turn, encourages them to devise more sophisticated narrative strategies and, ultimately, to refine their own abilities to re-narrate their gaming experiences into a more intricate and diverse realm of storytelling.

Therefore, upon combining these two concepts (gamer agency and moral dilemma), it becomes evident that the degree of freedom and consequences of choice described by Kevin are, in fact, practical manifestations of the concept of agency, as elucidated by Moran (2022). The concept of freedom of exploration, coupled with the moral dilemmas confronted by gamers, serves as the catalyst for the activation of the agency mechanism. This phenomenon is characterized by the dynamic interplay between gamers' adherence to the narrative plot and their capacity to actively contribute to the evolution of the story through their actions. In this sub-chapter, the synergistic understanding discussed has indirectly enriched the argument that the power of visual narrative in a video game lies not only in the beauty of the graphics displayed or the world-building design that adorns the setting, but also in the extent to which the video game is able to empower its gamers to become interpreters who understand the core of the narrative being told, leave traces of their choices and actions personally, and share unique stories from the results of this exploration of freedom.

Identical to Kevin's argument, in his experience playing *Hollow Knight*, Faraj also observed that moral choices and consequences that have a narrative impact can effectively engage him more with the story of the game he is playing. This is indicated as one of his points towards the criteria which makes an effective visual narrative in gaming. Faraj's intention was to convey that game developers afford gamers the autonomy to make pivotal decisions that result in alterations to the plot and denouement of the game. As elucidated in *Hollow Knight*, the decision to either save or allow an in-game character named Zote to be devoured by a monster can have

ramifications for the character's subsequent presence. This mechanism instructs gamers to reconstruct the story based on their choices, rendering storytelling skills more personal and varied.

"Di Hollow Knight itu dia ada satu sesi dimana kita tuh bakal ketemu sama salah satu karakter namanya Zote, dia ini karakter yang emang kita ketemunya dia lagi "dimangsa" lah sama monster gitu. Kita punya dua pilihan ... Kalau kita tolong dia berarti nanti dia bakal ada di game, si Zote bakal muncul, bakal berinteraksi sama kita, bahkan bakal jadi boss nanti gitu di ceritanya. Tapi kalau kita biarin aja, kita gak tolong dia sama sekali, kita gak akan pernah ketemu dia di game satu kalipun gak akan pernah lihat wujudnya bahkan, bahkan gak akan jadi boss nanti, dia bakal mati aja udah dimakan sama si monsternya gitu. Itu pilihan yang cukup berpengaruh, salah satu game yang menurut saya pilihannya cukup crucial ya."

(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

"In Hollow Knight, there's a scene where we meet a character named Zote. He's a character we meet being "eaten" by a monster. We have two choices... If we help him, he'll be in the game. Zote will appear, interact with us, and even become a boss later in the story. But if we just leave him alone, we don't help him at all, and we'll never meet him in the game, never even see him, and he won't even become a boss. He'll just die after being eaten by the monster. It's a pretty influential choice, one of the games where I think the choices are quite crucial."

(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

Faraj posits that moral choices in video games serve as a pivotal medium through which gamers can engage with the concepts of responsibility and gamer agency. This term, as defined by Faraj, refers to the extent of control and decision-making authority that gamers possess within a game. This concept encapsulates the extent to which gamers are granted autonomy to mould their own experiences and outcomes based on the choices they make. This concept is of particular significance in the domain of video game design, as it enables gamers to exert a tangible influence on the game's environment, thereby fostering a sense of interactivity and agency within the narrative. In the game Hollow Knight, Faraj asserts that the gamer's decision to either save or allow Zote to be consumed by monsters influences the character's subsequent presence within the game. This ranges from his depiction as a Non-Player Character (NPC) to his manifestation as a boss.

These consequences serve to substantiate the assertion that the actions of the gamer are regarded as exerting a 'significant impact' on the progression of the game's narrative. Faraj's position is that moral choices in games serve to enhance immersion through the medium of game world feedback. As was the case in the Horizon series, he went on to explain, if gamers choose to spare an enemy or choose to kill them, it will not only affect the availability of items in the game, but it can also influence how other NPCs (Non-Player Characters) will help gamers in the climax of the story. This perspective enables gamers to perceive the game world as a responsive 'ecosystem'. Furthermore, the existence of this moral choice concept has been demonstrated to encourage personal storytelling abilities. Faraj posits that each distinct conclusion to a gaming experience (as exemplified by the multiple endings in *Cyberpunk 2077*) possesses the capacity to motivate gamers to share their personalised narrative interpretations. Consequently, gamers indirectly assume the role of co-authors, contributing to the evolution of the narrative they encounter through their gameplay.

The profound emotional engagement and ethical decision-making processes, accompanied by narrative ramifications that shape the game's progression, akin to those encountered by Faraj, are intricately intertwined with the concept of emergent narrative and gamer initiative, as articulated by Folléa (2020). Muhammad Faraj Muzakki expounds on the phenomenon of intense emotional responses engendered by gaming experiences, citing the instance of his profound dismay upon witnessing the demise of a team member in the game *Cyberpunk 2077*. This experience, as Muzakki elucidates, transcended the mere act of observing a narrative unfold, imbuing it with a profound sense of personal impact. The elements of surprise and sadness evoke a reflective response, prompting the reader to seek further exploration of the narrative, and even to delve into the wider lore of the video game universe. Folléa (2020) emphasized that the concept of emergent narrative arises when a video game player feels an emotional urge to create and share their own unique story. The objective is not merely to adhere to a linear narrative, but rather to assemble personal experiences from the fragments with which they are presented.

The concept of emergent narrative is further exemplified by moral choices in video games, such as the decision to save or sacrifice a character named Zote in the game *Hollow Knight*. Faraj recognises that each of his choices exerts a 'significant impact' on the character's

return, whilst concomitantly altering the trajectory of the narrative. Folléa (2020) proposes the concept of emergent narrative, which asserts that the mechanics of a video game can provide a framework for moral dilemmas, thereby empowering gamers to assume the role of 'co-authors' of the narrative they are experiencing. Each option has the capacity to influence the conclusion of the narrative, whilst also stimulating discussion, the formulation of theories, and even the creation of fan fiction. This suggests that the narrative is not solely dictated by the game developers, but is also influenced by the community of gamers who engage with the game's narrative.

The initiative of gamers who play the game, and the key concepts in Folléa's theory, are formed by these two aspects, namely deep emotional involvement and moral choice in a video game. The author emphasized that proactive video game players who make efforts such as searching for hidden journals, discussing the consequences of choices, or exploring side quests for pieces of a game's lore automatically create an emergent narrative. This initiative extends beyond the conventional requirements of games that mandate adherence to a set of guidelines by all participants. Faraj himself has stated that he then felt like an 'investigator', watching videos discussing the lore on YouTube about the games he played and trying to piece together the story based on his own interpretation. It is evident that the presence of emergent narrative does not emerge as a consequence of the game initiated by the gamer. Rather, it is the outcome of a symbiotic relationship between the developer's implicit narrative strategy and the emotional and moral inclinations of the gamer.

Consequently, it can be posited that Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's extensive experience has demonstrated that elements that evoke emotions and prompt moral decisions function as catalysts for video game players to proactively shape their narratives, akin to Folléa's (2020) emergent narrative framework. This is an illustration of the potential of video games as an interactive storytelling medium. The convergence of emotions and moral choices in gamers has been demonstrated to facilitate a profound level of engagement with the narrative content. This engagement is characterized by a capacity to reinterpret the narrative, guided by individual vision, empathy and creativity. Therefore, it can be posited that Faraj's experience of playing video games may have been a contributing factor to the deep emotions he felt while playing

Cyberpunk 2077 and making morally complex choices in Hollow Knight, which have been shown to spark curiosity and engaging involvement. The validity of this assertion is supported by emergent narrative and video game player initiative, as described by Folléa (2020). Faraj's analysis demonstrates how emotional moments and options containing moral dilemmas have successfully encouraged him to explore lore outside of the game. This finding aligns with Folléa's (2020) assertion that video game players use their initiative to 'experience, experiment, and perform' visual narratives personally and creatively every time they play a video game with an interesting visual narrative.

In accordance with the preceding assertions voiced by Faraj and Kevin, the findings of the researcher's data collection from interviews with Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya also identified elements of moral dilemma and narrative consequences. These elements contribute to the enhanced efficacy of visual narratives in games in cultivating gamers' storytelling skills. For instance, a dilemma situation necessitates prolonged reflection, to the extent that Delda is required to pause for a duration of one hour whilst undertaking a mission from the Cyberpunk 2077 DLC (Downloadable Content) expansion entitled Phantom Liberty. In his comments on this issue, Delda stated the following:

"Saya mengalami dilema moral saat bermain cyberpunk di akhir tahun kemarin, jadi masih inget nih. Jadi ada satu game namanya cyberpunk, dia ada DLC-nya yang menceritakan tentang menyelamatkan presiden di world tersebut. Nah disitu tuh, singkat ceritanya, kita tuh bisa taking a side. Antara, kan ada dua agent, ada satu namanya So Mi, perempuan, sama laki-laki, Solomon Reed ... Di mision akhirnya, kita harus siding (lagi) antara memilih So Mi atau Reed, nah disitulah dilema moralnya terletak. Disitu dilema moral antara menyelamatkan presiden sama si So Mi, atau juga pilih So Mi dan mengkhianati si Reed, juga mengkhianati si presidennya lah. Mengkhianati pemerintah. Disitu dilema tuh, harus milih yang mana. Aduh bingung itu."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"I experienced a moral dilemma while playing Cyberpunk at the end of last year, so I still remember it. There's a game called Cyberpunk, and it has DLC that's about saving the president in that world. Long story short, we can take sides. There are two agents: one named So Mi, a woman, and a man, named Solomon Reed... In the final mission, we have to decide (again) whether to choose So Mi or Reed. That's where the moral dilemma lies. It's a moral dilemma: saving the president with So Mi, or choosing So Mi and betraying Reed, and betraying the president. Betraying the government. That's the dilemma, which one to choose. It was so confusing."

(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

Delda asserts that moral dilemmas and narrative consequences are pivotal in ascertaining the profundity of visual narrative in video games, with particular emphasis on engendering a reflective and emotive storytelling experience for the gaming demographic. Delda emphasized that games can be considered truly "sick" if they are evocative and force gamers to pause, reflect, and even struggle to make decisions. In his experience playing *Cyberpunk 2077*: Delda acknowledged that she had paused the game for a duration of one hour in order to deliberate on the available options, as each option was accompanied by significant emotional and moral implications. In an interview with researcher, Delda stated:

"Kalau pilih So Mi kita mengkhianati pemerintah dengan kita terbang ke bulan, tapi dibohongi ... Dari situ sih, saya akhirnya ya dengan waktu yang cukup lama lah. Saya pause lama itu, mikir dulu milih yang mana, sejam itu. Saya baca-baca Reddit itu dulu tuh, gimana ya ... Itu dilema moral itu ... Akhirnya saya milih si Reed, karena pertama dia jujur. Dia (tokoh utama) menganggap si Reed juga teman juga. Kedua, dia dihargai sama pemerintah ... Jadi saya akhirnya lebih milih yang si laki-laki yang ini. Karena pragmatis aja sih. Itu dilemanya. Sesignifikan itu ... Game sakit sih itu mas (menyakitkan secara emosional). Game yang story bagus itu sebenarnya game sakit sih mas."

(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Should we opt for So Mi, we would be betraying the government by flying to the moon, yet we have been misled ... From there, I finally decided, after quite a long time. I paused for a long time, thinking about which one to choose, for about an hour. I read Reddit first, to see what I should do ... In the end, I chose Reed, primarily, due to his honesty. He (the MC) considers Reed a friend too. Secondly, he's held in high esteem by the government. So I ultimately chose this man. He was just pragmatic. That's the dilemma. It's that significant... It's a sick game, man (emotionally painful). A game with a good story is actually a sick game, man."

