THREES

Author: Oratile Tlhabanyane

1686967

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

WITS SCHOOL OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

WSOA3003A: GAME DESIGN

MDA GAME ANALYSIS: COMMUNICATION DESIGN

5 APRIL 2021

(Photo Courtesy of Google https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/Threes%21_app_icon.png)

Plagiarism declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and to pretend that it is one's own.
2. I have used the author date convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to and quotation in this essay from the work or works of other people has been acknowledged through citation and reference.
3. This essay is my own work.
4. I have not submitted this work, or a substantial portion thereof, for assessment previously.
5. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
6. I have done the word processing and formatting of this assignment myself. I understand that the correct formatting is part of the mark for this assignment and that it is therefore wrong for another person to do it for me.

Initials & Surname: _____O. B TLHABANYANE_____

Date: __5/4/2021_____

Introduction

Threes! is a very addictive, puzzle video game that focuses on sliding tiles that contain numbers, a player needs to slide these tiles in order to add them to equal multiples of three. If the grid is full and there are no more moves, then the game ends and it shows the player their score. (Threes!, 2014)

The game *Threes*, which is also written as *Threes!*, was developed and published by Sirvo. It is a single-player game which was designed by Asher Vollmer and Jimmy Hinson. The below is going to include the analysis of the communication design in *Threes* using Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek's MDA framework and this is "a formal approach to game design and game research" (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004).

The 7 formal components for game analysis can also be identified in bold text during the analysis: player, objective, challenge, mechanics, rules, gameplay and outcome.

MDA?

I am going to start off by explaining each element of the MDA through the step-by-step perspective of a player. The player first experiences the aesthetics of a game, then moves onto the dynamics of the game and lastly ends with the encounter of the mechanics. Aesthetics are emotional response that are desired which is raised from the players when they are interacting with the game (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). Dynamics are "responses" or effects of the mechanics in reaction to the inputs the player makes during gameplay (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004). Mechanics are the actions and control mechanisms that are in the game which are presented to the player and make the game 'function' (Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R, 2004).

Aesthetics

This tiny, adorable puzzle game has an influence of sushi and chess in regard to their aesthetics. (Threes, 2014). The **player** is presented with a simple User Interface where it shows the menu, tutorial and 'play threes' buttons, look at figure 1.1. These buttons indicate and communicate to the player where to press if they want to navigate to the main menu, tutorial session or start the game. Below the 'play threes' button they indicate which key should you use to start the game. A tutorial is a great element to use when designing communication in a game. The game's display of communication is not just in the use of

texts, colour of matching tiles but also if you look at figure 1.2, you can see little faces/emojis on each tile. The emojis' mouths move close together when there is a possible match up and if the tiles have the same emojis then they can match up. However, player doesn't really notice these emojis as hints at first because we too focused on matching the numbers that are right on top of the tile. There are new emojis that are created as gameplay goes, look at figure 1.3 when player matches 24 and 24.

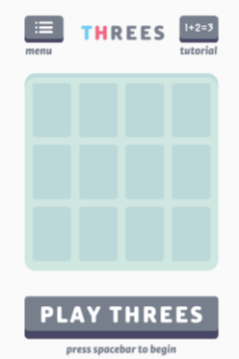

Figure 1.1 (Courtesy of http://play.threesgame.com/ screenshot)

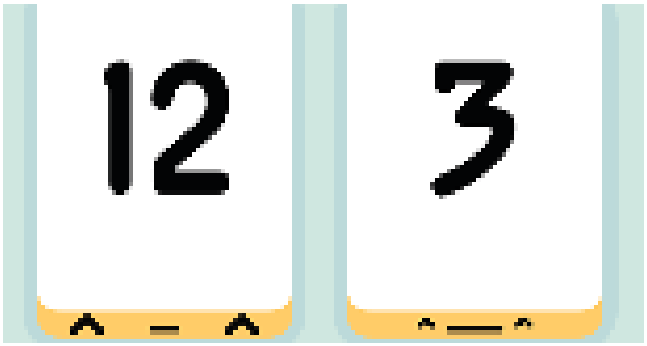

Figure 1.2 (Courtesy of http://play.threesgame.com/ screenshot)

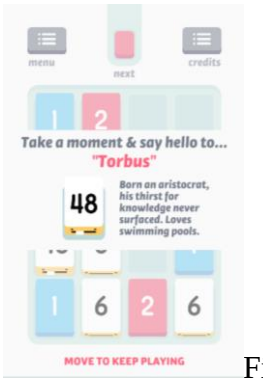

Figure 1.3 (Courtesy of http://play.threesgame.com/ screenshot)

Dynamics and overall gameplay

This game brings sensation, through its mechanical design and also sound design.

There is one goal and that is to challenge yourself and get the highest score during each **outcome**. This increases the player's interest in how far they can go, so they train themselves on how to 'outsmart' the game's system by trying see future moves by swiping really slowly and viewing what the move is going to result in after viewing the tile that's going to come next, see 'next' mechanic in figure 1.4.

The use of sound design brings an element of pleasure during gameplay. Each emoji that gets created has their own distinct voices and personalities this is encourages replay and players would want to discover more of these emojis/tiles. The soundtrack gives the player a vibe as if they are in a vibey café. (Stapleton, 2014)

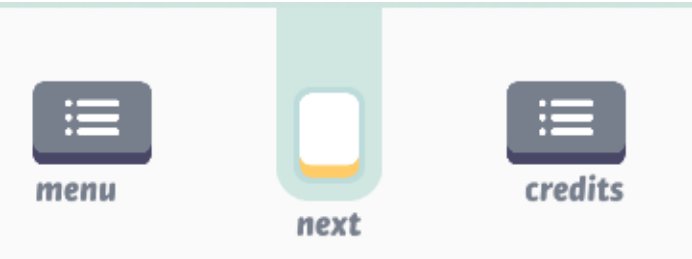

Figure 1.4 (Courtesy of http://play.threesgame.com/ screenshot)

Mechanics

M**echanics** are the things the player can do during the game. How does communication show through the mechanics? Player can, swipe up, down, left and right to match the different tiles by either using arrows on the laptop or swiping mechanic on mobile phones. Players can also use the "peek" mechanic which happens when a player swipes slowly to see what their next move is going to result into before committing to it. They can also see which tile comes next. The game also uses "unlocking" mechanic, whenever there is a new match up, a new number/emoji and its characteristics gets unlocked. The use of these mechanics gives great feedback to the player, together with the use of sound design, players know when they are making the right moves or not. For example, if player were to try to swipe and match a number above 3 which is not the same as that number then the emoji voices would communicate, "nuuh uh". The integration of these two mechanics creates interesting gamplay which keeps the player interested and very addicted to it. (Three, 2014) At first, a player may

think the game is a maths game but it is simple just a matching game, some tiles can be matched and some can't.

5.

Conclusion & Evaluation

Communication design in *Threes* is quite clear and brilliantly executed. Players know how to play the game through the use of text explaining gameplay but also through the use of the tutorial mechanic. The sound design tells players if they are getting the flow of the gameplay or not and if not, the voices of the emojis will bring to your attention the error that you have made. Feedback is given promptly as you progress through the game.

Bibliography

Asher Vollmer. (2014). *Threes* [Video Game]. IOS, Android, Microsoft. https://asherv.com/threes/ (4 April 2021)

Google Play. (2014). Threes! Freeplay. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=vo.threes.free&hl=en&gl=US. (4 April 2021)

Stapleton, D. (2014). Threes Review. IGN. https://www.ign.com/articles/2014/12/09/threes-review

Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R. (2004). MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research. In Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI. https://users.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf

.