

Travelers in Another World: How Game Experience in Genshin Impact Inspires Retellings

Analyzing immersion in Genshin Impact to gain a deeper understanding of its impact on retellings

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Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing players' immersive experience in a particular game and exploring how immersion affects the creation of retellings inspired by games.

Retellings can be defined as stories constructed out of game play experience, creating a narrative that exists separately from the actual narrative play in the game. They can be described as artifacts co-created by players and the games they play. Over the past decades, retellings have become increasingly common in the form of different mediums such as writing, art, or animation. However, there is a knowledge gap regarding which factors inspire people to create retellings. This study aims to partially explore this knowledge gap by examining whether there is a connection between immersive experiences in a game and the inspiration to create retellings.

This study focuses on the game Genshin Impact (interchangeably called Genshin) and the written or artistic retellings it has inspired, specifically fanfiction and fanart. Immersion is the feeling of being part of a game world. Two aspects of immersion are diegetic elements; everything in a game world perceivable by in-game characters, and culture, through possibilities to become immersed in and learn more about cultures portrayed in a game. The connection between immersion and retellings was explored through the research question: *How does immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspire players to create retellings of a particular game?*

A case study with the purpose of exploratory research was conducted, exploring the connection between immersion and the creation of retellings. A questionnaire was posted to two social media sites, which gathered 1606 answers about retelling creation and game experience in Genshin Impact. A total of eight semi-structured interviews with retelling creators were conducted, then coded and thematized using thematic analysis, resulting in three overarching themes; Game Experience, Culture, and Retelling Creation. The growth rate of the amount of Genshin-inspired retellings on the organization of transformative works ArchiveOfOurOwn was also analyzed during the course of the study.

Conclusions that could be made are that there is a link between immersion in a game and the creation of retellings, especially in the form of character attachment. In Genshin Impact cultural immersion plays an integral part as well, both in the form of elements that reflect reality and can be related to, and the game's own extensive worldbuilding and storytelling, containing a myriad of connections for the player to figure out. Characters are also deeply intertwined with their culture, making cultural aspects a part of retellings. Immersion in Genshin Impact could serve as a stepping stone for learning more about different cultures and mythologies. Positives were found in feelings of familiarity and unexpected parallels between cultures, and negatives were found in inaccurate portrayal and colorism.

Some of these conclusions may be applicable to games and media as a whole, specifically that character attachment and immersive worldbuilding can inspire people to create retellings. Cultural immersion also goes hand in hand with accurate portrayal, as the opposite can result in an immersive cultural disconnect, especially for people from that culture. Both of these are areas for future research.

Keywords: Video Games, Genshin Impact, Retellings, Immersion, Diegesis, Culture, Cultural Immersion, Fanfiction, Fanart

Synopsis

<p>BACKGROUND</p>	<p>Across the game industry as a whole, there is relatively little knowledge about the connection between immersion and retellings, if there is one. Immersion creates the feeling of being part of a game world. Hypothetically this may prompt retellings as means of continuing a game's story, or changing it, based on the players' imaginations.</p> <p>As one of the most influential games since 2020, with its combination of Open-World Action RPG and an elemental combat system, Genshin Impact has prompted many game retellings, with 70 692 works on Archive of Our Own in May 2022.</p>
<p>PROBLEM</p>	<p>The problem this study aims to explore is to decrease the knowledge gap about how immersive experience in a game is connected to the creation of retellings. In this study, the game in question is Genshin Impact, focusing specifically on retellings with artistic and authorial intent.</p>
<p>RESEARCH QUESTION</p>	<p>The amount of Genshin Impact fanworks posted to the organization for transformative works Archive of Our Own in the past two years, rivaling some of the most popular fandoms since the archive was started. This growth rate prompted the question of what in Genshin impact has inspired them, more specifically, what effect the immersive experiences in Genshin Impact have on the creation of retellings. From this, a research question was formulated:</p> <p><i>How does immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspire players to create retellings of a particular game?</i></p>
<p>METHOD</p>	<p>An empirical study was conducted with Case Study as the research strategy, centered around Genshin Impact and retellings. Data collection methods were questionnaire (1), to reach interview participants and ask questions to a larger group of people than possible with interviews, posted on HoYoLab and Reddit. Semi-structured interviews (2) with eight retelling creators were conducted, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews through coding and thematization. Statistical recording (3) of retelling data on Archive of Our Own was made across 100 days during the duration of this study and compared with the top 5 most popular games on AO3.</p>
<p>RESULT</p>	<p>The results strongly indicate a connection between in-game immersion and the creation of retellings, especially due to character attachment. Genshin Impact's complex characters, also extending to NPCs (Non-Playable Characters), and interpersonal dynamics between characters pave the way for retelling inspiration. Diegetic elements were the biggest inspiration, but non-diegetic elements such as lore hidden in item descriptions can also impact retellings. Cultural immersion plays an integral part, both in the form of elements that reflect reality and can be related to, and the game's own extensive worldbuilding and storytelling, containing many connections for the player to figure out or speculate on.</p>
<p>DISCUSSION</p>	<p>The scope was limited to retellings in the form of fanfiction and fanart, specifically inspired by Genshin Impact, and respondents from two social media sites. This may not represent all retelling types, all games, or creators. The results give valuable insight into what causes immersion and how character attachment and immersive worldbuilding in turn inspires retellings. This can be relevant for game developers, especially game designers and writers, whose focus is on these areas.</p>

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List of Abbreviations

AO3 - ArchiveOfOurOwn

BGM - Background Music

Co-Op - Cooperative video game/A form of multiplayer

DM - Direct Message

EXP - Experience Points

NPC - Non-Playable Character

OC - Original Character

OOC - Out Of Character

RPG - Role Playing Game

VA - Voice Acting or Voice Actor/Actress

VR - Virtual Reality

List of Terms

Diegesis - whether an element exists within the game world and is perceivable by in-game characters (diegetic), or is only perceivable by the player (non-diegetic)

Canon - source material established by the original creators

Headcanon - imagined theory or idea separate from the original narrative (canon)

Manga - Illustrated comics originating in Japan

Slice Of Life - the story focuses on moments that are usually considered mundane, but infuse them with emotion

1 Introduction

This chapter aims to give an introduction to immersion, retellings and the game Genshin Impact, for this study to later explore whether there is a connection between immersion and retelling creation.

Immersion, in particular narrative immersion, is what creates the feeling of being part of a story, in a sense living it through in-game events and characters (Adams, 2014, p. 20). Two aspects of immersion are diegesis and culture. Diegesis is a term used to discern whether a game element exists within a game world, perceptible to game characters, or whether they're only there for the player, e.g. in the form of menus (Naro, 2018). Cultural immersion is the possibility to become immersed in the culture of different places, by experiencing the language, customs, food and way of life specific to other cultures (DC Team, 2016). Games can be seen as social contexts for cultural learning, as they reflect values of the society and culture in which they are set (Salen, Zimmermann, 2014, p. 504).

Retellings can be defined as stories constructed out of game play experience, creating a narrative that exists separately from the narrative play in a game (Salen, Zimmermann, 2004, p. 405). Eladhari (2018) describes retellings as artifacts co-created by players and the games they are based on. One category of retellings are those with artistic or authorial intent, including fanfiction and fanart (Eladhari, 2018).

Fandoms are fan communities consisting of people who like the same media, who gather in social spaces, either online or offline, to discuss, share experiences, create art and write stories based on different media (Stein, Busse, 2009). Hence, fandoms are built largely around retellings, in this context known as fanworks. Fanworks are not limited to video games, rather they can be any form of creative work based on any type of media, commonly movies, tv-shows, books and video games (ibid.).