(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

This dilemma has been shown to engender heightened engagement among gamers, whilst concurrently establishing a more profound narrative space. In games devoid of definitive right or wrong answers, gamers are compelled to consider personal values, empathise with other characters, and contemplate the long-term consequences of their actions. This approach engenders a narrative that is less linear and branching, according to the decisions made by the gamer, with each branch of the narrative carrying a different emotional weight. Delda recognises

the potential of moral dilemmas in their capacity to engender a sense of responsibility in gamers regarding the outcome of the story. The consequences of these choices, whether in the form of altered relationships between characters, the death of a key figure, or a change in the ending, become a reflection of the gamer's own decisions. In summary, the narrative is not merely conveyed by the game, but is also shaped by the gamer through complex cognitive and emotional processes.

For this reason, within the domain of storytelling, this element prompts gamers to recount their experiences in a more personal and profound manner. Gamers are able to recall not only the narrative arc but also the dilemmas confronted by the protagonists, and provide a rationale for the decisions made by the characters, as well as their subsequent impact on both the characters themselves and the game world. Delda's position is that moral dilemmas and narrative consequences represent some of the most effective and meaningful criteria for creating an effective and meaningful visual narrative. Delda's perspective on moral dilemmas and narrative consequences, that gamers' choices in video games can trigger reflective pauses, form emotional attachments, and change the course of the story, aligns closely with the framework Schäfer (2022) describes through the concept of altercharacters. In this research, Delda cites a moment in *Cyberpunk 2077* where gamers are faced with a difficult decision that directly impacts the storyline and the relationships between characters. The author emphasized that this interactivity allows gamers to feel truly involved in the story they are playing.

As Schäfer (2022) explains, in narrative games, the relationship between gamers and their characters is characterized by dynamism and reciprocity. It is evident that each decision made by gamers serves to shape an alter ego, or narrative identity, which is formed from a series of choices and decisions. It is her argument that this process can engender profound emotional consequences for gamers, as they evolve a sense of collective responsibility for the characters and the game world. The decisions made by the gamer not only affect the storyline, but also influence how the gamer views the characters they play and themselves within the narrative context. It can thus be concluded that the correlation between the two is rooted in a shared fundamental principle: moral dilemmas in games are not merely narrative elements, but rather, they function as mechanisms that emotionally engage gamers and thereby influence their

personal narrative experience. Delda's approach is rooted in experiential observation, whereas Schäfer offers a theoretical framework elucidating the underlying mechanisms and processes that give rise to such experiences, drawing parallels with the construction of alter characters. This renders the moral dilemma moments Delda highlights not only as turning points in the story, but also as points of narrative identity formation, thereby rendering the gaming experience personal, immersive and meaningful.

3.1.4 Story Dynamics: What Contains the Element of Surprise

In his interview with the researcher, Faraj also emphasized that other key criteria which render visual narrative elements in video games effective in influencing storytelling ability are deep emotional involvement that impact narrative consequences. Faraj posits that emotional involvement arises when visual writing presents unexpected moments of surprise. Faraj cited the death scene of a character who was a friend to the main character in the game *Cyberpunk 2077* as an example of a moment that genuinely shocked him. This was despite his recognition of the death flag or other indications that a character would die in the story of a film or other game. This unexpected development led to a state of heightened engagement, characterized by a desire to continue playing and a profound sense of empathy for the character's plight. In a similar vein, Faraj also posited that emotional involvement can arise when visual narrative writing is able to build personal bonds through conflict and loss. The profound sense of melancholy evoked by the game surpassed that experienced in other AAA games, such as the *Horizon* series. This observation underscores the notion that emotional depth does not merely stem from music or visuals, but rather from the presence of a profoundly characterized narrative that exerts an emotionally resonant influence on gamers. In his interview with researchers regarding his experience after playing *Cyberpunk 2077*, he mentioned:

“Mungkin kalau dari game yang baru aja saya main, namanya Cyberpunk 2077 ... Sekitar 10 jam saya udah main game ini, kalau ngomong-ngomong emosional ada ga? ada. Salah satu scene atau bagian dari cerita dimana salah satu dari temennya main character-nya itu akhirnya mati lah di dalam suatu misi gitu. Itu saya bener-bener kaget, karena saya tau dari bagaimana ceritanya dijalankan ya gitu ... Mungkin beberapa orang tau kalau kita sering main game atau mungkin sering nonton film Biasanya ada yang namanya death flag, dimana ada beberapa tanda yang pasti akan keluar kalau misalnya ada karakter yang akan meninggal atau mungkin akan keluar dari group atau mungkin akan pokoknya akan menghilang dari ceritanya MC lah.”

(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

"Perhaps from the game I just played, called Cyberpunk 2077... I've been playing this game for about 10 hours. Speaking of emotional moments, have there been any? Yes. One scene or part of the story where one of the main character's friends ends up dying during a mission. I was really surprised, because I know how the story unfolds... Maybe some people know that if we often play games or maybe watch movies, there's usually something called a death flag, where there are certain signs that will appear if, for example, a character is about to die or maybe leave the group or maybe just disappear from the story, the main character."

(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

The emotions evoked by a particular scene appear to serve to strengthen the gamer's connection to the story they are playing. Faraj expounds on the emotional response evoked by the demise of the protagonist's companion in the game Cyberpunk 2077, which engendered a sense of surprise and sorrow. This prompted a period of personal contemplation before the game was resumed. This finding suggests that such experiences can serve as a training ground for gamers, equipping them with the ability to convey the intricacies and nuances of a story in a more vivid and tangible manner during gameplay. In the context of visual narrative, emotional involvement has been identified as a pivotal aspect that can exert an effective influence, provided it succeeds in eliciting curiosity and a concomitant desire to acquire further information. In a manner analogous to the experience of playing Hollow Knight, Faraj elucidated that upon initially exploring the lore of Cyberpunk 2077 through in-game journals and item descriptions, his curiosity engendered a sense of discovery, thereby fostering a more profound sense of engagement with the game's narrative.

As previously outlined by Soriani and Caselli (2020), Faraj's argument pertaining to emotional involvement posits that implicit narratives, manifested through elements such as in-game journals, item descriptions or minor visual elements, possess the capacity to evoke curiosity and profound emotional engagement. Soriani and Caselli emphasize that the narrative potency of video games is frequently obscured by embedded narratives and evocative spaces. Embedded narratives are defined as pieces of story that are intentionally embedded within the game environment. These embedded narratives may take the form of notes, artefacts, or object designs, and are only discovered through active exploration of the game environment. Evocative spaces are defined as those spaces or world designs that elicit emotional responses and stimulate

the imagination of the gamer, frequently without the need for explicit explanation. This phenomenon was exemplified by Faraj's experience while engaging with games such as Hollow Knight or Cyberpunk 2077. The subject was not assigned a direct storyline, rather, he was encouraged to engage with the game world, interpret the lore, and formulate his own understanding of its significance. This process, as posited by Soriani and Caselli (2020), has been shown to engender both deepening of immersion and cultivation of emotional engagement, given that gamers perceive themselves as both discoverers and story-makers. In summary, Faraj's analysis provides a detailed exposition of the practical implications of Soriani and Caselli's theoretical framework. The phenomenon of emotional involvement in gaming occurs when players are granted the autonomy to discover and interpret narratives through interaction with the visual environment. This enables an organic growth of an emotional connection to the gaming world and its characters.

Meanwhile, according to Kevin, what renders visual narrative in a video game effectively is the element of surprise and ignorance of the ending of a video game story that the gamer is about to experience. In Kevin's opinion, the efficacy of visual narrative elements lies in their ability to motivate gamers not only to engage in the game for enjoyment, but also to aspire to actualise and comprehend the narrative underlying the game mechanics. As Kevin emphasized, the elements of surprise and uncertainty are of significant importance. When elucidating this phenomenon to researchers, he stated:

"Element of surprise-nya ... Apalagi di era game yang sekarang agak sedih ... setidaknya gue gak tau di tengah-tengahnya, gitu. Itu yang bikin pertama kali gue benar-benar 'I wanna know the story.'"
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"The element of surprise ... Especially in the current era of gaming, which is a bit sad ... at least I don't know what's going to happen in the middle. That's what made me think, 'I wanna know the story,' for the first time."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

In instances where gamers are not yet privy to the culmination of a narrative, visual narratives have been shown to promote exploration and profound emotional engagement among gamers. Conversely, for Kevin, if the entire story has already been revealed outside of the game,

then the visual narrative has lost its credibility and only gameplay remains. In this study, Kevin posits the notion that the element of surprise in the visual narrative of a video game functions as a catalyst for a gamer's emotional engagement. In the absence of prior knowledge regarding the culmination or primary narrative of a video game, every element of the story, whether it be a brief dialogue or a scene from the game as depicted on social media, becomes an alluring element that stimulates curiosity. This finding indicates that in the absence of story leaks, Kevin experiences a heightened sense of obligation to meticulously examine every element of the visuals and narrative provided by a video game developer. It is evident that Kevin is aware of the implications of "spoilers" and is therefore endeavouring to maintain a certain distance from them. In an effort to preserve this sense of separation, he engages in practices such as refraining from watching videos that disclose the conclusions of a video game he intends to play on YouTube, thereby ensuring the preservation of his unawareness. In his seriousness about this matter, he stated in his interview with the researcher that:

"kalo misalnya gue dapet game yang gue gak tau ceritanya, gue bener-bener jaga-jaga gitu, kayak, "gue gak boleh tau, gue gak boleh tau, gue gak boleh tau." ... Apalagi, kayak, beruntung kalau lo tau endingnya doang, tapi lo gak tau tengahnya."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"In the event of encountering a game with an unfamiliar narrative, I adopted a meticulous approach by self-admonishment, like, "I must not know, I must not know, I must not know." ... It is particularly advantageous to be aware of the conclusion, but not the events that transpire in the narrative's midst.."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

The author's discourse on this subject reveals that a sense of uncertainty in the midst of a narrative contributes to the maintenance of the element of surprise, thereby ensuring that each step in a video game feels novel and engaging when played. In response to the query regarding video game narratives that are pleasurable to experience without the risk of spoilers, he also expressed a high level of appreciation for visual narratives that transcend mere imitation. According to Kevin, the efficacy of visual narratives is predicated upon their ability to compel individuals to actively seek out the information within them as a gamer, rather than merely functioning as a passive observer. In the context of a game such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, which typically provides minimal direct clues, Kevin elucidates:

"Tidak ada game yang benar-benar di umur saya waktu itu, di umur saya 14 tahun, benar-benar menawarkan ini game terserah lu mau gimana gitu. Benar-benar, karena benar-benar tidak ada patokan ... Kalau Skyrim pertama kali saya main, itu benar-benar, ada quest-questnya juga, tapi banyak penjelasan (yang harus dicari) akan quest-questnya sendiri. Jadi kayak membutuhkan pemahaman lebih dalam. Dan gue sebagai anak kecil kan, kenapa gue harus paham? Kenapa gue harus, kenapa gue dipaksa game ini untuk mengerti ceritanya gitu. Why that matter? Itulah yang Skyrim tawarkan gitu."

(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"There were no games at that time, when I was 14 years old, that really offered this kind of freedom. Really, because there were no guidelines ... When I first played Skyrim, there were quests, but there was a lot of explanation (that had to be sought) about the quests themselves. So it required a deeper understanding. And as a kid, why should I understand? Why should I, why was I forced by this game to understand the story? Why does that matter? That's what Skyrim offered."

(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

As Kevin emphasized, the visual elements of a game, including the environment and character expressions, can function as a surreptitious guide, providing gamers with a sense of direction from one moment to the next. This aspect of surprise is a crucial element in the broader context of game design and gamer engagement. The utilisation of the element of surprise, coupled with the gamer's unawareness of the intricacies of the game's narrative that they are about to engage with, has the capacity to enhance their personal engagement with the story. This approach enables gamers to experience the narrative in a more immersive manner, as opposed to merely observing a plot that has been meticulously crafted by the video game developer. The element of surprise and uncertainty also encourages video game players to discover narrative fragments on their own, making the story feel 'their own', as Kevin experienced. It was through this medium that Kevin was able to piece together the narrative.

