

Research on the Application of Emotional Design in Character Shaping of Genshin Impact

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Abstract: Emotional Design is a useful tool to create emotional experience for the users in industrial design. However, this method is rarely used in character shaping in games. This essay uses emotional design as an angle to analyze the character shaping in Genshin Impact and concludes the successful strategies used by Genshin from three different aspects of emotional design: visceral, behavioral, and reflective. This research offers a new approach to character shaping in games and will help game designers create affable and successful character.

Keywords: emotional design, role playing game, game characters, player experience, parasocial relationship

1. Introduction

“Engaging game characters are often key to a positive and emotionally rich player experience.” [1] Therefore, creating a credible, affable character is key to success of the game, especially for role-playing game. As for designing game characters, although many researchers have concluded several principles and strategies, seldom have they concluded a systematic approach to designing game characters.

Emotional design is a systematic approach to designing products that create good emotional experience for users from visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels [2]. Since game avatars can be considered as a special product, emotional design can be applied to character shaping in games.

Genshin Impact is the annual game of Apple Store 2020 and wins the nomination of “the Best RPG Game” by TGA. Whenever a new avatar is released, there will always be a heated discussion about the avatar. From this, we can see the advancements of shaping the character by Genshin Impact. Therefore, we apply emotional design to analyze avatars of Genshin Impact and conclude its strategies from the level of visceral, behavioral, and reflective.

2. Related Works

2.1. Emotion Attachments and Parasocial Interactions

Julia et al. identified seven distinct forms of emotional attachment, ranging from feeling excited about the characters’ gameplay competency, admiring them as role models, to deep concern for characters’ well-being [1]. This research highlights the emotional attachment and parasocial interaction formed

by the player and the game character. The research introduced a thematic map refers to the degree of emphasizing character's emotional and functional values, which correspond to the three levels of emotional design. Emphasis on functional value corresponds to the behavioral design, and emphasis on emotional value corresponds to visceral and reflective design.

2.2. Emotional Design

Emotional design was a concept and a methodology proposed by Dr. Donald Norman, aiming at making products that can provide intended users with positive emotional experience. Emotional design contains three levels of design: visceral, behavioral, and reflective.

Dr Norman and his collaborators divided human brain activity into three levels: visceral, behavioral, and reflective. Correspondently, designers can make their designs at the level of visceral, behavioral, and reflective [2].

2.2.1. Emotional Design: Visceral

Visceral level refers to the inherent part of the human beings. This inherent part enables individuals to make quick evaluations and judgements when they are faced with a new condition or meet new people and objects. Visceral level is related to sensory system of human beings and it is determined by biological factor. Norman points out that physiological features like visuals, audios, and sensations play a key role in visceral level. Therefore, shapes, sculpt, touch, textures of the materials, weight, and so on contribute to the design of the visceral level [2].

2.2.2. Emotional Design: Behavioral

Behavioral level refers to the use of the product. At this level, appearances are not important. What matters is the utility of the product. A good behavioral design includes four elements: function, understandability, usability, and usage experience. Function is what we can do with the product. Understandability is whether we can know how to use the product. Usability is whether we can use the product. And usage experience is how we feel when we use the product [2]. Take piano as an example. We can know its function is playing music, and we know that we need to click the string to make the sound. However, playing the piano requires skills and we are unable to play it with ease. And when we play the piano, we can have the feeling of the string, the sound and so forth.

2.2.3. Emotional Design: Reflective

Reflective level is the rational and cerebral part of our brain. Individuals will make considerations and reflections after the use of the product. They will think of the pros and cons of the product and reflect on themselves as well as the relationship between the product and themselves. Reflections often determine the general impression of the product. Good impression will help form a lasting bond between the user and the product [2].

Wu described the effects of reflective design in games. She pointed out that although players don't remember what keys they pressed, what rewards they got after beating the monsters, they still want to play the game because of the exciting playing experience [3]. This displays the reflective activity of the individuals. They play the game not only because they feel good when playing, but also because they recount this good feeling, and want to experience again.

2.3. Principles of Designing a Game Character

Huang concluded the principles of designing game characters based on users' psychology. They are generality, characterization, details, idealization, and balance [4].

2.3.1. Generality

To enable players find suitable role-playing character, Huang concludes two strategies: one is offering multiple avatars with different characters, and the other is offering a character that fits all people [4].

2.3.2. Characterization

Game characters can have their own special features from different aspects: sculpts, names, background, career, job, personalities, hobbies, and so on. These characteristics add credibility of the figure [4].

2.3.3. Details

Details is the supplement of the characterization. It displays some nuances like garments, mottos, and so on [4]. These small details create bond between the character and the player. When players think of the character, they will think of these interesting details.

2.3.4. Idealization

Game avatars need to have shining characteristic that make players appreciate. These characteristics might be pleasing appearances, special skills, good virtues. They might be imperfect, but need to be idealized. These characters satisfy the dreams at the bottom of the players' heart [4].