Common types of fanworks include fanfiction and fanart, where fans create art or stories based on e.g. the characters, scenery or plot of an already existing media (Hellekson, Busse, 2006). Fanfiction and art feature recognizable tropes uniquely specific to fandom. It is common to both fill in perceived gaps in the source text (or also called "canon") by e.g. exploring the past or future, or extending scenes. Fans also have the transformative freedom to reject the source material altogether, and change stories based on their own imagination (Stein, Busse, 2009). Comparing this to Adams (2014) definition of immersion, it seems possible that the feeling of being part of a story may prompt retellings, as means of continuing a game's story, or changing it, based on players' imaginations.

Genshin Impact is an Open-World Action Role-Playing-Game, where players explore the game world Teyvat, consisting of seven different nations. The game has an elemental-based combat system, where each playable character is tied to one out of seven elements, such as fire, water, ice or wind. The seven nations are linked to their own element, and each have rich individual cultures, inspired by different cultures and mythologies in real life (HoYoverse, 2020a). By depicting cultures to an extent rooted in real life, the game world in Genshin Impact is an environment for cultural immersion.

Video games can provide situations that allow players to learn the culture of a new language through engagement in playing it (Soyooof, 2018). A study by Dede and Barab (2009) detailed how immersion in digital environments can enhance education by promoting creativity, collaboration and sharing. Social media, or video games can shift learning from passive acquisition of other peoples' knowledge, to an active learning experience that inspires inquisitiveness, critique, creation, collaboration and understanding (Dede, Barab, 2009).

Between being published in September 2020, and until May 5th 2022, the game has inspired 70 700 retellings on the archive of transformative fanworks Archive of Our Own, rapidly closing in on becoming one of the five most popular video game fandoms on the website (ArchiveOfOurOwn, 2022). A question is what specifically about Genshin Impact inspired this amount of creative works.

1.1 Problem

The problem this study aims to explore is the knowledge gap regarding how immersion makes a game impactful; to study what about the game experience that makes people fall in love with a certain game, in this case specifically Genshin Impact, and in turn inspires the creation of retellings.

This knowledge gap is not an immediate problem or something that can be solved through this study alone. Rather the purpose of this study is exploratory research; to gain a better understanding and provide deeper context to whether there might be a connection between immersion and retellings, and what a connection may consist of. However, a relevant aspect of the knowledge gap is that previous studies related to this specific connection could be found during the course of this study. Dede and Barab (2009) brought up both video games and fanfiction in the context of immersive digital experiences and their potential to enhance learning. There are separate studies on immersion and retellings, but ones connecting immersion and retelling creation was not found by the authors of this study. Studies in this area could provide game developers with insight as to what creates immersive experiences with enough impact to inspire people to create their own works based on a game. In turn, the study of existing retellings could reflect which parts of a game resonated with, or disappointed, players the most.

1.2 Research Question

The amount of Genshin Impact fanworks posted to the organization for transformative works Archive of Our Own in the past two years, rivals some of the most popular fandoms since the archive was started. This prompted the question of what about Genshin Impact has inspired them, more specifically what effect the immersive experiences in Genshin Impact have on the creation of retellings. From there a research question was formulated, which the aim of this study is to answer:

How does immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspire players to create retellings of a particular game?

This research question is deeply interconnected with the problem, and may not fully solve it, but can decrease the knowledge gap by deepening understanding of whether immersion can inspire retelling creations, and how. In this regard, this study focuses specifically on retellings with artistic or authorial intent from the game Genshin Impact.

2 Extended Background

2.1 Retellings

In *Rules of Play - Game Design Fundamentals* by Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p. 405), retellings are defined as stories constructed out of game play experience, creating a narrative that exists separately from the actual narrative play in the game. They further explain that when “we see a great movie or overcome a life obstacle, there is a natural tendency to share this personal information with friends. Games can also represent powerful experiences in our lives that we want to share and relive with others, particularly other game players that will appreciate the details of play. Retelling play helps build communities of players through a common interest in the experience of a particular game” (ibid.).

Eladhari further defines retellings in her study *Re-Tellings: The Fourth Layer of Narrative as an Instrument for Critique* (Eladhari, 2018), as the fourth layer in an Interactive Narrative System, the first layer being the architectural layer, containing the code or framework for a game’s story construction. The second layer is the story layer, consisting of narrative content such as story elements, conditions, goals, and driving forces of agents in a game, created by game designers and writers. The third is the discourse layer; the sequence of experiences an experiencing agent, typically a player character, goes through during a game, as outcomes of the player interacting with the system in different ways. Retellings then become the fourth layer, consisting of all the ways that games can be re-told, both within and outside of game worlds (ibid.).

Examples of retellings include **communicative retellings**, such as talking about game experiences or posting about them online, **simultaneous retellings**, such as live-streaming while playing, **recorded system output**, for example, gameplay recordings or deep-diving into plot and lore in a Youtube video, and **retellings with artistic or authorial intent**, such as creating art or stories based on a game, including fanfiction and fanart (ibid.). Each game experience is unique for each player. They relate to and connect with different things, which in turn also make retellings unique, and different individuals can build on a game story in an infinite number of ways.

Retellings can thereby be described as artifacts co-created by players and the games they play. Eladhari explains that studying these narrative artifacts could enable a deeper understanding of player experience, and serve as an instrument for critique of narrative systems (ibid.). The study *Evaluating AI-based games through retellings* builds on the same study by Eladhari, where Kreminski et. al study the creation of written retellings built on AI-based games and conclude that “From this perspective, players are already making use of games as storytelling partners—and, in some cases, seeking out games with the specific intent of using them to support story construction” (Kreminski et al, 2019). This study has its foundation in both these studies and builds on them by exploring *what* it is in a game containing an interactive narrative system that can inspire these retellings, and how it is used to support story construction.

2.1.1 Fandom and Fanworks

On an individual level, a media fandom experience can be understood as an often positive, personal, and relatively deep emotional connection to a media in popular culture (Duffett, 2013, p. 2). The term fandom was adopted from sports and theater by science fiction fan communities in the late 1960s, originating in spaces where people liking the same media could talk to each other about it, and sometimes also the creators, creating a shared experience (Hellekson, Busse, 2006). Initially ascribed a negative meaning, the word fan is derived from the word ‘fanatic’. However, its negative connotations have decreased as fan culture has grown into a widespread subculture (Duffett, 2013, p. 5). Fandoms consist of people with shared interests in media, who gather either online or offline, to discuss, share experiences, create art and write stories based on different media (Stein, Busse, 2009). Hence, fandoms are built largely around retellings, in this context known as fanworks. Fanworks are not limited to video games, rather they can be any form of creative work based on any type of media, commonly movies, tv-shows, books, and video games (ibid.). Within the early fandoms, much of the infrastructure and language developed that is still in use in fandom today (Hellekson, Busse, 2006, p.38).

Stein and Busse (2009) further describe the inner workings and growth of fandoms: “No matter the media fandom, fans create texts, including fan fiction, computer wallpapers, avatars, fan music videos, reviews, analyses, and much more, in conversation with and against the background of the source text that inspired them in the first place. As fan-authored texts circulate, fan communities form out of both those who create fan works and those who offer feedback and recommendations”. Through online networks, fandoms can join together people from different countries and backgrounds (Stein, Busse, 2009).

Stein and Busse (2009) also bring up how character and relationship trends are established in fandoms, as fans encounter and create art with increasingly varied interpretations. Apart from the source media as a whole, fan communities can also define themselves around shared readings of a character, a pairing, or a particular aspect of a fictional universe. Fans can e.g. collectively decide that two characters belong together, and form shared agreements on central events, characteristics and interpretations that support their favorite romantic pairings. They can also introduce complexity to or deepen understanding of characters to the point where the original portrayal of the character is unwanted. As new writers and artists offer new interpretations, the community expectations of e.g. character or relationship interpretations can also change over time (ibid.).