In the course of dialogues with members of the community who were engaged in playing the same video game as him, it became evident that each individual might possess a unique set of 'fragments' of surprise. The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim serves as a pertinent example in this regard. It was through this game that Kevin first became cognizant of the pivotal role that narrative freedom plays in the creation of effective visual narratives within the domain of video games. This is primarily due to the absence of explicit guidelines for each quest or mission within the

game, and the fact that the gamer is unaware of the game's conclusion until it has been reached. In another game that was used as an example, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, Kevin noted that, as an older game, spoilers were rare, allowing him to relive moments that provided an element of surprise that felt new and fresh. According to Kevin, the presence of surprises and uncertainty in a narrative is pivotal in determining its influence on gamers' post-game reflections. It is evident that, in the absence of spoilers and with a visual design that strongly encourages exploration, a game is not only capable of conveying a story but also invites gamers to become architects of the narrative experiences they build for themselves.

In his correlation between the element of surprise and gamers' ignorance of the narrative of a game they are about to play, Kevin Maherga Surbakti posits that the elements of surprise and ignorance of most of the storyline are the primary triggers of gamers' curiosity and emotional involvement. When he first explored the world of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* without prior knowledge of the ending of the game's story or the correct path to take when embarking on the next quest, every discovery of hidden lore provided a satisfying experience that felt truly authentic to him. In a manner analogous to Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's perspective on the significance of emotional engagement in the context of visual narratives in video games, Kevin's viewpoint aligns closely with the notion of Embedded Narratives proposed by Soriani and Caselli (2020). This concept posits that video game developers frequently incorporate narrative elements into the gaming environment. As previously stated, this may manifest in the form of in-game journals, artefacts, building structures, or any other element that serves to preserve fragments of the game's overarching narrative.

Furthermore, it extends an invitation to video game players to explore the meaning they derive independently. The postulate proposed by Jenkins (2004) on environmental storytelling lends further credence to the notion that visual elements, such as the ruins of a building or various properties dispersed throughout a video game, can function as metaphors that offer narrative clues to any gamer who pays close attention to them. Consequently, a gamer's initial ignorance of the game's narrative, when viewed as a catalyst, has the potential to motivate them to explore further and assemble the dispersed narrative fragments.

In accordance with the concept of emergent narrative proposed by Folléa (2020), it is evident that the element of surprise in video games engenders distinctive narrative interpretations among gamers. The game system of story games, which utilize visual narratives, generally affords gamers a high degree of freedom to experiment with elements that are typically impossible to do in the real world. Examples of such elements include altering the fate of a character or exploring a forbidden area. Consequently, players of video games, particularly those in story mode, often develop their own storylines, potentially outside the linear script designed by the game developer. Another correlation is found in the interactive visual narrative framework presented by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010), which reaffirms the role of various actions and choices of a gamer in modifying the storyline of the game they play.

This suggests that the element of surprise described by Kevin Maherga Surbakti is not merely a gimmick, but also a form of mechanism that strengthens the existence of gamer agency, or the level of freedom that gamers have to do many things that can have an effect on changes that occur in the world in the game they play. The objective is to engender a simulation in which the gamers are endowed with the qualities of deities or some form of governing entity. Moran (2022) also demonstrates in his research how the intensity of emotions triggered by surprise, such as shock, sadness, or curiosity, can serve to deepen gamers' sense of attachment and their motivation to continue their exploration of a game story. Therefore, the presence of the element of surprise and the gamers' unawareness of the game's narrative, as posited by Kevin Maherga Surbakti, is consistent with the notion of embedded narrative and environmental storytelling, as previously theorised by researchers. Moreover, it serves to substantiate the concept of emergent narrative and interactive narratives, as articulated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, which serves as a foundational principle for video games, empowering each gamer to create a unique and immersive narrative experience through creative means.

3.1.5 Character, Animation, and Environment Design: A Silent Narrator that Expands the Story Context

A. Character Design

According to Faraj, the other aspect of visual narrative that Faraj considers effective is the presence of three-dimensional characterisation in a narrative. Faraj's concept of

three-dimensional characterisation in video games is predicated on the notion that characters feel "alive" when writers transcend the confines of stereotypes. In this particular instance, Faraj posits that the identification of fictional characters with three-dimensional aspects is contingent upon an analysis of their personal backgrounds. In the context of a work of fiction, each character is endowed with a life history, familial challenges, and past experiences that collectively contribute to the formation of their personality. Furthermore, the presence of motivation and ambition has the capacity to imbue a character with three-dimensional aspects. This suggests that each fictional character fulfils a function in the plot and possesses a distinct purpose. The purpose of this act may be attributed to a desire for revenge, a search for personal identity, or the idealism of the character in question.

Furthermore, Faraj noted that three-dimensional characters possess interpersonal relationships, which can be observed in the interactions between the protagonist and Non-Player Characters (NPCs). These NPCs are designed in such a manner that video game players experience emotional 'screen time', which may be expressed through dialogue, undertaking missions together, or even romance options if present in the plot. Faraj's argument is that three-dimensional characters possess backgrounds, motivations and developments that enrich the narrative, and that these 'lifelike' characters are distinguishable from two-dimensional characters, which he believes can only fulfil stereotypes. When elucidating the distinction between two-dimensional and three-dimensional characters, he stated:

"Yang saya tau karakter itu kadang dalam sebuah cerita tuh bisa disebut karakter dua dimensi sama karakter tiga dimensi, tapi dalam narasi ya konteksnya kalau karakter dua dimensi tuh berarti biasanya karakter yang serasa seperti dia karakter yang cuman hidup untuk menghindari stereotipe karakternya itu sendiri gitu ... Yang bagus itu adalah dimana karakter yang bisa kita liat all-around, jadi karakter yang serasa seperti hidup lah ... Punya pengalaman, motivasi, latar belakang."
(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

"It is evident that characters in a narrative can be categorised as two-dimensional or three-dimensional. However, within the context of the narrative, two-dimensional characters are typically those who exist merely to circumvent the stereotypes associated with their own characters ... The ideal scenario is when a character is depicted in such a manner that they appear to be a living, breathing entity ... They have accumulated experience, developed motivations, and acquired a background in this field."

(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

This suggests that when individuals are allocated time and opportunities to become acquainted with a character, they are prompted to generate detailed and multifaceted fan fiction narratives or reinterpretations. He frequently designates well-rounded characters as such, noting their possession of 'three-dimensional' qualities. Characters in three dimensions are complex and unique, with fully developed fictional lives. This aspect serves to render them more authentic. It is evident that the authenticity of a character is directly proportional to the extent of audience identification and emotional engagement. The impact of three-dimensional characterisation on storytelling in a video game is that gamers can build stronger empathy and emotional bonds. Furthermore, each significant event, including death, betrayal, and sacrifice, that transpires among the characters in the narrative is imbued with significance due to the reader's capacity to empathise with and relate to the characters involved. Consequently, the narrative evolves into a complex web of internal conflicts and relational dynamics, transcending the mere sequence of events.

Faraj's perspective on three-dimensional characterisation, which is characterized by its vitality due to the presence of a consistent background, motivation, development, and interaction, aligns with the framework elucidated by Moran (2022) in *Agency and Companionship: An Art Historical Analysis of Video Games*. For Faraj, the development of character depth is not solely attributable to the composition of narratives; it is equally influenced by the emotional bond that is established through the interactions and decisions made during gameplay. Moran (2022) emphasized that two main aspects form this attachment through his reception theory approach: agency, namely the gamer's ability to make meaningful choices that affect the world and narrative; and companionship, namely the emotional relationship that is formed between the gamer and the character as a "companion" that develops together throughout the story (Moran 2022). Moran (2022) advances the notion that a high level of agency serves to deepen immersion, thereby engendering a sense of personal connection in the gamer. Furthermore, the presence of companionship is posited as a factor that imbues the relationship with significance. Consequently, Faraj's experience of navigating the game world alongside the character can be considered a direct manifestation of Moran's (2022) theoretical proposition that

three-dimensional characters are created through the convergence of narrative, interactivity, and emotional connection, culminating in a unique and personalised gaming experience.

In accordance with the argument of Faraj, Delda also pertains to the criteria for the influence of visual narrative in games on gamers' storytelling abilities, with particular emphasis on emotional writing style in a character building. Delda asserts that narratives which are written "from the heart" have the capacity to evoke a profound emotional response in the reader. It is imperative that each character possesses a robust backstory, as this facilitates the comprehension of their actions and fosters a sense of empathy among gamers. Assassin's Creed III, for instance, was cited for its sentimental narrative writing style. In an interview with the researcher about this, he stated:

"Karena dia penulisannya tuh pake hati. Jadi kena gitu (secara emosional), sentimental ke pemainnya gitu."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Because it's written with the heart. So it resonates (emotionally), it resonates with the players."
(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

The second example he highlighted regarding the importance of character building is the development of the main character, Arthur Morgan, in Red Dead Redemption 2. In the course of his interview with the researchers, Delda stated the following:

"Character building itu penting ya, dari awal dia ceritanya gimana, misalkan Arthur dia kecilnya, balik lagi ke RDR ya. Background story-nya, dari sebuah karakter itu penting. Apalagi di RDR 2 ini, setiap karakter itu punya background masing-masing. Jadi sangat-sangat penting ke story. Ngaruh itu, ngaruh. Jadi gak tiba-tiba, 'Kok gini' sehingga jadi ada plot hole itu menurut saya background dari karakter game itu penting. Penulisan karakter penting."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Character building is important, right from the beginning. From Arthur's childhood, for example, back to RDR. The character's background story is crucial. Especially in RDR 2, where each character has their own background. So it's very important to the story. It influences it, influences it. So it's not like, 'Why is this happening?' and there's a plot hole. I think the background of a game character is important. Character writing is important."

(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

In the mind of Delda, the two pillars which enable a game's visual narrative to transcend mere entertainment and become a storytelling experience that resonates deeply with gamers are emotional writing and character building. For Delda, the notion of "writing with heart" signifies the presentation of characters whose backgrounds are portrayed with complete depth, encompassing their origins, traumas, and aspirations. This enables a seamless integration of actions and dialogues, ensuring that they are not merely a means to progress the game's narrative. When a writer has a profound understanding of the motivations of their characters, the resulting conflicts become more meaningful and poignant, evoking a sense of both empathy and curiosity in gamers who continue to explore the narrative.

Continuing with the examples of the two video games mentioned above, namely Assassin's Creed III and Red Dead Redemption 2, in order to demonstrate the application of the aforementioned elements in the relationship between Connor and his father, Haytham. It is argued that the relationship between the two of them is not merely a simple family conflict, but rather a complex dynamic that encompasses a broader socio-political context. The clashing ideals of the protagonists are presented through cinematic cutscenes that highlight emotional expressions, forcing gamers to empathise with the heartbreak of a child who must choose his own path in life. The narrative structure of the game is characterized by its use of flashbacks and its positioning of the gamer within the character of Connor. This approach facilitates an immersive experience, where the gamer is encouraged to relate to the events of the game from the perspective of the protagonist. In a similar manner, Red Dead Redemption 2 establishes emotional intimacy through the character development of Arthur Morgan. Delda highlights his childhood as an orphan in a nomadic world, his upbringing by Dutch Van Der Linde, and the developing brotherly bond between Arthur and John Marston, who are protected and taught various skills such as creating a rich space of empathy as human beings. It is evident that every action undertaken by Arthur, irrespective of whether it pertains to the main mission or the exploration of side stories, is deeply intertwined with his personal history and ethical principles. This aspect of the game fosters a complex environment, wherein moral decision-making

becomes a multifaceted challenge that profoundly impacts the emotional bond between the gamer character and the gamer.