2.3.5. Balance

Balance means there are trade-offs between "generality" and "characterization", "idealization" and "details". When we want an avatar to fit all people, it's difficult to have him or her to have a special characteristic, and chances are that he or she will not impress the players. However, if an avatar is too characterized, it will lead to polarization. Some people like him or her, while others don't. As for the contradiction between "idealization" and "details", Huang claimed that too idealized avatar will make people feel hypocritic and duplicitous. And too many trivial will make the character insipid. In a game where players can control multiple avatars, it's important to balance the skills of the avatar. Otherwise, players will only choose the avatar with the most merits [4].

3. Application of Emotional Design in Character Shaping of Genshin Impact

Genshin Impact is an open world role playing game. Players will control different characters to explore a land of wonder. These different characters have their own skills, personalities, and stories. These characters are one of the drives that attract players to playing this game. Many players want to invest time and money to develop the characters that they like.

Especially when Hu Tao (a character in Genshin Impact) was reintroduced, Genshin Impact ranked No.1 in iOS and Google Play in China, America, Japan, and Korea.

From this we can see the success of Genshin Impact in terms of character shaping. Therefore, it's beneficial to analyze how Genshin Impact shapes its characters so that it can help future designers to design successful characters.

3.1. Visceral Design

Genshin does well in using images, animations, and audios to leave a good impression on the player. These strategies make players feel adorable to the avatars.

3.1.1. Figures

Figures in Genshin impact correspond with the principle of generality. Genshin designs multiple avatars. And they have disparate appearances and personalities. There are more than 60 figures right now. Some are mature and elegant (e.g. Jean, Lisa), some are vigorous (e.g. Bennet, Xiangling), some are cute (e.g. Qiqi, Klee). These multiple choices enable players whether male or female to pick the avatar they like.

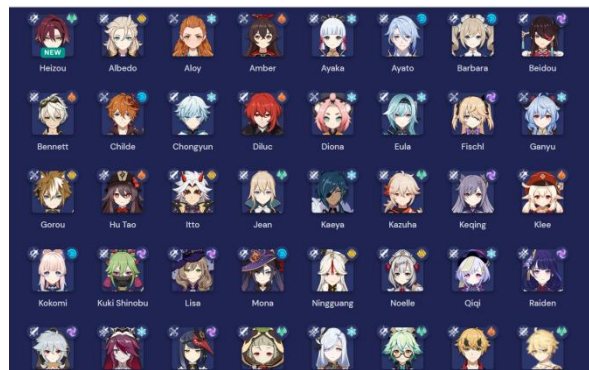


Figure 1: Character list of Genshin Impact [6].

Visual features give players first impression of the avatar by characterized details and special motions. For example, when we first see Bennet, we will think of him as an optimistic boy full of adventure. That is because we can see the big smile and bandage on his face, and we can also see his big thumb motion. Another example is Kamisato Ayaka, we will think of her as a noble and elegant young mistress. That is because we can see her decorated fans and noble costumes.

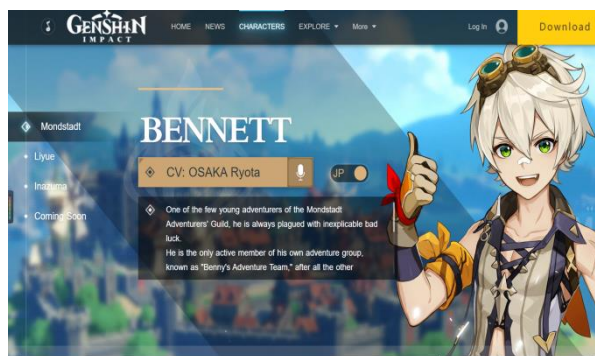


Figure 2: Portray of Bennett [7].

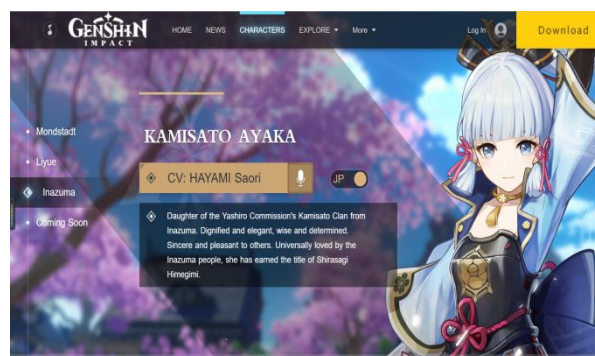


Figure 3: Portray of Kamisato Ayaka [8].

3.1.2. Audios

Audios are a conducive supplement to the visual images.

First, it's because they are euphonious, and some are very interesting and special. For example, Zhongli's voice is husky and mature; Klee's voice is cute; and Qiqi's voice is zombie-like, which is very interesting. These first impressions bridge the gap between the avatar and the player. It's understandable that some players will pick an avatar because of his or her voice.

Second, audios are helpful to shape avatars. Players believe what avatars say and believe what avatars are. For example, from what Bennet says "Let's go find some treasures", we consider him as an adventurer. And from what Kaedehara Kazuha says "Whenever in this world I run, I carry memories of my home", we know he is a strayed warrior.