2.1.1.1 Otaku and Doujinshi

Doujinshi culture has its origin in Japan. The word ‘doujinshi’ is derived from ‘doujin’, referring to two or more people sharing a common interest or hobby, and ‘shi’, referring to a magazine or newspaper. ‘Doujin’ is used colloquially as the self-publication of fanworks based on e.g. games, music or manga, underlining the community aspect that brings fans together. It is sometimes translated to English as fandom. The term ‘Doujinshi’ then stands for self-publication as a medium, including comics (manga), light novels and art books produced by fans. A doujinshi can be a tribute to existing media, e.g. inspired by anime, manga, games and sometimes western stories. Doujinshi can also be ‘original’, featuring original stories or characters conceived by the creator. Lamerichs (2013) defines doujinshi loosely as fan-created manga that circulates in Japanese pop culture fan communities, also a large part of fan conventions, e.g. Comiket in Japan or artist alleys in other countries, where doujinshi creators or fanartists sell their own works (Lamerichs, N., 2013).

Related to fan culture centered around Japanese media is the term otaku. The meaning of the word otaku differs subtly between mainland Japan and other countries. When emerging in the 1980s in Japan, the term otaku referred to a person with deep interest in anime, manga, video games, or similar, ignoring the passage of time. Facing stigmatization, otaku became a derogatory term for young people who stayed at home, indulged in personal interests and hobbies, and were out of touch with society. The popularity of online culture and people labeling themselves as otaku has shifted the meaning of the term to people who are passionate about a subculture and have an in-depth understanding of it. For example "sports otaku", "music otaku", "car otaku", "tech otaku" and similar. In Europe, the United States and other regions, otaku generally refers to people who like Japanese media, especially animation, referred to as anime otakus (Ito et al., 2012, p. xi). A significant part of otaku activity is rooted in doujin culture and doujin comic events (ibid., p. 107), similar to how fanworks are a central part of fandoms.

Fanwork example - Podcast covering different aspects of Genshin Impact, including its game design, cultural context, and place between fandom and doujin culture (the game is explained more thoroughly in section 2.3 - Genshin Impact):



Figure 1 Genshin Impact Podcast - [The Shade Chamber](#) on Youtube

2.1.2 Fanfiction and Fanart

Fanfiction and fanart are two types of fanworks, and retellings with artistic or authorial intent.

Fanfiction are stories using characters from an already existing fictional media. They can be entirely based on said media, for example consisting of the author's own imagination of what happens in the future, what happened in the past, rewriting parts they were dissatisfied with, or expanding on parts of the media by filling in time-gaps or extending a scene (Thomas, 2011). Fanfiction can also have an entirely different setting, only keeping the characters from the media it is inspired by and giving them new roles. This is called an Alternate Universe (AU) (Stein, Busse, 2009), for example, modern or historical AU, college AU, coffee shop AU, or using characters from one piece of media, but basing the plot on e.g. another book, movie, or game. Additionally, a story containing characters from more than one media is called a crossover (Hellekson, Busse, 2006, p. 7).

Similar to fanfiction, fanart is any type of art based on existing fictional work (Stein, Busse, 2009). Examples of fanart are traditional art, digital art, animation, comics, video creations, and sculpting. Often fanart depicts a character, or characters, from the media it is based on, but it can also depict scenery, objects, or another aspect of that work.

Fanfiction, fanart and retellings as a whole, can be related to the concept of the afterstory, which in relation to games is defined as the “virtual, mental story that exists in the player’s mind after play and informed by the interactions and their perspective on them” (Larsen et. al, 2019). Fanworks can then be a form of retelling created based on this afterstory, by solidifying a story that exists in the player's mind.

Part of the fun of fan creation can be the limitations that the source material provides, which becomes both a framework and a challenge. A framework by having something to build on, e.g. characters and setting, and challenge in creating a compelling narrative or image by creating along with or against the source material. It can be a delicate dance of filling in gaps in the source material, or the transformative freedom of rejecting parts of it and changing stories based on imagination (Stein, Busse, 2009).

2.1.2.1 Fanfiction examples

A fanfiction set in Genshin universe, with the author writing in more Chinese mythology and folklore:

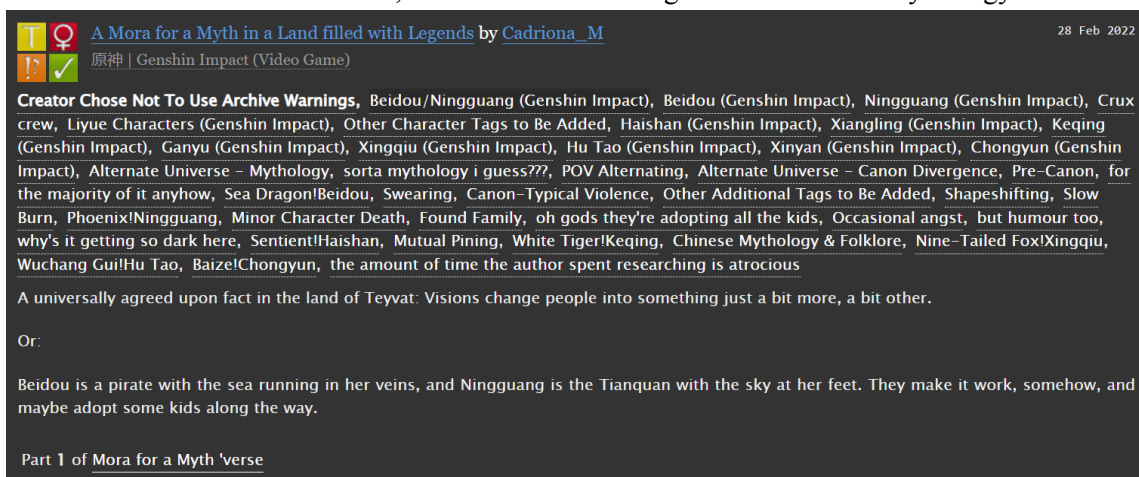


Figure 2 Fanfiction Example: [A Mora for a Myth in a Land filled with Legends by Cadriona_M](#)

A fanfiction set in Genshin universe, exploring dynamics beyond the game between two characters:

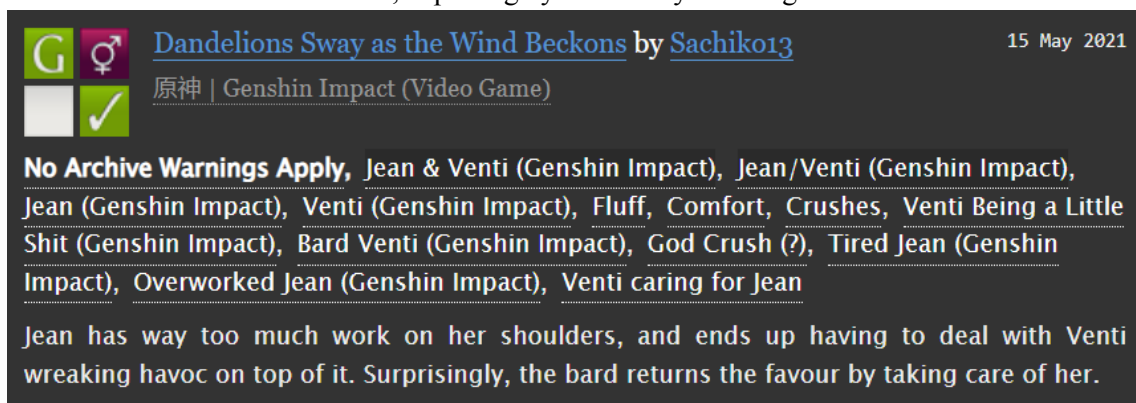


Figure 3 Fanfiction Example: [Dandelions Sway as the Wind Beckons by Sachiko13](#)