Furthermore, the consistent development of a character can serve to prevent plot holes and ensure that the character's development remains realistic. Delda emphasized the necessity for the character's transition from the initial to the climactic point of the narrative to be congruent with the experiences and interpersonal connections that had been established, thereby ensuring that the shift in disposition does not appear arbitrary or abrupt. The well-built emotional writing has been demonstrated to encourage game players to derive pleasure from the narrative, whilst simultaneously inspiring them to meticulously recount the tale in intricate detail. A thorough examination of the implications of each decision made is undertaken, alongside a contemplation of instances of betrayal, sacrifice, or resurrection, with a discerning attention to detail. The amalgamation of empathetic and emotive writing, in conjunction with meticulously devised character development, has resulted in a video game that not only boasts visually stunning graphics, but also engenders within each gamer the aspiration to assume the role of the game's narrator, thereby becoming the architect of their own narrative journey. This renders the potential of interactive storytelling, whereby the narrative and emotional elements are not merely observed, but experienced first-hand, and subsequently recounted with the same fervour as when originally encountered.

Additionally, the perspective of Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya on emotional writing and character development aligns with the insights provided by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010). Delda emphasized that emotional writing was a visual study that incorporated inner content, such as a brief flash, micro-narratives, micro-face expressions or ambient cues. This approach enabled gamers to experience the narrative rather than merely being informed of it. In addition, the concept of character building, which places emphasis on the significance of a character's background, motivation, and emotional development within a gaming environment, serves as the foundation for enabling gamers to empathise and participate in shaping the narrative through the choices available to them in the game. In their 2010 publication, Pimenta and Poovaiah introduce the concept of Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN), which they define as a narrative visual subgenre. IVN, otherwise known as Visual Storytelling, involves the audience engaging directly

with the visual elements to construct storylines or address gaps in a narrative. IVN created what can be termed interactive empathy, or empathy that was born from the active involvement of players of a game in a visual narrative that was built.

In this particular instance, gamers do not merely observe scenes; they select them, navigate the environment and determine the fate of the characters they embody. Consequently, emotions become a pervasive experience, rather than merely an isolated phenomenon within the game. Characters that are rich in background and possess strong character building elements offer gamers an emotional foundation upon which to understand the consequences of their choices and foster inner attachment. The incorporation of emotional writing elements, such as micro-narratives, symbolic objects and environmental hints, has been demonstrated to encourage gamers to interpret their own stories, fostering understanding and growth in empathy. This interactive process entails not only the "explaining" of these elements, but also their active involvement in the visual composition of the narrative.

Therefore, it is evident that there is a correlation between the argument proposed by Delda and the explanation provided by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010). Delda's rejection of the narrative model of passivity is characterized by an emphasis on micro-narratives, defined as fragments of mini-stories disseminated through NPC (non-player characters) notes or dialogue, lore items, or ambient cues. In contrast, Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) advocate for an interactive empathy model, emphasising the role of visual narratives in fostering empathy. Delega previously mentioned the importance of providing a comprehensive background and motivation for the characters, emphasising the need for emotional details to engage the gamers' imagination. Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) present a contrasting perspective, exploring the concept of actors in IVN as entities that transcend mere visual representations, asserting that they are "actors" who actively engage in the realm of storytelling. The presence of players of a video game is thus equivalent to that of a puppeteer, who is responsible for choosing the storyline and who also experiences empathy during the interactive process. It is evident that the actors observe the characters they portray with meticulous attention, whilst simultaneously embodying the essence of the roles they assume. Delda's perspective on character building in the context of IVN is predicated on the notion of presence of actors and the concept of user agency. Characters that are

well-written with profound and intricate backstories, along with a well-defined volition, serve to establish an emotional substructure for players of video games, thereby engendering a sense of active engagement, prompting responses, and potentially altering the flow of the game's narrative.

Discussing character design as the other element that can enhance the efficacy of visual narrative writing in a video game in influencing a gamer's storytelling skills, it is also Kevin's conviction that the roles of character design and animation are to act as a conduit for the communication of the gamer's emotions, thereby serving to reinforce the visual narrative of the game. It is evident that even rudimentary animations, such as those employed to convey emotions such as sadness or tension, have the capacity to imbue a narrative with greater depth and complexity. As Kevin stated in his interview with researcher:

"Kalau secara grafis atau karakter design atau apa ... Narasi visual benar-bener memberi reference yang bagus. Bagaimana mereka bisa mengekspresikan suatu perasaan atau emosional yang mereka pengen lengkapkan dalam suatu karakter, dalam bentuk graphic design ... It's really good thing. Soalnya, gue sangat mengapresiasi itu. Kayak gue makin-makin ngerti dan makin bisa memahami hal-hal. Gue main game lagi, dan gue mulai kayak, "Wah, ini kayaknya dari perspektif ini keren juga" gitu. Atau misalnya, "oh masuk akal kalo dia jahat" gitu."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"In terms of graphics, character design, or whatever... Visual narratives really provide a good reference. How they can express a feeling or emotion they want to convey in a character, through graphic design... It's really good. I really appreciate it. I feel like I'm understanding things more and more. I play a game again, and I start to think, 'Wow, this seems cool from this perspective,' or, for example, 'Oh, it makes sense that he's evil.'"
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

In Kevin's view, a well-defined visual design in a game can facilitate an emotional connection between the game player and the character, even in the absence of text or dialogue.

It was emphasized by Kevin that a character in a video game is not merely a ragdoll dressed up or an entity that populates the game world, but that they are also the bearers of a message that creates an emotional impression through the highlighted visual details. In this instance, the character design is capable of eliciting a series of expressions without recourse to verbal communication. In several key points of his explanation in interviews with researchers, he

mentioned that the presence of video characters in a video game is akin to a silent storyteller. This assertion was articulated in the concise animation employed as a demonstrative medium in the game under consideration, a technique previously elucidated in the Kingdom Come: Deliverance. One exemplification of this phenomenon is the NPC (Non-Player Character) family who cries following the gamer's act of cutting the block maker in the game. This serves to imply a moral consequence without the necessity of lengthy dialogue. According to Kevin, a competent character designer is one who does not provide all the answers through text, but also by embedding pieces of the story in poses, facial expressions, and other micro-gestures. Furthermore, when the game narrative endeavours to evoke a sense of sadness through the deployment of crying animations, gamers are endowed with the autonomy to re-examine the narrative and comprehend the events that transpired. The rich character design, with its multiple layers, has been shown to stimulate gamers' interest in exploration. In addition to the primary objective of "leveling up", gamers may also find themselves questioning how the life path of each character they have visited will be influenced by the moments they have experienced.

In this discourse, Kevin Maherga Surbakti emphasized that the assertion of animation and character design represent as one of the fundamental principles of storytelling within the domain of video games. For Kevin, every gesture, facial expression, and cutscene can convey inner conflict and evoke empathy from gamers without recourse to dialogue. Consequently, character designs characterized by compelling motivations, backgrounds, and animated movements have the capacity to furnish gamers with an emotional foundation on which to establish a genuine connection with the characters in the game. This connection is of such a nature that gamers may perceive it as if they were walking alongside the characters in the game world. A similar direction is taken by Zarzycki (2016), who sees the use of cinematic techniques such as cutscenes, dynamic camera angles, and dramatic framing as key to strengthening the visual narrative in a video game. Zarzycki (2016) argues that cinematic techniques contained in video games, especially story mode games, instill visual gravity as a cinematic attraction in games, namely the ability of moving images and camera settings to present strong emotional moments. The objective is to ensure that every critical moment is imbued with a sense of emotion and engagement, akin to the experience typically offered by cinematic productions. Through the strategic employment of camera angle settings, the incorporation of slow-motion movements,

and the utilisation of close-ups that are executed with a high degree of fluidity, gamers who partake in the video game are invited to experience the intricacies of the narrative, evoking a sense of being intimately present within the scene as it unfolds.

B. Animation Design

Still in Kevin's viewpoints, the incorporation of additional elements, such as animations that align with the context of the atmosphere depicted in the game's narrative, can serve to reinforce the overall depiction of the situation faced by gamers while playing. In Kevin's opinion, the role of animation within a video game is analogous to a brief cinematic interlude, which serves to enhance the sense of engagement with the game's virtual environment. Animation is regarded by him as a factor that strengthens the emotional bond between gamers and the game they are playing. For instance, the use of subtle gestures, the presence of blank stares, or trembling hands can engender a sense of heightened involvement in the situation for the gamer, as opposed to merely observing it. In explaining the importance of environmental factors in depicting the situation in a game's narrative, Kevin employs the phrase "it doesn't hold your hand", which also appears because the animation displayed at that moment arouses curiosity without being coercive. It is the prerogative of the gamer to determine the consequences of their actions during the game. Animation in the game also serves as an element that bridges the gap between story and gameplay.

For instance, in the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, the presence of non-player characters (NPCs) whispering to each other as the protagonist walks through the city corners is an example of an animation that can be seen during exploration, this example also comprises brief yet expressive scenes that prevent the narrative from halting at any one point. In contradistinction to the animations that are presented in their entirety within the context of conventional game cutscenes, animations that are integrated into the midst of gameplay have the capacity to maintain the vitality of the storyline and to encourage gamers to sustain their concentration on the narrative.

However, a distinctive aspect of the discussion concerning the equilibrium between visuals and narrative is that Kevin perceives visual quality and narrative strength as dual aspects

of a unified entity, necessitating a harmonious balance for an optimal narrative encounter. On the one hand, he acknowledged that a compelling narrative can serve to mitigate the impact of graphical or animation deficiencies in a video game, as evidenced by his experience while playing *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall*. In his interview with the researcher he said:

"Gue jadi kepikiran soalnya bagi gue, ketika kalau ceritanya bagus, animasi atau grafik wise bisa gue toleransikan. Setelah Daggerfall. Itu ancur banget grafiknya. Dan lo harus beli buku manualnya besar, gitu. Dan itu menunjukkan dedikasi kita buat memahami ceritanya doang. Kayak gameplay-nya, gameplay wise, it's a very simple gameplay. Fetch quest, ambil barang A, ambil taruh ke A, gitu. Tapi yang mereka tawarkan itu di ceritanya panjang banget. Ga ada voice actor ya. Itu baca, baca, baca. Dan mencoba memainkan game itu juga membuat gue berpikir kalau misalnya gue bisa menoleransikan grafik, animasi, ataupun desain karakter demi sebuah cerita. Kayak selama mereka bisa, selama ada game dan gamenya itu benar-bener bertujuan untuk bisa menyampaikan ceritanya. Mau desain kartunya jelek, mau animasinya jelek, atau grafiknya jelek. Gue rasa gue tetap main."

(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"It made me think, because for me, if the story is good, I can tolerate animation or graphics-wise. After Daggerfall, the graphics were a total disaster. And you had to buy a huge manual. And that shows our dedication to understanding the story alone. Like gameplay-wise, it's a very simple gameplay. Fetch quest, get item A, get it, put it in A, like that. But what they offered was a very long story. There were no voice actors. It was reading, reading, reading. And trying to play that game also made me think that I could tolerate graphics, animation, or character design for the sake of a story. Like as long as they can, as long as there's a game and the game is really good." "The goal is to convey the story. Whether the card design is bad, the animation is bad, or the graphics are bad, I think I'll still play."

(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

However, Kevin also emphasized that when character design and animation are intended to support a game's theme, emotionality, and lore, they have the capacity to elevate the narrative's potential to a much more engaging level. In the course of an interview with a researcher, the aforementioned individual conveyed the following message:

"Justru cerita game yang rich, yang kaya, gitu, akan semua kemungkinan-kemungkinan deep lore (in a video game) itu harusnya bisa juga dipengaruhi sama grafis, animasi, dan desain karakternya. Yang makin bikin serunya."

(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

*"In fact, a game story that is rich, rich in all the possibilities of deep lore (in a video game) should also be influenced by the graphics, animation, and character design. That makes it even more exciting."
(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)*

It is therefore evident that visuals are not merely supplementary but are also expected to be a vital tool for strengthening storytelling in a video game. It is the contention of the aforementioned author that, as the game progresses, the synchrony between graphics and animation, and the narrative, serves to enhance the vividness and profundity of gamers' impressions and emotional attachment to the game world. Expressive character designs have been shown to contribute to a more immersive gaming experience by adding depth to the narrative. Furthermore, intuitive animations have been found to facilitate a more immersive interpretation of the game world. Finally, non-verbal animations have been demonstrated to enhance the visual narrative, ensuring that it does not appear as just a background.

