MDA Analysis- Threes

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Introduction

This report will discuss the types of the feedback methods used in the game Threes. In the following sections we will focus on a set of feedback methods and whether they successfully answer our analysis questions. We will be looking at how the mechanics are communicated and how and if the communication design affects game feel and experience. Are these elements of communication used in such a way that it is readable at any given moment during game play. Finally, we will try to identify whether the different layers of feedback are present.

Types of Feedback and How They are Presented in The Game.

Using the MDA analysis technique, we will be analysing these methods and how they effect the mechanics, dynamics or the aesthetics of the game.

1. **UI**

Everything bout Threes is simple and that includes the UI presented to us, from the layout to the colour scheme. The first thing the player notices is a 4 x 4 grid that is partially filled with numbered slabs. The numbers 1 and 2 are presented as blue and pink slabs respectively, the rest of the slabs are white with a unique face drawn at the bottom. Each face is assigned to a number. Above the board the player can also see what slab will appear after the next move

When Two or more slabs match the faces of those respective slabs react. The player can immediately identify which slabs to combine. When we take into consideration the tile above the board, this piece of information creates a dynamic for the player to strategically plan their next move. Altogether, the numbers, faces and the tile above the grid, helps the player understand and strategically use the swipe mechanic provided to them.

Another set of UI is also used whenever the player creates a new number, this causes a UI text to pop up introducing the new character the player. This not only give the player a sense of achievement but also creates a bond between the players and the characters.

2. **Art + Animation**

The number and faces alone do not give off successful and efficient feedback. Art and animation combined successfully create a feedback system that players can interact with and understand. To add onto the faces drawn on each slab when slabs of the same kind a next to each other these faces react to each other forming new facial expression or simply looking at each other. Once again affecting game play by hinting that these slabs can combine, the simple animations and art allow the player to immediately recognise this at any given point in the game.

3. **Sound Effects**

There are 5 different events that occur when sound effects are used:

Event	Explanation
Swiping	When ever the player swipes two sounds effects can play. 1. A swiping sound, indicating that the swipe was successful. 2. The character on the board saying "NO", indicating that a swipe cannot be made.

Combining	When combining characters, a different greeting is played for each character type. This allows the player to recognise which characters have popped up, allowing the player to become more familiar with each.
Idling	When the player leaves the game to idle, the characters begin to express their boredom, by telling the players that they are bored or simple sighing. This ends up giving the game and characters more depth and life.
Ending	Running out of space for more moves. When this happens, the facial expressions become neutral, and a cheering noise is played. This draws down to manipulation as the player is cheered at for running out of moves and not frowned upon.
Introducing a new Character	When a new character is form, a small animation plays with confetti and a cheering sound effect is played. This gives a sense of achievement. Another sound is played by introducing this new character as they introduce themselves.

4. Music

Soft and soothing, with a gradual change in tempo and pitch and a subtle background harmony, is the best way to describe the music used in this game. Even on its own the music simply puts one in a relaxed state. When analysing the game without the music, the player can become very annoyed fast. The music serves as a means of manipulating the player, making them forget about the frustration brought out by the game. With the sudden changes in tempo observed, this could be associated with the gameplay, as the game can sometimes be unpredictable and could slowly become intense.

5. UX

5.1. Simple Core Mechanic

The central core mechanic is simple and yet satisfying, allowing it to be understood almost instantly, allowing any player, regardless of their gaming background to approach the game with ease. When navigating through the main menu this can also be observed as navigating uses the same core mechanic and sound effects.

5.2. Manipulation and Attraction

The pieces and their different personalities also greatly affect the players experience, gradually manipulating the player. As the player progresses, they are captivated by these unique characters and persuaded to want to meet the other characters. Art, animation and sound bring and create a sense of charm, allowing the game itself to give off a sense of personality, leaving players wanting more and more.

5.3. Feedback Elements VS Frustration

From the art and animation to the sound effects and music, this game is designed to keep the player relaxed and captivated, ignoring most if not all senses of frustration. When playing the web version of the game, which does not use animation, sound effects or music, the player can slowly become frustrated as the game increases in complexity, resulting in continuous failure.

5.4. No Game Over

This is a form of motivational manipulation. When a player runs out of moves and the current game ends, the designers did not make use of a game over text. Instead, they would lead the player straight to the high score menu. This does not only encourage the player by letting them know its not the end, but also drives them to continue playing to beat their high score. Leaving players fixed to their screens.

5.5. Gradual Complexity

As the player progresses through the game, the music slowly changes tempo which could symbolise the increase in complexity. Another feedback element that indicates this is the increase in the number values. As the number values increase so does the personalities of the new characters.

Layered Feedback

Layered feedback allows the player to identify what is going on in more then just one way. Threes does this in several ways as seen in the table below:

Action	Layered Feedback
Move	Swipe sound effect Character sounds to indicate the move cannot be made. Movement of slabs or Static state of slabs if move cannot be made
Combination of slabs	Changing number Different greetings Animation of faces joining
Hints	Identical numbers Face animations play

Layered feedback creates recognisable moment to moment gameplay which will be discussed in the next section.

Identifiable Moment to Moment Gameplay

The simple mechanic we are faced with from the starting menu of the game allows the player to instantly remember how the games basic mechanic is used. These identifiable moments are further observed through the UI, art and animation.

Returning players are faced with the standard grid and a group of slabs, the simple UI allows the games elements to be easily read and understood, in return allowing the player to identify what is happening.

Numbers alone do not say anything at all, but the combination of these numbers and the animations played when identical slabs are next to each other, hints at the player that a combination can be made. Another animation that causes this, is when characters react to an identical character that just appeared, indicating that they can form a combination.

Conclusion

When it comes to "perfection", simplicity is best, Threes is definitely an example of this statement. From a simple easy to understand mechanic, to the simple yet cunning feedback mechanics, Threes uses both to create a game that is addictive, challenging and charming. The feedback elements successfully bring life to the game, affecting gameplay and experience, through charm and manipulation. With the basic mechanic and clearly layered feedback present, the designers have successfully created a game that has identifiable moment to moment gameplay present. Overall creating a game that everyone can enjoy.

References

Asherv.com. 2021. *THREES - A tiny puzzle that grows on you.* [online] Available at: <https://asherv.com/threes/> [Accessed 3 April 2021].