A fanfiction set in Genshin universe, exploring characters pasts 2600 years before the main story:

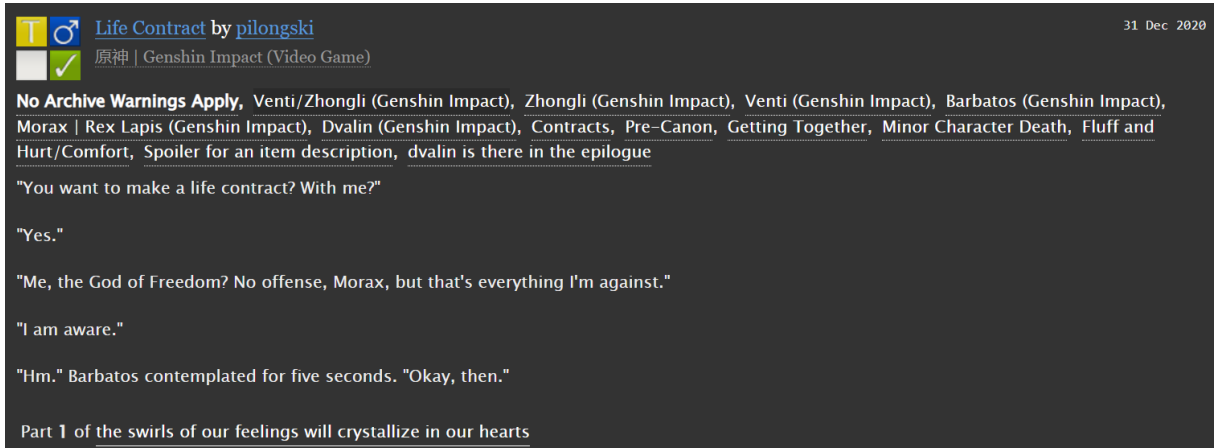


Figure 4 Fanfiction Example: [Life Contract by pilongski](#)

Reincarnation AU Genshin fanfiction, written in the format of a twitter thread (also called twitfic)



Figure 5, 6 Twitfic by [cityscape on Twitter](#)

Genshin Fanfiction in form of a letter from one character to another, written by Aji, inspired by their favorite book:

I Worship Another God - A Letter to Zhongli
(Zhongli/Itto. Inspired by the Six of Crows duology by Leigh Bardugo.)

*I wasn't religious.
I never went to sing praise and worship,
Only prayed when I needed something.
I used to ignore the holy word.
Used to think they were empty promises,
Words that can fill a paper but never the abyss in
my soul.
I never paid attention to holy texts,
Never read them and never thought it was worth
my time.*

*I wasn't religious,
Not until I met you anyway.*

*I saw you across the street and knew you were as
heavenly as Celestia intended.
You are everything holy and sacred,
I look at you and my eyes say a silent prayer;
I pray for my gratitude for our faithful encounter.
You are made of all things holy -
You wear a halo of joy and you make me feel
blessed,
Everything you touch comes to life and I feel alive
more than ever;
The stars are in your eyes, your irises bright
moons in the dark.*

*I wasn't religious,
Not until I met you anyway.....*

2.1.2.2 Fanart examples



Figure 7 Fanart of Genshin Impact Characters during Lantern Rite by [Vvon on Pixiv](#)



Figure 8, 9 Genshin Impact art meme by [Beefy on Tumblr](#)

Explanation by the creator: “this is an “art meme”: some artist drew a [template of 4 people in a car](#), then spread it on social media for other artists to redraw with their own characters. I drew these Genshin characters not according to their narrative portrayal, but rather to the roles they fill on my personal in-game team”.

2.2 Immersion

Immersion is not something intrinsic to a video game, or something it will automatically have if following set criteria. Rather, immersion is an effect that a piece of media produces, an experience created between the game and the player. This is an important distinction, as immersion can get conflated with how closely a game is tied to reality, through story, design, or interaction between the player and the scene. Immersion can for example be experienced when playing Tetris, which contains neither story nor lifelike design (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p. 32).

Adams defines immersion as “the feeling of being submerged in a form of entertainment, or rather, being unaware that you are experiencing an artificial world” (Adams, 2014, p. 20), and divides the ways in which players can become immersed into four categories: tactical immersion, strategic immersion, spatial immersion, and narrative immersion.

- *Tactical immersion*, also referred to as ‘Tetris trance’, is the sense of being “in the groove”, in high-speed action games. This can occur when there are dozens of small, similar challenges, that need to be met within fractions of a second. This means that the action is so fast that the brain has no time for anything else, there is no time to think about strategy or storyline (ibid.).
- *Strategic immersion* occurs when the player is deeply involved in trying to win a game, by observing, calculating, and planning. To experience this, the player must be familiar with the game rules, so that they can plan their actions accordingly. Strategic immersion can break if players encounter an unfamiliar situation or the game has too many unpredictable elements (ibid.).
- *Spatial immersion* is the sense of being in another place than where you physically are. Especially virtual reality (VR) equipment is designed to achieve this. Outside of VR, multiple monitors can increase the feeling of being inside the game world, by occupying more of the player’s field of view. A good 3D engine can also help a player be spatially immersed in an environment without stereo vision or 360° sound (ibid., p. 21).
- *Narrative immersion* is the feeling of being inside a story, the player is completely involved and it is accepted as real. It is a similar immersion to experiencing a good book or movie, except the player is also an actor in the video game. Good storytelling, interesting characters, exciting plot, and dramatic situations can all produce narrative immersion. The opposite can result in breaking it, as well as gameplay that does not fit the context of the story (ibid.).

McMahan (2013) criticized early definitions of immersion centered around “the feeling of being there,” because she thought they were too loose, and too easily interchangeable with presence, a term often seen together with immersion. Her own definition of immersion is "the player is immersed in the world of the game story, but it also refers to the love of the game and the strategy involved in it" (McMahan, 2013). She then divides immersion into two parts. The first part being the aesthetics of the game that provide context and meaning, and the second being player engagement. Aesthetics here refer to the surface elements of the game, such as the story, graphics, and sound. The word “player engagement” she mentioned is not directly connected to the narrative of the game, because narrative is not a key component of all video games. Rather, engagement represents the player's appreciation of

the game on a non-diegetic level (McMahan, 2013). Interestingly, the word engagement also appears in Zimmerman's description of game flow. That is to say, when players are in different flow states, their participation in the game will also change, and their immersion in the game along with it. If the game cannot keep the player in a state of balanced flow, there are two potential outcomes: the player will be bored, that is, the player's level of operation or strategy is higher than the difficulty of the game, that the game is not challenging. Alternatively imbalanced flow can make the player feel anxious, that is, if the difficulty of the game is beyond the player's current ability, resulting in stress (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, pp. 332-335). Therefore, players are more likely to feel immersed in the game when the player's ability and game difficulty are in the right ratio, and the aesthetics that make up the game environment can give the player an enjoyable game experience.

Additionally, when it comes to games the player is also an active participant in the storytelling. Gee (2003) explains this through "Games allow players to be producers and not just consumers. Along with the designer, the player's actions co-create the game world. As players make choices about what to build [...], what skills and missions to choose [...], or what moral decisions to make [...] players are as much designers of the game as the original innovators" (Gee, 2003). This way players can experience and influence events in a game as if they were living through them themselves, rather than as observers of a story. Another aspect that makes games good for learning is that games often provide necessary information on demand, at a time when it is important, and within a context it is relevant to. This information is applied soon after, as it is usually related to a task the player is performing, and sometimes with intent for the player to remember it for later use (ibid.).