This analysis thus provides a clear correlation between the two explanations proposed by Kevin and Zarzycki (2016). Kevin's work offers a compelling case study in the efficacy of expressive animation, demonstrating its capacity to engage gamers not merely as passive observers, but as active participants in the narrative experience. In contrast, Zarzycki's (2016) theoretical framework underscores the transformative power of cinematic techniques, highlighting how they can metamorphose animation and character design into emotional catalysts that profoundly impact the gamer's engagement with the game's narrative. The vibrant character design, underpinned by cinematic framing, fulfils a dual role of engendering empathy while providing a dramatic framework to each episode or chapter of the game. Therefore, by combining Kevin's insight and the theory elucidated by Zarzycki (2016), it can be observed that the most effective visual storytelling in games occurs when character design and animation are arranged with the same level of precision as in a film. This is supported by the utilisation of cinematic camera techniques and pacing, thereby ensuring that the narrative in the game does not become merely a mechanical sequence. It is this combination of lifelike character design and cinematic framing that transforms each gameplay sequence into an interactive storytelling experience. In this experience, emotional immersion and freedom of action are combined in a cohesive visual narrative.

In line with Kevin's explanation regarding animation, Delda emphasized that effective visual narrative is not merely concerned with graphic appearance that is aesthetically pleasing to the eye; rather, it is also concerned with the arrangement of visual elements to augment the impression of profound immersion and to stimulate the storytelling ability in a video game player to actively develop. Among the various primary criteria articulated by Delda, the initial ones he emphasized pertained to cinematography and visual framing. In this case, the placement of the cinematic camera is considered capable of highlighting the emotions and dynamics of the story as if watching an interactive film. Delda emphasized that cinematography in video games is the manner in which the camera is placed and moved, akin to the technique employed in filmmaking. Visual framing, on the other hand, pertains to the arrangement of elements within the frame, such as characters, settings, and city layout, with the objective of enhancing the mood and focus of the narrative. Cinematography is the branch of filmmaking that deals with the technical aspects of film production, such as camera placement, movement, and transitions in a cutscene. It also includes the use of point of view to place the game player "in the eyes" of the main character they are playing. Delda cited Assassin's Creed III as the inaugural game he played. The incorporation of cutscenes, which adopted a cinematic perspective that evoked the experience of viewing a movie, served to augment the sense of immersion, thereby engendering a profound sense of engagement with the narrative of the immigrants and indigenous people narrated in the game. In an interview with researchers about this, Delda stated:

"Ternyata dari segi visual, terus ya peletakan kameranya lah kalau di film tuh. Sinematik banget gitu kalau menurut saya. Sinematografinya cukup diperhatikan, terus sama penulisan ceritanya tuh pake hati ... Jadinya sentimental banget sih. Terus dari segi visualnya sih... Karena itu game jadul ya, tapi dulu saya merasa cukup bagus sih. Dari tata letak kota, terus dari dia waktu cutscenanya kan dia ngambil sisi kameranya itu bagus gitu. Menurut saya POV-nya bagus gitu."
(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"It turns out that the visuals, and the camera placement, are like a movie. It's very cinematic, in my opinion. The cinematography is well thought out, and the writing is heartfelt... It makes it very sentimental. And the visuals... It's an old game, but I thought it was quite good. The city layout, and the camera angles during the cutscenes, are all beautiful. I think the POV is good."
(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

In the opinion of Delda, the urban layout and the framing of a single shot of the city gate in *Assassin's Creed III*, or the forest landscape as seen in other examples, such as *Red Dead Redemption 2*, also convey historical context and social conditions. This, in turn, has the effect of rendering players of these video games more sensitive to the dynamics of the story presented. In this case, it can be argued that visual framing principles such as the use of close-ups to capture the emotional expressions of a character, wide shots or establishing shots to emphasize the scale of the city and the game world, and also the composition of the rule of thirds have the ability to implicitly guide the gamer's eye to imagine the narrative context that appears in the game being played.

In order to conceptualise the manner in which these two elements can be employed to enhance storytelling, it is first necessary to consider their capacity to engender empathy. The concept of cinematic angles in video games entails the implementation of a virtual environment that enables the gamer to adopt the perspective of the character they are controlling, thereby engendering a sense of agency that is analogous to the experience of observing the world through the character's own eyes. A second strategy is to emphasize emotional moments, such as close-ups of the protagonists' faces from *Assassin's Creed III* or Arthur Morgan from *Red Dead Redemption 2*. This serves to maximise sympathy when family conflicts arise in the narrative or during moments where the character is dying. In conclusion, the strategic placement of emphasis through deliberate framing techniques serves to illuminate pivotal objects or symbols. A notable example of this is the recurring Templar motif in the *Assassin's Creed* video game series, which employs visual cues to facilitate gamers' comprehension of the narrative elements integrated into the game's storyline.

With regard to the additional example in the game entitled *Assassin's Creed III*, as referenced by Delda, it is evident that cinematic cutscenes, characterized by the utilisation of a camera that follows the movements of Connor, the game's primary protagonist, have the capacity to evoke a documentary-like aesthetic. The depiction of the interaction between Connor and Haytham in the government room in *Assassin's Creed III* also appears to emphasize the interpersonal tension that occurs. The final example is a wide shot of the old city of Boston as a setting, which emphasizes the scale of the conflict between the British, colonial and indigenous tribes involved in the game's narrative.

In a manner akin to Kevin Maherga Surbakti's elucidation of character design and animation as a pivotal element in the visual narrative of games, thereby rendering it effective for gamers to retell, Delda's perspective, which places significant emphasis on cinematography techniques and visual framing, also exhibits a comparable correlation with the argument proposed by Zarzycki (2015). As Zarzycki (2015) emphasizes, the efficacy of cinematic narrative in video games is contingent on the capacity of camera techniques to establish an emotional rhythm and direct the gamer's attention. The speaker expounded on the notion of cutscenes as a medium for narrative progression, likening them to the intertitles of a cinematic production. These interludes serve to transition the narrative from the exploratory phase of gameplay to pivotal plot points. The transition between gamer control and cinematic scenes is characterized by a seamless progression, ensuring that the immersive experience is sustained without disrupting the continuous progression of the narrative. A secondary yet pivotal element of the argument under scrutiny is the utilisation of dynamic camera angles.

As Zarzycki (2015) observes, the selection of camera angles can serve to create a compelling visual focal point and influence a gamer's emotional response to a video game. Angles such as low-angle, over-the-shoulder, and high-angle perspectives have been demonstrated to elicit specific emotional responses, including feelings of dominance, intimacy, and vulnerability, respectively. The third of his arguments pertains to the utilisation of slow-motion and close-ups for accentuated moments. The employment of slow-motion effects serves to underscore the dramatic culmination of a scene, while the strategic utilisation of subtle close-ups captures the nuanced expressions that are typically imperceptible to the untrained eye. This combination serves to enhance emotional resonance, thereby rendering every significant moment more impactful than the typical real-time gameplay experience that is commonly encountered by gamers. Finally, the examination of camera movements, including panning, tracking, and zooming, is imperative to ensure comprehensive analysis. Horizontal panning and tracking shots, which follow the movements of a video game player or narrative object, have been demonstrated to create a sense of space and continuity. The integration of zooming in and out, or vice versa, has the capacity to reveal a comprehensive landscape that has the potential to enhance the narrative context of a game.

The study explores the correlation between Delda's perspective and that of Zarzycki (2015), highlighting Delda's assertion that the quality of a game's cinematic experience is contingent not solely on its visual fidelity, but also on the strategic integration of framing and camera movement, meticulously designed to stimulate gamers' curiosity through the selected perspective. For instance, a close-up of a mysterious object in the corner of the layer serves to encourage gamers to explore the available lore in greater depth. The combination of good cinematography and visual framing, from Delda's perspective, can also present emotional resonance through visual rhythm. For instance, consider the utilisation of the slow-motion effect when a game character encounters failure in creating a deep reflection space within the narrative being depicted. It has been demonstrated that both of these can also function to control the focal point of the narrative being told, such as with the presence of dynamic angles that suddenly shift attention from the background to facial expressions, thereby strengthening the bond between the gamer playing the game and the character they are playing.

In summary, Delda seeks to delineate the cinematic principles espoused by Zarzycki (2015), including the seamless integration of cutscenes, the deliberate selection of camera angles, and the utilisation of visual pacing, as the foundational principles of visual framing within this specific sub-chapter. It is acknowledged that both parties concur that the camera, with its ability to convey narratives through its lens, is of equal significance to the dialogue or text that reinforces the visual narrative in a game. This is due to the fact that the camera guides the gamer's eyes and soul to the core of the narrative being presented.

C. Environmental Storytelling (Through Environment Design)

In addition to the previously explained three-dimensional characterisation, Muhammad Faraj Muzakki places significant emphasis on the notion of the visual environment as a silent narrator. As one of the aspects that renders visual narration effective, Faraj describes the game environment, such as ruins or decorations like 'dead bodies', as having the potential to provide visual clues about the history of a plot that takes place in a game world. Faraj's analysis demonstrates how these elements contribute to the atmosphere of a fallen kingdom in the game *Hollow Knight*. By relying on visuals without verbal narration, video game players can become trained in independently constructing background stories. In his interview with the researcher,

Faraj cites the use of 'dead bodies' as an example of a visual aspect that reinforces the narrative atmosphere of Hollow Knight. During the interview, Muhammad Faraj Muzakki stated that:

"Mungkin saya bisa ambil contoh dari Hollow Knight kali ya, kenapa ini penting? Karena Hollow Knight itu ceritanya tuh tentang The Fallen Kingdom kalau ga salah, kerajaan yang jatuh lah ya. Jadi kita sebagai karakter itu mengeksplor dunia, mengeksplor kerajaan yang sudah runtuh ini lah gitu ... Mungkin nggak cuma Hollow Knight sih, beberapa game-game lain juga itu (yang) biasanya dipakai adalah dead bodies. Dead Bodies kalau di game-game ini karena itu bisa menambah suasana misalnya ada Fallen Kingdom, terus kita eksplor kan pasti kita bakal lihat kayak bekas perang misalnya atau mungkin bekas orang-orang yang mayat-mayat jatuh atau mungkin benda yang berhubungan sama war misalnya ada patung-patung lah atau apa gitu biasanya, itu penting. Karena membangun base story-nya gitu."
(Ujar Muhammad Faraj Muzakki, dalam wawancaranya pada 12 Maret, 2025)

"Perhaps I can take Hollow Knight as an example. Why is this important? Because Hollow Knight is about The Fallen Kingdom, if I'm not mistaken, a fallen kingdom. So, as characters, we explore the world, exploring this fallen kingdom... Maybe not just Hollow Knight, but also other games that usually use dead bodies. Dead bodies in these games can add atmosphere, for example, in the Fallen Kingdom. Then, when we explore, we'll definitely see war scars, or maybe the remains of fallen bodies, or maybe war-related objects, like statues or something like that. That's important. Because it builds the base story."
(As stated by Muhammad Faraj Muzakki in his interview on March 12th, 2025)

In Faraj's analysis of the game Hollow Knight, he employs the use of properties such as 'dead bodies' as a decorative element in the game's narrative background. This, Faraj contends, serves to reinforce the dystopian impression of a country that has collapsed due to the impact of a war that occurs in the plot. Faraj's position is that the visual environment in games has the capacity to convey a narrative without recourse to verbal communication. Faraj's conceptualisation of artefacts, props and ruins, including piles of corpses or war skeletons in Hollow Knight, as a 'silent narrator', serves to underscore the fall of the kingdom and the great war that forms the backdrop of the game. The subsequent component of the visual environment pertains to the level design and architecture in a video game, which can manifest as edifices, sculptures, or vestiges of civilisation that offer insights into the lives of individuals prior to the collapse of the world in a game. Visual environments can also be manifested through lighting and colour schemes, characterized by dim lighting, fog obscuring vision, or bursts of light in

specific areas that may evoke feelings of fear, curiosity, or hope. This phenomenon occurs without dialogue for every player experiencing the video game.

