WSOA3003A Assignment 2: Communication Feedback Design & Game Analysis

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Reigns (Nerial, 2016) is a single-player strategy mobile game developed by Nerial and published by Devolver Digital. This game will be analysed using the MDA framework (Hunicke et al., 2004) in relation to the game's feedback design.

Reigns is a strategy card game in which the player takes on the role of a medieval king and must swipe left or right on different advisor cards to accept or decline the person's suggestion. Depending on the player's choice, one or more of the game's various stats (i.e. the church, the people, the military, and the money) will either increase or decrease. If one of the stats is either maxed-out or drops to zero, the king's reign ends, and he dies. However, the game continues, as the player continues to play as their heir. The goal of the game is to achieve a high score and be in power as a king for as long as possible.

During a game of *Reign,* the player must utilise the game's tinder-esque mechanic of swiping left or right on an advisor's suggestion to affect the game's various stats. The feedback of whether the stats will increase or decrease and the amount the stat will increase or decrease by is kept hidden from the player. By keeping this information hidden from the player, the game creates a sense of uncertainty in the player about which way to swipe on a decision which brings in an element of chance in the game, as the player must take an educated guess on how a stat will be affected. However, the game does not leave the player to guess by themselves. When the player is about to swipe in either direction, a circle appears above different stats hinting at how the stat will be affected. If the circle is big, the player can deduce that the stat will increase or decrease by a large amount, while a small circle will indicate to the player that the stat will increase or decrease by a small amount. Adding the circles as a form of feedback for the player mitigates the chance of the player becoming confused or frustrated from a lack of information (Brathwaite & Schreiber, 2008) . This feedback in turn allows the player to understand the consequences of their decisions and enables them to form a strategy in terms of planning how to affect each stat when swiping left or right.

Depending on player actions, the player may gain card abilities which will either give an advantage or disadvantage to their decisions making. For example, the clarity card will reveal

to the player whether a stat will increase or decrease depending on which way the player swipes and the amount it will increase or decrease by. This adds another level of feedback to the player's actions and gives the player more information as to how the stats are affected. *Reigns* provides effective feedback communication of its systems through its visuals elements. When the player is about to swipe left or right, the game communicates this potential decision by moving the card gently in the direction the player is about to swipe. The swipe direction is also communicated through the advisors' eyes which move in the direction the player is about to swipe in, providing an additional layer of feedback. The game's minimalistic aesthetic provides the player with an easy-to-understand UI (user-interface) system. To keep the UI minimalist and easy to process visually, the game uses iconic representation to portray the game's various stats and its feedback, relying on conventions and the player's knowledge of symbols, signs and signifiers (i.e. the sword represents the military stat). When a stat is raised the icon briefly turns green and when a stat is lowered it briefly turns red to visually give feedback to the player whether the stat has increased or decreased as by convention, green is associated with growth while red is associated with decline.

As the player continues to make decisions, a "collection" and "solve" dynamic (Boller, 2013) emerges. As the player interacts with the game, they unlock and collect different endings, characters and objectives, the collection dynamic emerges as the player achieve personal goals of acquiring certain unlockables. The game's "solve" dynamic is a result of the player's interaction with the game's mechanics, as the player must use problem-solving and deduction to manage the game's various stats.

In relation to the game's aesthetics, *Reign's* aesthetics can be grouped under "challenge" and "fantasy" (Hunicke et al., 2004). *Reigns* provides the player with the "challenge" of managing the game's various stats and achieving a high score. *Reigns* also provides a "fantasy" aesthetic by allowing the player to play a game where they can realize their desire to become a king and manage a kingdom.

Reigns provides effective communication feedback design by supporting its mechanics and systems through its layered visual elements, which combined, allows for the emergence of interesting dynamics and game aesthetics.

Bibliography

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