Third, most of the audios are compatible to enhancing parasocial interaction. Audios is not a rare feature in games. Games like League of legends, Overwatch also have audios of the avatars when players play the game. However, what differs Genshin Impact from those games is that the audios of Genshin Impact is more for shaping the avatar and building the parasocial relationship between the avatar and the player. For example, the avatar will utter their fun experiences, their attitudes towards other avatars and the player(traveler).

3.1.3. Special Effects of the Action and Skills

The action of the character is one of the highlights of Genshin Impact. As mentioned by Mihoyo, the creator of Genshin Impact, the whole attacking process of a character is considered as a whole narrative and a performance, which has a beginning and an ending [5].

The skills of the avatars are impressive with special effects like flares, lightning, rocks, and so on. And for some avatars, when they have their ultimate skill, they will have their own special animation effects. In terms of visual design, it can impress the players and make players feel excited.

3.2. Behavioral Design

Although behavior design is referred as the utility of the product in Emotional Design [2], we can still consider avatars as special products which have specific uses. In Genshin Impact, players control the avatars to explore the world and have battle against the enemies. Therefore, we can analyze the utility of the avatar from the aspects mentioned above.

3.2.1. Different Types of the Avatars

There are mainly two classifications as for the avatars. One is the "Element Classification". Since Genshin Impact devises element mechanism (there are seven elements: Pyro, Hydro, Electro, Dendro, Geo, Anemo, and Proto), avatars are characterized with one special element. And different elemental collocation will have special effects on the monsters.

Another classification is the attributes of the avatars. The first attribute is weapon. There are 4 types of the weapons: sword, claymore, bow, and catalyst. And each avatar can only have one type of the weapon. The second attribute is the skills of the avatar. Some are skilled at attacking, some are skilled at exploring, and some are skilled at healing.

These mechanisms bring balance to the game, and offer players a prolific playing experience.

3.2.2. Special Skills

As for world exploring, special skills of some avatars make world exploring easier and more interesting. Take Kamisato Ayaka as an example. Most of the avatar's sprint to explore the world. However, Ayaka can change into moving ice. In fact, Ayaka moves more quickly than the avatars

who sprint. And some avatars like Ningguang can show the location of the minerals, which is also very helpful for players who want to collect those materials.

3.3. Reflective Design

As Wu noted, players want to play the game, not only because they feel good and excited when they play the game, but also because they recount the good feelings. Reflections can be considered as the impromptus for players to enter the game world again. Therefore, it's important to adopt reflective design in games. As for shaping the avatar, the goal of reflective design is to form lasting bond between the player and the avatars. One of the drives for playing Genshin Impact is that players want to develop their avatars or make adventures with them. From this, we can conclude the significance of character shaping. As follows are some of the strategies used by Genshin.

3.3.1. Figure Setting

The figure setting in Genshin Impact is proper, well-stacked, and interesting. Kamisato Ayaka is one of the figures that perfectly fits idealization principle. She is the oldest daughter of Kamisato clan, one of the hierarchs in Inazuma. She is beautiful, elegant, and grateful. She is good at teaism and flowerism. She is polite and amiable to the common folk. But she is not a perfect figure, she also has her own wishes like being a carefree girl dancing and enjoying snacks. Ayaka can be considered as an idealized figure in many people's eyes, no matter male or female.

And when it comes to interesting and funny elements, Bennet is a good example. He is the unluckiest character in the Teyvat land. He is an adventurer. However, whenever he takes an adventure, he will meet the worst weather, the toughest monsters. What's worse, he seldom finds treasuries. Due to these interesting settings, players can have connections and reflections over these characters.

3.3.2. Animation Narration

Figures in Genshin Impact all have the similar well-stacked and interesting setting as Ayaka and Bennet. But having these settings is not enough. They need to be revealed in a proper way. Animation narration plays an important part.

In the Character Quest, players will have adventures with specific avatar. And the avatar's hobbies, personality, and his or her story will be revealed during the adventure. This enables players to have a in-flesh experience, which also makes the figure more credible.

3.3.3. Fan-fiction

Game avatars are static, but fan fiction makes the game avatar lively because they seem have endless stories. Although it seems to be a carnival embraced by a small group, fan fiction actually has an influence on other players. When a new avatar is released, there are always hot discussions on the figure in Youtube, Bilibili, and other websites. And players will create more stories apart from the official setting, making the character livelier and more three-dimensional.

4. Conclusion

This essay applies emotional design to analyze the character shaping of the Genshin Impact, and concludes the strategies used by Genshin Impact to create a successful avatar, which will give inspiration to game designers to create credible and affable game characters. Because applying emotional design to character shaping is a new angle of character shaping analysis, more game

analyses need to be conducted. Plus, this essay doesn't give quantitative analysis of the game, which might lack accuracy and precision.

Future studies are advised to take emotional design analysis to RPG games. And game designers are recommended to adopt emotional design to create game character. Future researchers are suggested to take quantitative analysis of the strategies mentioned in the article to verify and evaluate the effects of them, and try to reveal the rooted mechanism behind the strategies.

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