For Faraj, concrete examples, such as a zone in a game filled with properties such as the corpses of an army and castle ruins that decorate the visual appearance of a video game, as presented in *Hollow Knight*, have the capacity to directly engage gamers' emotions and provoke curiosity about the events that have transpired. Alternatively, as illustrated in the depiction of a post-apocalyptic landscape and properties in the form of giant machine carcasses as depicted in the game *Horizon Zero Dawn*, according to Faraj, it is also able to convey the narrative of the massive scale of the war between humans and robots in the game's setting. In the domain of storytelling, the utilisation of the visual environment has been demonstrated to be advantageous in establishing a compelling visual hook within the initial seconds of a gamer's immersion into a game world.

It is evident that the utilisation of visual environments in video games can also engender exploration and curiosity, thereby prompting the discovery of the implicit lore inherent in the game's setting. This combination serves to enhance the sense of immersion by integrating two distinct elements in gaming: that is the gameplay and the narrative. This integration is facilitated through the incorporation of informative objects and set pieces, which serve to enrich the gaming experience by providing gamers with additional contextual information and visual cues. The integration of three-dimensional characters and visual environments as silent narrators empowers video game developers to optimise non-verbal elements, thereby facilitating the creation of profound, personalised storytelling experiences. These experiences are further enhanced by the capacity to engage gamers as co-authors of the narratives they inhabit.

The utilisation of three-dimensional characterisation and the employment of the visual environment as a silent narrator, as emphasized by Faraj, serve to reflect several key concepts that have been elucidated in preceding studies. Research by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010) clearly explains that Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN) attempts to combine visual storytelling with the interactivity of gamers with the video games they play. In this case, video game players indirectly assume the role of co-creators of the narrative rather than merely passive viewers.

Within the framework of Interactive Visual Narrative (IVN), a character in a video game is no longer merely a static object, but rather becomes a nexus where visual design and the choices made by the video game player intersect. The actions of the gamer have the capacity to influence the progression of the narrative.

This finding lends further support to the hypothesis that Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's approach to three-dimensional characterisation aligns closely with the principles outlined in this study. The author emphasizes that characters which are constructed with a comprehensive background, clear motivations, conflict, and unambiguous development enable gamers to establish a personal connection. This suggests that spectators do not merely observe a character, but also experience a sense of empathy, comprehend their actions, and exert a degree of influence over their destiny. The process of allocating 'screen time' and backstory to a character in a video game enables gamers to engage in meaningful interactions, akin to the concept of interactive visual narrative (IVN). The latter encourages active participation from gamers through the moral decisions they make while playing the game and the relationships between characters that occur within it.

Furthermore, Faraj describes the environments in the video games he plays, such as the ruins of kingdoms and corpses lying around in *Hollow Knight*, as silent narrators that attempt to convey lore without directly mentioning it in words. In this particular instance, it is incumbent upon the player of the video game to explore every corner, read journals, and piece together visual clues in order to understand the storyline of the game. This concept is also closely associated with the notion of interactive visual narrative (IVN), as articulated by Pimenta and Poovaiah (2010). In this paradigm, developers seek to 'plant' narrative information through the utilisation of visual artefacts and level design, subsequently affording video game players the autonomy to discover and interpret this narrative. It is evident that the amalgamation of three-dimensional characterisation and implied narrative environment engenders a profound experience. Consequently, video game players are presented with the opportunity to not only select a storyline, but also to proactively explore, shape, and bring a story to life based on the choices they make while playing the game. Therefore, Faraj's practical experience corroborates the theory of interactive visual narrative (IVN) as posited in his interview with the researcher.

The latter also seeks to convey the notion that a video game that successfully combines well-developed characters and meticulous environmental storytelling can present a unique and personal narrative for each individual gamer.

In the meantime, Kevin's view upon environmental storytelling that elevates the potency of visual narrative, can be defined as environmental details, level design and depictions of the world that reveal layers of story without the necessity for extensive dialogue. During the interview, Kevin cited the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* as for the instance, stated the following:

"Kalo kita tarik ke Kingdom Come gitu ya, Kingdom Come 1, mereka menawarkan fitur contohnya gini, ada misi (dimana) gue harus ke A, gue ngantar balok ke A. Rupanya balok yang lo antar palsu, lo ke pembuat balok itu ke B, harus ke B kan? Karena B yang buat balok. Terus, kau bunuh sih B karena dia yang memalsukan baloknya, terus lo ambil balok yang dikasih, lo kasih ke A. Nah, lo bisa ke B karena lo tau itu bukan dari misi tuh, lo kasih balok ke A, balok yang asli, misi tamat. Tapi lo penasaran gimana keluarga si B yang dibunuh, itu kan bukan bagian dari cerita. Dan lo tau dia pasti terefek oleh tindakan kurang ajar lo, jadi lo balik dan gue bisa ngeliat anak-anaknya nangis, nungguin nangis, dan bener-bener disitu gue kayak, oh ini game bener-bener "it doesn't hold your hand to know what you want to know" ... Jadi, gue jadi terpaksa buat mengerti, apa namanya, akibat dari tindakan gue ke karakter yang menurut gue gak terlalu penting ... itu menurut gue kayak, jarang gue ada game yang membuat gue pengen memperhatikan desain suatu karakter ketika berinteraksi dengan cerita. Soalnya itu kenapa gue lari ke Kingdom Come ... Mereka yang nunjukin animasi dia menangis dan sebagainya, tapi tidak ada di questnya, itu kayak bener-bener 80% kita yang pengen tau sendiri bagaimana akhir suatu cerita."
(Ujar Kevin Maherga Surbakti, dalam wawancaranya pada 9 April, 2025)

"If we go back to Kingdom Come, Kingdom Come 1, they offered a feature like this: there's a mission where I have to go to A, I deliver a block to A. It turns out the block you delivered is fake, so you go to the maker of the block and get B, and you have to go to B, right? Because B made the block. Then, you kill B because he faked the block, and then you take the block he gave you, and you give it to A. Well, you can go to B because you know it's not part of the mission. You give the block to A, the real block, and mission over. But you're curious about what happened to B's family who was killed, that's not part of the story. And you know they must have been affected by your insolence, so you go back and I can see their children crying, waiting for them to cry, and I was like, 'Oh, this game really doesn't hold your hand to know what you want to do.'" "You know" ... So, I was forced to understand, what do you call it, the consequences of my actions towards characters that I didn't think were that important... I think it's rare for me to find a game that makes me want to pay attention to a character's design when interacting with the

story. That's why I ran to Kingdom Come ... They showed the animation of them crying and so on, but it wasn't in the quest, it's like 80% of us really want to know how the story ends."

(As stated by Kevin Maherga Surbakti in his interview on April 9th, 2025)

According to Kevin, this kind of visual arrangement has the capacity to stimulate curiosity, thereby requiring gamers to actively participate in paying attention to the environment and the circumstances that emerge, connecting every clue found, and also feeling the emotional impact of each action taken as gamers. In a manner analogous to Muhammad Faraj Muzakki's perspective on the visual milieu's capacity to act as a tacit narrator within the game, Kevin underscores the manner in which the game environment itself functions as a surreptitious narrator, disseminating vestiges of the narrative without recourse to protracted dialogue or cutscenes. In this discussion, Kevin raises several salient points concerning the game under scrutiny. Chief among these is the presence of environmental details within the game that act as story fragments. These story fragments manifest in properties that appear "unexpectedly."

This is analogous to the game Kingdom Come: As an illustration, the speaker cited the instance of the character Kevin, who, upon slaying the block maker as a prerequisite to the completion of the game's primary quest, encountered the bereaved family of the victim in a state of distress. It is evident that the individual in question is cognisant of the ethical implications of his actions, despite the absence of any extended discourse. Visual traces such as bloodstains in a corridor, torn documents on a desk, or torch marks on a wall can suggest occurrences in the past, thereby evoking curiosity and encouraging gamers to engage with the game world. It is evident that additional environmental elements, such as non-verbal animations on the faces of sad Non-Player Characters (NPCs), evoking blank stares, or visually shocked body language, have the potential to function as "mini-cutscenes". These "mini-cutscenes" have the capacity to reveal layers of emotion and conflict.

In the subsequent discussion, Kevin addressed the significance of worldbuilding in environmental storytelling, inviting gamers to engage with the game by, for instance, appreciating its architectural design and city layout. The subject is still in Kingdom Come: Deliverance. A prime example of this phenomenon is the architecture of a 16th-century

European city, which features stone buildings, open markets, and military fortifications, among other elements. This visual representation of the social structure and hierarchy of society is effective in the absence of textual explanation. In accordance with Faraj's explanation, Kevin also emphasized the role of item descriptions as a form of alternative narrative. In his discourse, Kevin made reference to games such as *Dark Souls* and *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall*, which are characterized by the embedding of lore within the descriptions of weapons and artefacts. This approach, as Kevin noted, facilitates the engagement of gamers with the subtextual layers of the fictional world's history during the course of their exploration, rather than the more conventional method of the subtext being conveyed through dialogue. Finally, with regard to the concept of "isolated" areas, Kevin posited that the incorporation of quiet spaces or ruins that are challenging for gamers to access within a video game can engender a sense of mystery and provoke questions such as, "What was the cause of the destruction of this place?" or "Who were the inhabitants of this location?" It is hypothesised that this approach will motivate gamers to adopt a detective role within their own narratives.

In conclusion, as Kevin asserts, the pivotal element in this matter is the active participation of the gamer in the construction of the game's narrative. Rather than adhering to a conventional linear narrative, gamers are encouraged to explore the visual components of the environment, with the objective of interpreting it into a personal narrative. This fosters a heightened emotional connection between the gamer and the video game, as the narrative they construct and the interpretation they develop resonate deeply with their personal experiences and perceptions. The utilisation of visual elements, encompassing depictions of environmental conditions within the game, has been observed to stimulate discourse within online forums dedicated to gaming, as well as in the context of retrospective video content.

The act of sharing interpretations becomes a means through which the community can construct lore that is more expansive than the overarching narrative of the game, which itself has the potential to be more extensive. As characters, gamers can also obtain different items containing story descriptions that vary depending on the explored area and the interactions they have during play, creating an interpretive and multivocal experience. Consequently, as elucidated by the author, environmental storytelling serves as a potent instrument to motivate gamers to adopt an interactive stance in their engagement with the narrative of the game, transcending the

conventional role of passive consumers. This renders the visual narrative of the game not merely an embellishment, but a pivotal component for the storytelling capability, both for the game developer and the community that consumes the game.

In his discourse to the researcher, Kevin Maherga Surbakti expounded on the significance of environmental design in gaming, underscoring the incorporation of destroyed building walls and abandoned craftsmen's houses in the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. These elements serve to elicit a visceral response from gamers, who are prompted to empathise with the plight of the characters and their families. He elucidated this as a paradigmatic exemplar, emphasising environmental storytelling as a pivotal element in the efficacy of the visual narrative in the game, in its capacity to convey the game's core narrative to gamers. According to Kevin, this example encourages gamers to interpret their own story without the need for a single long cut-scene or expository dialogue. The subject gave an account of the manner in which, upon completion of the primary mission in the game, he returned to the derelict workshop and discovered the victim's family, motionless and overwhelmed by their emotions in the wake of his actions within the game. He further elaborated on the notion that environmental factors constitute a pivotal element in the enhancement of the narrative strength conveyed in a game such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*.