2.2.1 Cultural Immersion

Cultural immersion can be defined as "the act of surrounding yourself with the culture of a place. It might mean living with family and helping out on their farm, or simply sharing a meal with a local. Cultural immersion is a unique experience that can open doors to a deeper understanding of an unfamiliar place" (DC Team, 2016).

Salen and Zimmerman mention that "Games reflect the values of the society and culture in which they are played because they are part of the fabric of that society itself. Games can be seen as social contexts for cultural learning, replicating, reproducing and sometimes transforming cultural beliefs" (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p. 504). That is to say, in theory, players can immerse themselves in a local culture in the game and feel part of it.

A study made by Garcia and Shliakhovchuk, where sixty-two studies about behavioral change, content understanding, knowledge acquisition, and perceptual impacts are reviewed and analyzed, suggests that "video games have the potential to help to acquire cultural knowledge and develop intercultural literacy, socio-cultural literacy, cultural awareness, self-awareness, and the cultural understanding of different geopolitical spaces, to reinforce or weaken stereotypes, and to some extent also facilitate the development of intercultural skills" (Garcia, Shliakhovchuk, 2019).

Often misrepresented in video games are characters with different skin colors, especially darker ones, due to colorism being prevalent in media. Colorism is a product of racism, which discriminates against people of color, and privileges people with lighter skin in a majority of cultures across the globe. In most regions, colorism has its roots in early colonialism and slavery (Hunter, 2007). In East Asia colorism emerged separately from colonization, but was later influenced by colonized neighbors, contributing to the spread of it. E.g. Japan and China have historically associated light skin colors with upper class or higher status work, and darker skin colors with lower class work, where many worked

outside and developed darker complexions (Dixon, Telles, 2017). In video games, this is reflected in the overrepresentation of light-skinned characters compared to characters with darker skin. A compilation of the 100 highest selling games and major releases between 2017-2021, excluding games with fully customizable characters, showed that 61.2% of characters in games are white, 38.8% are characters of other ethnicities, combined due to the lack of background information about characters and difficulty in determining their ethnicity, including but not limited to black and Asian characters. Only 5.3% of games have no playable character who is white (Lin, 2022).

Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) mention how “Gaming environments provide immersion in distinctive linguistic, cultural, and task-based settings”, and can thereby have a positive effect on learning within these areas (Thorne, Reinhardt, 2008). Dede and Barab mention the same in relation to social media and video games, but also bring up a downside that the agency and layers of freedom through these platforms could lead learners to end up with an understanding inconsistent with scientific and evidence-based views (Dede, Barab, 2009).

When translating games from one language and culture to another, localizing them to reach a bigger audience, cultural significance can get lost in translation. Francesca Di Marco (2007) describes the difficulties of translating games, both linguistically and culturally, and the dilemma between changing dialogue or imagery into something relevant to the culture it is being localized in, or keeping the original context but risk the meaning being lost on players. Keeping cultural context could on the other hand serve as a learning experience, increasing players’ understanding of more cultures than their own (Di Marco, 2007).

2.2.2 Diegesis

One part of immersion is diegesis, derived from a Greek word meaning narration or narrative, which has evolved into a tool to analyze and create media (Naro, 2018).

When it comes to defining diegesis, it is important to talk about the concept of the fourth wall. The concept of the fourth wall originates from theater, referring to the existence of an invisible wall between the stage and audience, or characters in a game and the actual player. When Denis Diderot talks about the fourth wall, he defines it as an imaginary barrier that separates the stage from the audience. The curtain acts as a wall until the show begins, people behind it and outside of it cannot see each other. When the curtain is pulled the physical wall disappears, but a fourth wall remains that separates the audience from the actors. The wall is invisible to the audience, allowing them to watch the performance, but tangible to the actors, who ignore it in favor of interpreting their characters, who are oblivious to both the audience and the wall. One meaning of breaking the fourth wall is when the characters are not constrained by the scene and start interacting with the audience (ibid.).

Diegesis can be considered a way of relating game elements to the fourth wall, determining if the element exists inside or outside of it; if it is diegetic or non-diegetic. Everything that exists inside the fourth wall, or within a game world, is diegetic. Scenery, characters, sounds they can hear, the music they play; everything that is perceivable to characters within the scene, are all diegetic elements. Elements outside the wall that only the player can perceive, such as menus, interfaces, and soundtrack (there is usually not an in-game orchestra playing suspenseful music next to the boss fight), are considered non-diegetic elements. An interesting thing is that sound can exist on both sides of the fourth wall (ibid.).

If both diegetic and non-diegetic elements echo the theme of the game and have good usability, it can create an immersive gaming experience, and the fourth wall can become gradually thinner. One example of this is making interfaces diegetic, by integrating them into the world and making them

visible to the player character as well, rather than just the player, for example through opening a notebook or looking at a wristwatch (ibid.).

Examples of diegetic elements	Examples of non-diegetic elements
In-game characters (are within the game world)	Character menu (e.g. weapon change, character level-up, biographies)
Sounds characters can hear (voices, footsteps, combat sounds, tavern music...)	Sounds only the player can hear (soundtrack)
Character voice lines	Subtitles
Stories that game characters can also read (e.g. in-game books)	Stories that only players can read (e.g. item descriptions)
Bag carried by main character	Inventory interface
Information/notes in player character's notebook	Pause menu

Table 1 Examples of diegetic and non-diegetic elements in games

The way that diegetic elements influence game progression can, for example, be through narrative reward systems, such as story progression, explanations, or emotional ties to characters, objects, or places (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, pp. 51-52). Emotional ties to games can, in turn, potentially contribute to retellings.

2.3 Genshin Impact

Genshin Impact is an Action Role-Playing Game (ARPG), published in September 2020 by the Chinese game company miHoYo (Genshin Impact Game DB, 2019a), in February 2022 rebranded to HoYoverse (HoYoverse, 2022a). The game is set in an Open World environment, with an elemental-based combat system where the player can switch between different characters tied to their own element and combat style (HoYoverse, 2020a). With a detailed story and unique character designs, it has attracted a large number of players. In the first week after its release, it was downloaded 23 million times, and by October 2021 it had 50 million active users (Milakovic, 2022). Genshin Impact is updated as it is being developed, with each game update being distributed to four different servers; Asia, America, Europe, and SAR (Taiwan, Hongkong and Macao) across the world. The default selected server is generally the geographically closest one, and players in Africa and Middle East are directed to the Europe server. Players can switch to any server with the same account, but player data exists independently on each server and cannot be linked between them (Genshin Impact Game DB, 2019b). As they are released, new game patches can be downloaded on multiple consoles, and the same player account can be linked across platforms. The game provides subtitles in 13 languages, and also supports voice-over in four languages; Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English (ibid.). It is currently available on PlayStation, PC, Android and iOS (HoYoverse, 2020b). Genshin Impact also won the Game of the Year (TGA) Best Mobile Game Award in 2021 (The Game Awards, 2021).



Figure 10 Genshin Impact screenshot

The main story in Genshin Impact is about two twins, Aether and Lumine (Chinese: 空 (Kōng) and 荧 (Yíng), Japanese: 空 (Sora) and 蛍 (Hotaru)), who get separated by an unknown God and transported to an unfamiliar world. The player can choose to play as either one of them. In a fantasy world named Teyvat, the main character travels to seven regions, meeting new people along the way. Several of them are acquirable as playable characters, each with different personalities and unique abilities. Gradually the truth of "Genshin" is uncovered in the process of finding their lost sibling (ibid.).

