

WSOA3003

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MDA Analysis: Communication Design

MDA Analysis of Threes!

Threes! Is a game in which the player must slide tiles layered with different numbers around a 4x4 board and combine them to form similar tiles with different numbers. Tiles with values from 3 and upwards can only combine with tiles of the same value. The game ends when the player can no longer swipe tiles to combine them. The following report will use the MDA framework (Hunicke, 2004) to analyze the game according to its communication design, or rather the way the game provides players with various information. We will be looking specifically at the game's user-interface (UI), the game's feedback design, its art and sound design.



Figure A: Screenshot of gameplay in Threes!

UI is described as the medium that allows for players to interact with the game. This includes on-screen buttons, menus and the presentation of certain information such as player health. As is seen in Figure A above, the game features a menu button, a stats button, an icon that shows which tile will be created next within the game and the area of play that contains these various tiles. These are presented clearly to the player and allows for the player to access the relevant information, such as their statistics or a menu for other settings. The way this is set up is therefore logical and organized since it allows ease of access. This is seen with the icon showing which tile is next so that the player, who has this information, can plan or strategize around it.

Feedback is similar to UI but discusses how certain information is provided to the player. This includes many things such as effects when a player may take damage in certain games or a player heals, very specific information such as how much damage a player takes. An example of this in Threes! is the next tile icon which also falls into this category as it allows the player to understand and therefore play the game. This can also be seen when swiping tiles as all the tiles move together in the direction swiped, however cannot move if they are at the edge of the play field (if the player swipes up, tiles on the top-most row cannot move). Players can see tiles that will combine as during the swipe, tiles that can combine will overlap while tiles that can't remain stationary. As is seen, the player is then provided with information that allows them to understand moves they can make and what will happen when they make their move while they make it.

The art used adds to the idea of feedback as seen above. This is because in some instances art is used to communicate this feedback to the player. We see tiles that can be combined if next to each other as some tiles have a face, as seen in figure A, and if they can combine they will look as if they can speak to one another. Additionally, the tiles have different colors based on their value with tiles of values 3 and higher remaining white, with the addition of these faces to separate them. That said, however, the art style used for the game is very minimal and as such does not add to the overall feel of the game for the player, and only exists to further provide feedback.

Sound is similar to art in that it can be used to communicate feedback to the player. When a player combines tiles to create a higher number than they currently have, a unique sound is played and this tells the player that they have reached a higher number should they have not noticed due to the minimalist design of the tiles not standing out or attracting their attention. There are also sounds made with each swipe, however these are rather uniform or repetitive and do not contribute to game feel but rather succeed in presenting information, that tiles have been moved, to the player.

In conclusion, Threes! is great at providing the player with important and relevant information that allows them to play the game, however does not offer enough in terms of player enjoyment or game feel. This is partly because of the minimalist art style in the game. That said, the feedback presented gives players all the information they may require but due to the board size it still manages to pose a challenge.

References

Hunicke, R. (2004). *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research* (p. 5).

Sirvo, 2014. *Threes!*. [Video Game].