In his 2004 publication 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', Henry Jenkins sought to elaborate on the concept of environmental storytelling. The phenomenon of environmental storytelling, as elucidated by Jenkins (2004), involves the meticulous integration of textural elements, auditory effects, and visual cues, meticulously crafted to weave a narrative tapestry that immerses gamers within the virtual realm of a video game. As posited by Jenkins (2004), level designers function as "narrative architects", tasked with the placement of lore within the game environment, as opposed to its delivery through dialogue. This approach engenders a gameplay experience analogous to that of an investigator tasked with the reassembly of a puzzle, the pieces of which are distributed throughout the game environment and must be pieced together based on the gamer's exploration. Accordingly, the correlation of the explanation of environmental storytelling as mentioned by Kevin and Jenkins (2004) places both on the

recognition that the space or setting in the game itself is the speaker of the situation and circumstances that are happening in a narrative.

Kevin experienced a more profound sense of immersion when he was able to visualise the events of the game through the graphics that depicted the surrounding environment. This finding aligns with the assertion made by Jenkins (2004) that effective level design must facilitate the creation of an intrinsic narrative meaning. Ultimately, the congruence of practical experience ascribed by Kevin and the theoretical framework initiated by Jenkins (2004) both substantiate the hypothesis posited in Chapter Three of this research that the success of visual narrative is not solely determined by the dialogue read or the magnificent cut-scene, but can also be determined by the judicious arrangement of elements contained in a setting, such as rocks, debris, shadows, including the gloom of gestures and the appearance of characters standing in the surrounding environment, to invite gamers who play their characters in a game to form and bring to life the story they want to build themselves.

In a manner consistent with the arguments advanced by Faraj and Kevin, who likewise allude to the concept of environmental storytelling, Delda is of the opinion that the visual accuracy with which fictional worlds, such as those found in video games, are represented serves to facilitate the absorption of lore and thereby enhance the credibility of the narrative. In his commentary on *Cyberpunk 2077*, Delda offers an insightful perspective on the game's depiction of a futuristic world and advanced technology within the fictional city of Night City in 2077.

"Seperti Cyberpunk 2077 kan karena story-nya tentang modifikasi tubuh, aka cyborg, jadi world building sama visual-nya penting. Karena kalau misalkan ini ceritanya tentang cyborg, tapi (menampilkan) koboi, tapi visual-nya itu di padang pasir, malah agak aneh sih. Iya, jadi ngaruh banget sih sebenarnya. Tapi di game yang lain sih tergantung story-nya sih ya, premisnya tentang apa dulu, itu bisa ngaruh secara signifikan."

(Ujar Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya, dalam wawancaranya pada 17 April, 2025)

"Like Cyberpunk 2077, because the story is about body modification, aka cyborgs, so the world-building and visuals are important. Because if this story is about cyborgs, but (displays) cowboys, but the visuals are in the desert, it's a bit strange. Yeah, that makes a big difference, actually. But in other games, it depends on the story, what the premise is about, and that can have a significant impact."

(As stated by Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya in his interview on April 17th, 2025)

Delda's argument concerning the processes of world-building and environmental storytelling demonstrates the manner in which visual and spatial elements in video games function not only as backdrops, but also as active components of the narrative, profoundly influencing the player's experience. According to the aforementioned theorist, effective world-building occurs when the game's world design aligns with the story's themes and reinforces the narrative's logic. He reiterated his point by referencing the example of *Cyberpunk 2077*, wherein the narrative elements concerning body modification and cyborg technology are to be reinforced by the visual depiction of a densely populated, neon-infused, futuristic cityscape, characterized by a high-tech ambience. Delda advanced the argument that, were the setting to be a desert, it would appear incongruous and disrupt the desired level of immersion. Beyond the domain of visual consistency, Delda's argument resonates with those of Faraj and Kevin, underscoring the notion that environmental design in games can serve as a medium to reinforce the narrative conveyed by the game and to facilitate indirect exposition of the circumstances occurring within the game's storyline. In this particular instance, elements such as graffiti adorning walls, social posters and banners, city architecture, and even ambient lighting and sound can convey information pertaining to world history, social conflicts, or the characters inhabiting the game. It is evident that observant gamers can comprehend a game world without the necessity for explicit dialogue, instead forming a narrative understanding through exploration.

Delda also observes that rich world-building has the capacity to encourage gamers to actively shape their own stories through gameplay. When a game environment is characterized by its vitality and significance, gamers demonstrate a propensity to not only complete assigned tasks (i.e. missions) but also to interpret and establish connections between various elements of the game's world and the primary characters and conflicts. This approach serves to reinforce emergent storytelling, a phenomenon in which narratives arise from the interactions of gamers with the game world, as opposed to being derived solely from narrative cutscenes or textual dialogue. In essence, Delda conceptualises world-building and environmental storytelling as narrative instruments that extend the conventional scope of storytelling, encompassing text, sound, visual and atmospheric dimensions. A meticulously crafted game world has been shown

to motivate gamers to engage with the game beyond mere play, prompting them to experience, interpret, and narrate their own personalised accounts. This serves as a paradigm for refining their creative storytelling abilities.

Delda's perspective on the concept of world-building in video games aligns closely with the notion put forth by Henry Jenkins (2004) in *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*, which asserts that a meticulously crafted world should enable gamers to fully immerse themselves in the narrative, allowing them to select a narrative path that aligns with their individual creative processes. Jenkins emphasizes that the aspects of spatial and environmental storytelling serve to position the game's space and environment as the primary medium for the conveyance of the narrative. Through environmental design, visual details, sound effects, and contextual clues, gamers not only enjoy the setting, but also actively "read" and construct a narrative from the world they explore. Delda conceptualises world-building as a catalyst for exploration, curiosity, and emotional engagement, aligning with Jenkins's notions concerning evocative spaces and embedded narratives that employ story or genre associations to enhance the experience. There is a consensus that the efficacy of a game's narrative is not confined to the primary plot, but is also present in the manner in which the game's environment functions as a narrative architect, thereby providing guidance, stimulation, and the opportunity for creative self-expression in the shaping of the player's narrative.

3.2 Gamer's Response and Interpretation to The Game's Narrative Elements

This sub-chapter delineates the manner in which informants responded to and interpreted the visual narrative elements identified in the preceding sub-chapters. The discussion in this sub-chapter connects the findings and discussion that examined the first research problem formulation, which asked about the effective criteria for visual narrative elements in games that influence the insight or storytelling abilities of video game players. This phenomenon is evidenced by the emotional responses, exploratory behaviour, interpretative processes, and narrative actions exhibited by gamers when engaging with the visual narratives emphasized within the game. The responses and interpretations of visual narrative elements by gamers are active and constructive. Gamers do not merely receive the narrative messages conveyed; they also test, construct and reconstruct meaning based on their interactions with visual assets,

mechanics and the consequences of actions during play. A series of interviews with three informants has indicated that elements such as implied narrative, agency, environment, character, and elements of surprise determine response modes, ranging from individual exploration to ethical reflection and community participation.

In the initial phase, the informants adopted an exploratory and analytical stance, motivated to amass lore fragments from in-game journals, item descriptions and environmental clues. These fragments were then assembled into a comprehensive narrative or hypothesis concerning the game world experienced. This process gave rise to a form of gameplay driven by curiosity, in which gamers assume the role of researchers within the fictional world they explore, as opposed to the more passive role of consumers who merely complete a linear game. Muhammad Faraj Muzakki has asserted that the act of reading in-game journals and item descriptions has the capacity to evoke curiosity and facilitate the discovery of hitherto unexplored aspects of the game narrative. This process also extends the time between gamers' engagement with the game narrative and strengthens their storytelling skills as gamers practice assembling plots from these visual fragments. At the interpretative level, the resulting meaning is personal and open to discussion with the community.

Secondly, narrative freedom and gamer agency have been identified as significant factors influencing interpretation. When players are presented with the option to select a particular storyline in a video game, they often interpret the events and characters in accordance with the decisions they make during gameplay. This process of interpretation leads to the creation of a unique narrative that is specific to each playthrough. In this regard, Kevin Maherga Surbakti emphasized that narrative freedom allows video game players to feel as if they are making their own film with every step they take in the game. Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya further elaborated that this level of freedom facilitates an experience that is analogous to a combination of a novel and a film. In this particular instance, it signifies that gamers embody dynamic characters who shape the narrative through their actions within the game. The interpretative practice in this context is subjective and multi-variant in nature, involving the evaluation of short-term goals and long-term implications, as well as the moral justification for the choices made.

Thirdly, elements such as moral dilemmas and the consequences of choices also trigger ethical reflection and deep emotional engagement. When games present players with significant choices that have discernible emotional ramifications for both the world and the characters within it, players' responses are not confined to pragmatic reactions. Instead, interpretations of game events are imbued with moral nuances. Delda Lesmana Sastrawijaya employs examples from *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Red Dead Redemption*, and *Detroit: Become Human*, which in the present study he utilizes the game to illustrate how such dilemmas encourage video game players to engage in introspection and reinterpret their characters and narrative consequences. The presence of moral dilemmas also generates a unique type of cognitive-affective response because gamers choose not simply based on utility but also weigh personal values, empathy for the characters, and social implications. Interpretations of characters and events are frequently revised post-choice, as these experiences encourage introspection and ethical discussion outside of the gameplay session. The strength of each decision is increased by clear narrative consequences, which also prolong the narrative learning effect.

Fourthly, it is evident that character design elements and expressive animations serve as primary sources for reading the emotions and motivations of characters depicted in a game's narrative. All three informants described how gestures, facial expressions, and cutscenes can provide non-verbal data that gamers use to infer backgrounds, inner conflicts, and relationships between characters. Consequently, the visual reading of these character design elements frequently extends beyond the textual dialogue, thereby implicitly enriching narrative interpretations. It is evident that detailed character design and expressive animations function as non-verbal data sources that gamers utilize to interpret the motivations and inner states of the characters they encounter in the game. These interpretations serve to enrich the narrative, as players frequently combine visual clues with brief dialogues or settings to construct a coherent character story.

Fifthly, environmental elements and environmental storytelling also function as narrative archives that can be read. That is to say, such elements may include architecture, objects, traces of events and landscapes in a video game. These elements are so carefully considered by gamers as they reconstruct the history of the game world they are playing. The responses of gamers to

the visual appearance of the game environment are typically investigative and inferential in nature. This means that gamers connect visual clues with possible past events or character settings, thereby rendering the game world a source of evidence that enriches references to their storytelling abilities. Interpretation of the environment in games also tends to be collaborative, with players discussing the game's lore hypothesis in the community to develop the game world into a text that can be read and rewritten collectively.

And in the last part, elements such as story dynamics and narrative surprises, including plot twists embedded within the narrative, have the capacity to provoke intense emotional reactions and reinterpretations of the overall narrative within the game. These effective surprises encourage video game players to reassess character motives, goals, and prior assumptions, often spurring community discussion and sometimes even the production of fan-driven content as new forms of collective meaning, such as fan theories or other participatory activities originating from gamers themselves. The initial emotional response is frequently accompanied by a re-examination of the story structure, the formulation of theories, and the dissemination of reactions on community platforms.

The response patterns exhibited by the three informants demonstrate that gamers' interpretations of narrative visual elements are active, creative, and contextual. This phenomenon is characterized by the interplay of meanings arising from the interaction between features and design, such as the inclusion of implied narratives, agency, and environmental cues. The efficacy of visual narratives in enhancing gamers' knowledge of storytelling is influenced by a number of factors, including the gamers' own experiences, such as their values, preferences, and understanding of game literacy. Consequently, gamers not only receive the story from the game they play, but also reconstruct, adapt, and recommunicate the narrative through personal playthroughs, ethical reflections, or community creations such as lore theory and fanworks. The emotional engagement present when gamers play a game also influences how clues are prioritize and remembered, as emotional moments strengthen narrative schemas that are then repeated in the player's storytelling. The experience of strong personal feelings, such as shock, sadness and guilt, during play has been demonstrated to accelerate the formation of personal narratives and

encourage the sharing of experiences. This suggests that gamer storytelling can be considered a tool for both emotional regulation and personal representation.