2.3.1 Cultural immersion in Genshin Impact



Figure 11 Screenshots of architecture in Mondstadt, Liyue and Inazuma

Genshin Impact contains influences of cultures from all over the world, with more to be added within the next four years, as only three of the game's seven planned regions are released so far; Mondstadt, Liyue, and Inazuma. The first region, Mondstadt, is mainly inspired by German culture, but also contains elements from other northern European cultures. A sub-region of Mondstadt is Dragonspine, a snow-covered mountain, largely inspired by the Swiss Alps (HoYoverse, 2020a). The second region is Liyue, inspired by China and several different aspects of culture there. The third region, Inazuma, is inspired by Japan, and just as in real life, consists of several islands. A subregion of Inazuma is Enkanomiya, partially inspired by ancient Greek culture. In each region, the architecture, way of life, character names and backstories, partially or entirely, reflect the culture they are inspired by. Characters from different regions can also be found in each region traveled to. Many tasks or activities in the game refer to traditional customs or historical events in the region it is inspired by, such as the lantern rite in China also being a tradition in Liyue in Genshin (ibid.). It has been included as an in-game event during the real-life lantern festivals the past two years, *Fleeting Colors in Flight* being the most recent lantern rite event in 2022 (Genshin Impact, 2022a). The characters that have appeared so far also have their backstories rooted in their respective regions of origin, for example, *The Divine Damsel of Devastation* (Genshin Impact, 2022b).

The next planned region, Sumeru, is rumored to be inspired by medieval Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures, but whether this is true remains to be seen. Another future region, Natlan, is the region with least information so far, but may be inspired by Indigenous America with influences from Spanish and West African cultures. The remaining future regions are Fontaine, inspired by France, and Snezhnaya, inspired by Russia (HoYoverse, 2020a).

The cultural immersion of the game is also reflected in the NPCs in different regions. For example, players will meet an NPC from Liyue in Inazuma who misses the food of her hometown. She asks the player to make her a Liyue dish that can only be made by learning the recipes from Liyue. Players can

also observe a difference in personalities between people from different regions. For example, people in Mondstadt tend to respect freedom, people in Liyue attach importance to contracts, and values in Inazuma are connected to the juxtaposition of eternity and change (ibid.).

The multitude of cultural references in Genshin Impact gives people an opportunity to learn about cultures they are unfamiliar with. It could also let people recognize their own culture in the game, as not all cultures are widely represented, reflected accurately, or have playable characters in video games (Lin, 2021). At this point in time, the two previous points hold true for Genshin as well. Due to the fantasy game world and anime-inspired style, it is impossible to determine the ethnicity of the main characters, however, they are both light-skinned. Only two out of 50 playable characters have darker skin, in contrast fairly light. NPCs from regions indicated to be inspired by cultures where the majority of people have darker skin colors, are portrayed as light-skinned instead (HoYoverse, 2020a), thereby contributing to further colorism in media. How this is handled in future regions is yet to be seen.

2.3.2 Characters and Gacha System

As of patch 2.7 in June 2022 there are 50 playable characters in Genshin Impact, with more to be released in future updates. Each character has different combat abilities, and also an element that their skills are tied to. The possible elemental skills are pyro (fire), hydro (water), cryo (ice), anemo (wind), geo (earth), electro (lightning), and dendro (nature). Dendro is the only element without playable characters at the time this study is being written. Players can have four characters on their team at once, and they can create several teams to switch between. Genshin's combat system involves using characters with different elements to cause elemental reactions. These characters, aside from the Traveler and three starting characters, are obtained through Genshin's gacha system (HoYoverse, 2020a).

A gacha game adopts and virtualizes the gacha mechanism, originating from the toy vending machine, or loot box, where you put coins into a machine and press a switch to get a randomized toy (Yamaguchi et al., 2017). In Genshin, this is applied through a 'wish' system, a form of virtual lottery. Resources to use the gacha system can be acquired through playing the game, and gathering enough is exchangeable for 'wishes'. Using a wish results in a randomized reward, either a weapon or character. In Genshin Impact, ten wishes guarantee a 4-star character or weapon and 90, respectively 80 wishes guarantee a 5-star character or weapon, which are the strongest in the game. However, the probability for a 5-star character is increased at 60 wishes (HoYoverse, 2020a). Genshin Impact is free to play, meaning that the base version is free and playable without paying, but has a built-in payment system to encourage players to spend money on in-game resources (Adams, 2014, p. 119) for stronger characters and weapons. This enables microtransactions, payments for additional content in games (Tomić, 2019). A large part of Genshin Impact's profit relies on people exchanging money for virtual currency to obtain more wishes. Without spending money it can take over a month of daily playing to obtain a 5-star character or weapon, as wishes cost a lot of in-game resources and rely on randomness unless reaching a number for guaranteed reward (HoYoverse, 2020a).



Figure 12 All Playable Characters in Genshin until patch 2.7 (HoYoLab, 2022)

2.3.3 Game Flow and Storytelling

The storytelling in Genshin is primarily told through different types of quests. These are Archon Quests, World Quests, and Story Quests. **Archon Quests** are equivalent to main quests in other Open World games. Archon Quests are named specifically after the seven Archons, Gods of their individual region and corresponding element in Teyvat, whom the Traveler searches for and meets in main quests in order to find the Unknown God that separated Traveler from their sibling. **World Quests** contain more history about the world of Teyvat and the specific regions and are unlocked by talking to NPCs. **Story Quests** are specifically focused on individual playable characters. Through these players get to learn their backstory and personalities better, as characters met in Archon Quests are only briefly introduced. Few interactions are shown in the Story Quests between other characters than the Traveler and people the player meets, but in other parts of Genshin's storytelling, the relationships between other characters are also shown, especially Patch Events (ibid.).

Patch Events are time-limited, and new ones are distributed with each new patch that is released. Most of them are composed of different game mechanics, sometimes introducing new ones, with their own plots. Some Patch Events contain their own quests similar to Story Quests or World Quests, but they disappear after the Patch Event duration is over and cannot be accessed after. Patch Events are unique to each patch, some are in-game regional festivals inspired by real life, and others contain gameplay that does not yet exist in the base game. A few contain returning gameplay, but so far none have been exactly the same twice (ibid.).

There are other types of quests that are less related to the story and more to in-game resources for Genshin's Gacha system or different types of experience points (EXP) (ibid.). These are not the focus of this study, therefore not explained in detail.

Most quests and events are connected to each other in different ways, with each type of quest containing pieces of the full story. A major part of Genshin's storytelling is also done through hidden lore and story details only found in item descriptions or while exploring, for the player to discover and make their own connections as to where they fit into the Genshin universe. Some of these are also looped back to and expanded on as the main story continues (ibid.).

The gameplay in Genshin Impact remains fairly constant, regardless of player experience, especially in the sense of open-world exploration. The difficulty of enemies and domain challenges (explained below) scale with the player's World Level and character levels. There are different types of domains, where some are part of the story, such as enemy hideouts that the player has to clear to continue the game's storyline. For this study, these are called Story Domains. Other domains consist of challenges that players can complete in return for valuable materials to increase character and weapon strength, whose gameplay is reset each time the player starts the challenge. In this study, these are called Material Domains. Some Material Domains have to be unlocked by completing prerequisite quests, but the gameplay itself is seemingly unrelated to Genshin's story, and reset each time the player starts the challenge (ibid.).

2.3.4 Game Community and Fandom in Genshin

Genshin supports multiplayer (Co-Op), allowing players to visit each other's game worlds and cooperate in domain challenges or boss fights. However, the upper limit is set to 4 people. It is common for players of higher levels to join lower-level players to help them with boss fights and material gathering to level up characters. Co-Op also allows friends to play together, and for people to find new friends in Genshin, but the in-game community does not extend further than that. Due to the inability to discuss or compare game-related things with more people than ones in Co-Op, the game community exists mainly outside of the game. HoYoverse has its own game forum called HoYoLab, and many players use other social platforms for discussions or sharing content, for example, Discord, Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, and similar.

Genshin Impact is developed in China, by developers with a background in anime and otaku culture, seen in the anime-inspired game design and the company's slogan "Tech otakus save the world" (miHoYo, 2011). Genshin is also rooted in doujin culture. This is seen both through an in-game Patch Event that featured a festival similar to a comic convention (HoYoverse, 2022c), and HoYoverse hosting e.g. fanart and poetry contests on social media and HoYoverse's forum HoYoLab (HoYoverse, 2022b), both encouraging fanworks, and increasing publicity.

2.4 Retelling popularity across different games

Video Game	Year of Release	Amount of Retellings (25th January)	Amount of Retellings (25th February)	Amount of Retellings (25th March)	Amount of Retellings (5nd May)	Total Increase (January - May) 100 days
Genshin Impact (Video Game)	2020	55 411	60 530	64 415	70 692	15 281
Harry Potter - All Media Types	1997*	340 562	346 635	350 678	356 661	16 099
Star Wars - All Media Types	1977*	182 101	185 866	188 314	191 885	9 784
Minecraft (Video Game)	2009	87 110	91 690	95 419	94 844	7744
Final Fantasy Series	1987*	80 283	81 930	83 332	85 141	4 858
Dragon Age - All Media Types	2009	74 161	74 564	75 070	75 637	1 476

* ArchiveOfOurOwn was created in November 2009, marking the year when retellings started being published on the website. Games marked with “*” were launched earlier than this.

Table 2 Retelling popularity on AO3 across different fandoms

Data in the table above was collected from the archive of transformative fanworks Archive of Our Own (AO3), the table shows the total number of retellings for Genshin Impact and five of the most popular video game fandoms. It can be seen that Genshin Impact, which has been released for less than two years, has a comparatively fast growth rate in its amount of retellings. Up until January 25th, it had 55,411 retellings published on AO3. Compared with some of the most popular games that have existed for over a decade, such as Minecraft with 87,110 retellings, and the Final Fantasy series with 80,283, Genshin Impact has attracted a large number of fans to retell it in just over a year.

During the five months of conducting this study, data of the total number of retellings was recorded for Genshin Impact and the five most popular video game fandoms on AO3. The recording period was set to be 100 days, and comparisons were made by taking samples each month between January and March, and lastly on May 5th. As the focus of this study, Genshin Impact increased by 15,281 retellings during this period. In the same time span the amount of Harry Potter retellings increased by 16,099, Star Wars increased by 9,784, Minecraft increased by 7,744, Final Fantasy increased by 4,858, and Dragon Age increased by 1,476. From the comparison of this group of data, the growth rate of Genshin Impact’s fanfiction is second only to that of Harry Potter. When splitting the data into more detail, the average daily growth of fanworks for each game can be seen: Harry Potter has an average daily increase of 161 works, Star Wars increased daily by 98 on average, Minecraft by 77, Final Fantasy by 49 and Dragon Age by 15. Genshin Impact has an average daily increase of 153 works. The daily increase of Genshin Impact’s works is only 5% lower than Harry Potter, and 56% higher than Star Wars. *(The calculation method is to divide the daily growth of Genshin by the daily growth of other works and calculate the percentage that exceeds or falls below 1).*

The data shows that Genshin Impact retellings are currently closing in on the fandoms that have been most popular during the last few years. On May 5th the difference in the total amount of creative works between Dragon Age and Genshin Impact was less than 5,000. If the same growth rate continues, it may soon exceed Dragon Age in its amount of retellings, and become one of the top 5 most popular video game fandoms on AO3.

The statistics above are not representative of retellings on other sites or forums, where data may look different.

3 Method

3.1 Research strategy

In an attempt to answer the research question, the research strategy used is case study. Case study is used for small-scale studies, enabling a deeper dive into a specific scenario, in this case Genshin Impact. The results of a case study aim to reinforce a theory (Denscombe, 2014), in this case, that immersion could be linked to the creation of retellings. Case studies provide the possibility for in-depth research by using multiple methods or data sources to obtain knowledge from different places (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 44). This could e.g. enable comparison between questionnaire and interview results. Aforementioned background is why case study was chosen as the research strategy. Case studies are also fitting for exploratory research, which is the aim of this study. A drawback is that results from a case study can usually not be generalized, they apply only to the specific case that is analyzed (ibid., p. 45). However, there are exceptions to this, and depending on how the study is conducted, the implications and limitations of the results can be considered to determine how far they can be generalized (Denscombe, 2010, p. 322).

3.1.1 Alternative research strategy

An alternative research strategy is phenomenological study, a method that aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life. It focuses on research questions centered around what it is like to experience a particular situation (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 51), which in this case would be immersion or inspiration to create retellings. Phenomenology is a research method that describes phenomena through ‘direct knowledge’, or peoples’ own perspectives and lived experiences. It is not limited to one specific case (ibid.), but could take comparisons of different games, types of retellings and community experiences into account. This would be an ideal research strategy for this study, as it could compare experiences across different video games, and lead to generalizations between them. It could also be more focused on personal experiences, such as what internal or external factors make people start creating, as opposed to only playing a game. However, phenomenology would be too large a scope considering the time frame of this study, and was therefore not chosen. Case study is also most appropriate for this context, the case of Genshin Impact and a potential link between immersion and retelling creation. Phenomenology would, however, be a very fitting research strategy for future studies.

Another methodology is grounded theory. Its main purpose is to build a theory from the collected data. Researchers generally do not pre-set hypothetical theories before researching. Rather, it summarizes experiences directly from observations or data analysis, and then raises them to systematic theories. This is a way to build a substantive theory from the bottom up like a plant takes root and sprouts (ibid., p. 47). This was not chosen as a research strategy as this study already had a question to explore, but would otherwise have been a way to first collect data about game experience in Genshin Impact or retelling creation, and then analyze potential connections without a predetermined theory in mind.

3.2 Data collection method

The data collection was made through three different methods for a more extensive data background, questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and documents.

A questionnaire consists of a written series of questions that should be brief, objective and unambiguous in nature. Various data can be gathered, such as demographics of respondents, e.g. age or gender. Other information can be opinions, feelings, habits and similar. Apart from preparation, questionnaires have the potential to reach a large number of respondents in a short period of time (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 55-57). This method was initially chosen as a way to reach people willing to be interviewed. However, in accordance with case study allowing multiple data sources, it was expanded to include questions, enabling comparison between quantitative questionnaire results and qualitative interview responses.

Semi-structured interviews are composed of communication between researchers and respondents, based on a prepared list of questions that can be discussed in a flexible order. Interviews enable more depth, detail and personal experiences than a questionnaire with set answers would permit. The communicative nature of interviews also allow for follow-up questions to explore a subject deeper, or skipping questions to avoid repetition (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 57-58). This was chosen as it could allow detailed individual responses about what causes immersion, what inspires creation of retellings, what individual retellings are about and their roots in the game.

Documents were used as an additional source of data. This method allows a great deal of data to be collected inexpensively and in a short period of time. Examples of documents include government publications, organizational records, academic publications, newspapers or magazines (ibid., p. 60-61). In this case archive records, specifically the number of posted retellings on AO3, were used. This was chosen as a method since it could show the increase in retellings over time, in a sense also the popularity of Genshin Impact compared to other fandoms.

3.2.1 Alternative data collection method

Alternatively, observation (ibid., p. 59) could be used to study how Genshin Impact players engage with the game content outside of playing; which topics are discussed, which kinds of retellings are most common, along with comparisons across different social media. However, it was determined that interviews, permitting individual perspectives from retelling creators, would be more valuable for this study, as they allow more depth and consist of first-hand knowledge, rather than researchers' guesses based on observations.