The results of Chapter Three demonstrate that informants develop storytelling abilities through the utilization of visual narrative components, including implied narratives, player agency, moral dilemmas, surprise dynamics, character and environmental design, and emotional consequences. These findings exhibit a conceptual alignment with Ien Ang's reception theory framework. Specifically, the pattern of narrative reconstruction involving inference, meaning-testing, and recontextualization of experience affirms the audience's position as active agents negotiating the text's use-value, rather than as objects of production manipulation. The informants' reading of visual elements as both a means of identification and a means of critical distance reflects a receptive mechanism in which aesthetic pleasure and affective engagement serve as starting points for social and personal interpretation. Moreover, the informants' explicit reasons appear to be symptomatic, representing structures of feeling and socio-cultural conditions that shape preferences. Consequently, these reasons warrant analysis as manifestations of a deeper receptive orientation. These findings underscore the significance of differentiating between the game's textual characteristics and the conditions of consumption, such as the platform context and community practices, as their interaction determines the manner in which players derive and employ pleasure. Therefore, the integration of Chapter 3's empirical findings and reception theory underscores that the performer's storytelling experience is the result of a dialectic between textual material and reception practices that are affectively, socially, and culturally charged.

This sub-chapter concludes by emphasizing the implications for game designers that if gamers' storytelling and narrative participation are to be encouraged, then visual design functions as interpretive tools. These include implicit lore fragments, meaningful action options, informative environments, expressive characters, and well-integrated narrative surprises, supported by feedback mechanisms such as playtesting that ensure the consequences of gamer choices feel coherent and impactful within the game world. The findings and discussion in this sub-chapter demonstrate that gamers' responses to narrative visual elements are an active process combining cognitive interpretation, emotional reactions, and social interactions. These responses

corroborate the effectiveness criteria identified in the initial research question: elements that encourage exploration, provide meaningful freedom of action, showcase expressive characters, and provide interpretive points will enhance players' storytelling abilities. It is imperative to acknowledge that interpretation does not occur solely at the individual level; it also permeates community activities, encompassing discourse on lore, theories, streaming reactions, and other fanworks. It is evident that social media platforms, such as Discord, Reddit, and YouTube, have emerged as significant sites for the exchange of ideas and the formation of collective narratives. In these spaces, divergent interpretations are tested and frequently revised, contributing to the creation of composite narratives that either complement or challenge the official game narrative.

Chapter IV

Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

This study confirms that six criteria – implied narrative, narrative agency, moral dilemmas with tangible consequences, expressive character design and animation, environmental storytelling, and story dynamics with elements of surprise – work synergistically to create an immersive storytelling experience. The aforementioned criteria are not isolated entities; rather, they are interconnected, forming a complex system that interacts with each other. This framework addresses the two research questions: firstly, what elements constitute an effective visual narrative, and secondly, how do gamers respond to and interpret these elements. It is not simply a matter of consuming stories; rather, gamers engage in the collection of pieces of lore fragments, test hypotheses through moral choices, interpret character motivations from backstories and animations, explore the game world as a narrative archive, and respond to plot twists. These activities collectively form a rich personal narrative.

Theoretically, these findings serve to reinforce the principles of reception theory and the concept of narrative architecture. The data indicate that, in contrast to the conventional notion of the audience as passive recipients, gamers actively construct meaning through four cyclical stages: perceiving visual clues, inferring, testing through action, and reconstructing the narrative. Meaning is theorized to emerge from a dynamic interplay between the design of the game and the gamer's experiential environment, thereby substantiating the assertion that video games function as a medium that facilitates narrative co-creation, a capacity that is inherently absent in linear media.

From a pragmatic standpoint, this research offers a concrete roadmap for game designers. First, it is crucial to craft implicit narrative clues, such as item descriptions and environmental cues, in a manner that fosters exploration without inducing confusion. Second, the mechanics of gamer choices and actions must yield transparent and consequential outcomes, validated through iterative playtesting to create meaningful agency. Third, character design and non-verbal

animations must effectively communicate emotional states to build empathy. Fourth, it is essential that the game world is designed as an "archive" that is both accessible and navigable. Fifth, plot twists should be placed at strategic narrative moments to stimulate reinterpretation and encourage discourse within the community. These recommendations support developers in creating visual narrative experiences that are not only entertaining but also empower gamers' storytelling abilities.

Moreover, the research findings demonstrate that video games have the potential to serve as creative laboratories for the development of soft skills such as critical thinking, empathy, and, most importantly, storytelling. Integrating moral dilemmas and environmental exploration into game-based learning environments can promote ethical reflection and enhance narrative skills in users. Finally, this research emphasizes the transformation of video games from a mere interactive entertainment medium into a dynamic communicative medium. In this medium, designers and gamers collaborate to create and reconstruct stories, making each gamer both agent and storyteller of their own story.

4.2 Research Limitations

The present study is bound by several limitations. First, the small sample size, three players aged 21–22 from Bandung, limits the generalizability of findings across broader demographic, cultural, and gaming-literacy spectrums. Second, data were obtained through self-report and semi-structured interviews, without the involvement of longer observations or digital trace analysis. This means that there is a potential for memory bias and social tendencies to influence the informants' narratives. Third, the focus on RPGs and a limited set of popular titles restricts generalizability of the findings to other genres, such as sports or strategy games, or indeed other genres that potentially incorporate intense use of visual narratives. Finally, it should be noted that the researcher's interpretation of the qualitative data obtained and processed may be influenced by subjectivity, despite the implementation of triangulation and the verification of quotations.

4.3 Recommendations

The research findings indicate the existence of numerous practical recommendations for game developers to employ in the design of visual narratives. The recommendations are not only intended to be entertaining; they also seek to empower gamers' storytelling abilities. First, developers should provide meaningful narrative fragments, such as item descriptions, in-game journals, or environmental clues designed to encourage exploration without being confusing. Designers should balance implicit narrative cues with explicit signals to sustain engagement among novice players while simultaneously providing experienced gamers with the opportunity to engage in in-depth inference. Second, choice mechanisms should possess clear and consistent consequences that can be evaluated through playtesting, thereby engendering a sense of agency that is both authentic and impactful. Consequence design should consider emotional and narrative implications, encouraging reflection and generate meaningful storylines. Third, character development and nonverbal animation should be deepened to convey emotional information in a more nuanced manner, thus ensuring that dialogue is not the sole conduit for emotional expression. The employment of gestures, expressions, and meticulously orchestrated cutscene staging can furnish players with substantial clues for interpreting the motivations and interpersonal dynamics among characters.

It is recommended for future researchers to expand the scope of studies with larger, demographically diverse samples, and to combine self-report interviews with behavioral observations, such as recordings of longitudinal play sessions and analysis of online community discussions. A mixed-methods approach will allow for triangulation between gamers' subjective reports and more objective behavioural evidence, and provide insight into how interpretations are discussed in public spaces such as forums, Discord, or YouTube. It is recommended that experimental research be conducted to measure the effects of varying visual cues, such as the clarity of implied cues and the intensity of choice consequences, on gamers' storytelling output. This may include the length of narratives produced, the frequency of lore sharing, or the quality of fanworks.

The findings of the present study suggest that educators and media practitioners utilize game-based learning that integrates visual narrative elements, such as moral dilemmas,

environmental artifacts, and layered characters, as a means of training users' critical thinking, empathy, and storytelling skills. In practice, educators can develop reflective assignments based on game scenes, lore re-creation workshops, or character analysis modules that encourage users to rewrite narratives based on visual evidence. Furthermore, collaboration between developers and educators to create educational modes or in-game learning options has the potential to unleash the pedagogical potential of this medium.

Finally, the developer and research communities are encouraged to establish collaborative ecosystems, such as effective narrative design, the sharing of playtesting case studies on the consequences of choices, and the sharing of platforms for research findings, to accelerate the adoption of evidence-based practices in designing visual narratives. The implementation of these recommendations has the potential to enhance the efficacy of video games as a medium for honing storytelling skills, thereby enriching gamers' experiences on both emotional and intellectual levels.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

List of interview questions according to the importance category (high, mid, low):

Question importance: High

1. How was your experience the first time you played a game that had a strong visual narrative?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana pengalaman pertama Anda saat bermain game dengan narasi visual yang kuat?
2. How would you describe your emotional engagement with the story in the game?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana Anda menggambarkan keterlibatan emosional Anda dengan cerita dalam game?
3. To what extent do you feel your decisions and actions in the game affect the development of the story?
In Indonesian:
Sejauh mana Anda merasa keputusan dan tindakan Anda dalam game memengaruhi perkembangan cerita?
4. How do the visual elements in the game (such as graphics, animation, character design) affect the way you understand and interact with the story?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana elemen visual dalam game (seperti grafik, animasi, desain karakter) memengaruhi cara Anda memahami dan berinteraksi dengan cerita?
5. Have you ever felt inspired to create your own stories or other creative content after playing a game? Tell the experience if any.
In Indonesian:
Apakah Anda pernah merasa terinspirasi untuk membuat cerita sendiri atau konten kreatif lainnya setelah bermain game? Ceritakan pengalaman Anda bila ada.
6. What makes you feel connected to the characters in the game?
In Indonesian:
Apa yang membuat Anda merasa terhubung dengan karakter dalam game?
7. How does the visual narrative in the game affect your understanding of the storyline and world in the game?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana narasi visual dalam game memengaruhi pemahaman Anda tentang alur cerita dan dunia dalam game?
8. Do you prefer games with a strong visual narrative compared to games that focus on the game mechanics alone? Why?
In Indonesian:
Apakah Anda lebih suka game dengan narasi visual yang kuat dibandingkan game yang fokus pada mekanisme permainan saja? Mengapa?

Question importance: Mid

1. How do elements like moral dilemmas and character development affect your gaming experience?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana elemen seperti dilema moral dan pengembangan karakter memengaruhi pengalaman bermain Anda?

2. How often do you share or discuss story experiences from games with others?
In Indonesian:
Seberapa sering Anda berbagi atau mendiskusikan pengalaman cerita dari game dengan orang lain?
3. How do you see your role as a player in shaping the story in the game?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana Anda melihat peran Anda sebagai pemain dalam membentuk cerita dalam game?
4. Are there certain game genres or titles that you think are more effective in conveying a visual narrative?
Please give an example.
In Indonesian:
Apakah ada genre game atau judul tertentu yang menurut Anda lebih efektif dalam menyampaikan narasi visual? Berikan contoh.
5. How does your interaction with the characters in the game affect the way you understand the story?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana interaksi Anda dengan karakter dalam game memengaruhi cara Anda memahami ceritanya?
6. Have you ever experienced a change in perspective or insight after playing a game with a strong visual narrative? Explain.
In Indonesian:
Apakah Anda pernah mengalami perubahan pandangan atau wawasan setelah bermain game dengan narasi visual yang kuat? Jelaskan.
7. How important is the visual narrative in determining your decision to choose or recommend a game?
In Indonesian:
Seberapa penting narasi visual dalam menentukan keputusan Anda untuk memilih atau merekomendasikan game?
8. Do you feel that games with a good visual narrative motivate you more to complete the game? Why?
In Indonesian:
Apakah game dengan narasi visual yang bagus membuat Anda lebih termotivasi untuk menyelesaikan game? Mengapa?

Question importance: Low

1. How would you describe the quality of the visual narrative in the games you play?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana Anda menggambarkan / menjelaskan kualitas narasi visual dalam game yang Anda mainkan?
2. Do you feel like the visual narrative in the game influences your creativity outside of the game?
In Indonesian:
Apakah Anda merasa narasi visual dalam game memengaruhi kreativitas Anda di luar game?
3. How would you compare the gaming experience to watching a film or reading a book in terms of narrative?
In Indonesian:
Bagaimana Anda membandingkan pengalaman bermain game dengan menonton film atau membaca buku dalam hal narasi?
4. Have you ever followed or joined an online community that discusses in-game stories? How did it affect your understanding of the story in the game?
In Indonesian:
Apakah Anda pernah mengikuti atau bergabung dengan komunitas online yang membahas cerita dalam game? Bagaimana hal ini memengaruhi pemahaman Anda tentang cerita dalam game?