3.3 Analysis method

3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is an analytical method in qualitative research. It is used to identify, analyze and report patterns within data; in this case interviews, by summarizing data related to the research question into codes, and compiling related codes into themes and sub-themes. This way similarities or differences between respondents' answers can be spotted. Rather than frequency of occurrence, themes and codes are identified based on their relevance to the research question. Thematization can be done inductively, where themes are identified from patterns that emerge during the coding process, similar to grounded theory where theories are formed based on the analyzed data. Alternatively, it can be done deductively, where themes are decided on beforehand, and data is coded through that framework. Additionally, thematic analysis can be semantic or latent. A semantic approach means the data is taken at face value and themes and codes are created based on what has explicitly been said. A latent approach instead includes interpretations of data, examining underlying ideas, assumptions and ideologies, that could be shaping or informing what is said (Braun, Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen specifically because of its potential to logically structure qualitative data into overarching themes, creating a comprehensive overview of the results, and showing connections or differences between different responses.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a method where large volumes of data are transformed into meaningful, manageable pieces in order to describe or explain a phenomenon that is being investigated (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 61). This was chosen since both results from the questionnaire, and statistics gathered from AO3 are data that needs to be divided into tables or charts in order to efficiently display and analyze them. Since raw data does not speak for itself, it is first prepared, interpreted, analyzed and presented before conclusions can be drawn. Quantitative data analysis is used instead of qualitative, due to the data being in the form of numbers and statistics. Descriptive statistics, a form of data analysis that is used to describe a given sample of data through tables or charts, was used to display and describe the increase in retellings on ArchiveOfOurOwn, along with the results from the questionnaire (ibid., p. 62-63).

3.3.3 Alternative analysis method

An alternative analysis method is content analysis. Content analysis can be used for both quantitative and qualitative research. As with thematic analysis, in most cases researchers use coding to discover, differentiate and categorize different data items. Unlike thematic analysis, the focus of content analysis is to analyze the frequency in occurrence of the identified codes (Mayring, 2015). The use of content analysis may lead to results based on codes that were most repeated, which is relevant to take into account. However, as inspiration for retellings can look different for different people, a more comprehensive approach is appropriate to not exclude data based on their frequency of occurrence. Therefore thematic analysis was deemed the more fitting method.

Content analysis could also be applied to written retellings posted on AO3, where the most popular works, alternatively the oldest and most recent works, could be analyzed to see which parts of the game they drew inspiration from. Content analysis could also have been used for open questionnaire questions to analyze individual text responses. However, this was not chosen as a method since it would be difficult to examine a link between inspiration and immersion this way.

In addition, inferential statistics could be used to analyze the questionnaire results. The purpose of this method is to examine the likelihood of a relationship between two variables, or a difference between two populations. This way differences between people of different age groups, genders or cultural affiliation could be analyzed, and statistical tests could determine the significance of correlations between survey questions (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 63). However, this was not the initial purpose of the study, and questions were not formatted in a suitable way for statistical tests. Therefore this analysis method was not used in the study. However, it could be relevant for future studies.

3.4 Method application

3.4.1 Data collection

An interview guide was created, preparing a set of questions centered around three themes; retellings, immersion, and culture respectively. The full list of questions can be seen in Appendix E - Interview Guide.

A web based questionnaire was created using Google Forms. The first section of the questionnaire contained information about the study and the authors of it, followed by a few demographic questions. One section regards written retellings, reached if participants answered 'Yes' to creating Genshin fanfiction. Another section is about hypothetical retellings, regarding other types of creations related to Genshin Impact, reached if answering 'No' to creating fanfiction. Both of these sections contained a question if respondents would want to be interviewed, if answering 'Yes', leading to a section with information about interviews, contact information to the authors of this study, along with the option for respondents to leave their contact information to be reached out to in an attempt to schedule interviews. The last section, reached by everyone regardless of answers, contained general questions about Genshin Impact.

A pilot study was conducted, with subsequent changes and clarifications made according to feedback. The questionnaire was then posted to HoYoLAB, which resulted in around 30 responses. Two weeks later, due to not having reached a total of 10 potential interview participants, the questionnaire was posted to 27 different Genshin character forums on Reddit (example linked in Appendix D), resulting in about 1600 responses. A full copy of the questionnaire that was sent out is linked in Appendix C - Questionnaire. The one that was posted is not linked, due to the promise of keeping respondents anonymous and protecting their data. Results follow in the result section.

A consent form was created (seen in Appendix B - Consent Form) and sent out to interview participants when scheduling, to be signed before the interview started. The initial aim was to interview ten people, later lowered to eight due to time limitations. Each interview was expected to take between 30-45 minutes. However, not accounting for text interviews taking longer, along with one participant with extensive knowledge in this area, only two of the voice interviews held the timeframe, the remaining ones taking between 2 - 4.5 hours. Text interview participants were informed of this after the first interview that exceeded the time estimate and asked along the way if they wanted to interrupt the interview or continue another time, but each interview ended up being possible to finish in one go.

All interviews were conducted through Discord, three of these were through voice chat and five were through text. Voice interviews were recorded using OBS Studio to later transcribe, text interviews were already a written record on their own. Voice recordings were listened through and transcribed into a Google Docs document (seen in Appendix F - Voice Interviews), and text interviews were transferred from Discord to a Google Docs document as well (seen in Appendix G - Text Interviews).

Lastly, the increase in retellings on Archive of Our Own was documented during the time this study was conducted. A sample of archive records on AO3 was taken once each month between January and March, as well as on the 100th day since the starting date. This process can be seen in section 2.4 - Retelling popularity across different games, and screenshots of all samples can be seen in Appendix A - Data from AO3.

3.4.2 Analysis

To present and analyze the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted by identifying, analyzing, and lastly compiling codes into themes. The thematization was done inductively, by coding the interviews first and later finding applicable themes, to not be limited to predetermined themes from the start. A semantic approach was used, basing the codes on the explicit or surface meanings of what respondents had said (Braun, Clarke, 2006).

The coding was done by identifying the parts of the transcribed interviews that overlapped with the research question, which was then summarized into a shorter code in a comment in Google Docs, marking the section referred to. This way there was an overview of all codes while having them connected to the source material, to be able to go back and relate them to the entirety of what was said. The codes were then gone over again, identifying potential themes. Lastly, codes were sorted into a table in the result section of this study, where overarching themes and individual categories they could belong to were identified in the process.

All codes were looked through iteratively to see if respondents had similar experiences or expressed shared opinions. Patterns that formed between codes from different respondents were combined into one code, and codes unrelated to the research question were discarded. Along the way, realizations were made that several themes or categories could be combined into one and that one theme could be included in another as a category instead. The end result was three themes; Game Experience, Culture, and Retelling Creation, with 11 categories and 94 codes in total, fully presented in the result section. The full table was then split into three sections, one for each theme, with explanations in between that anchor the codes to what interview respondents said. Lastly, conclusions were drawn from similarities and differences between what respondents expressed, along with how they connected to the scientific background.

Descriptive statistics (Johannesson, Perjons, 2014, p. 62) was used to present the data from questionnaire responses, by compiling and describing data from charts to later compare them with interview results. Due to lack of time the questionnaire data was not analyzed in detail, by taking e.g. mean and median values or standard deviation into account, or using content analysis to analyze the textual responses from the open questions. Merely closed questions relevant to the research questions were included, and compared to interview results, while all data from open questions, and the remaining closed ones, were not. Data analysis and descriptive statistics was also applied to the monthly samples of the number of retellings, related to the five most popular video game fandoms on AO3. This was done by presenting the samples taken in a table, describing the visualized data, and calculating differences in increase and the average growth rate of retellings.

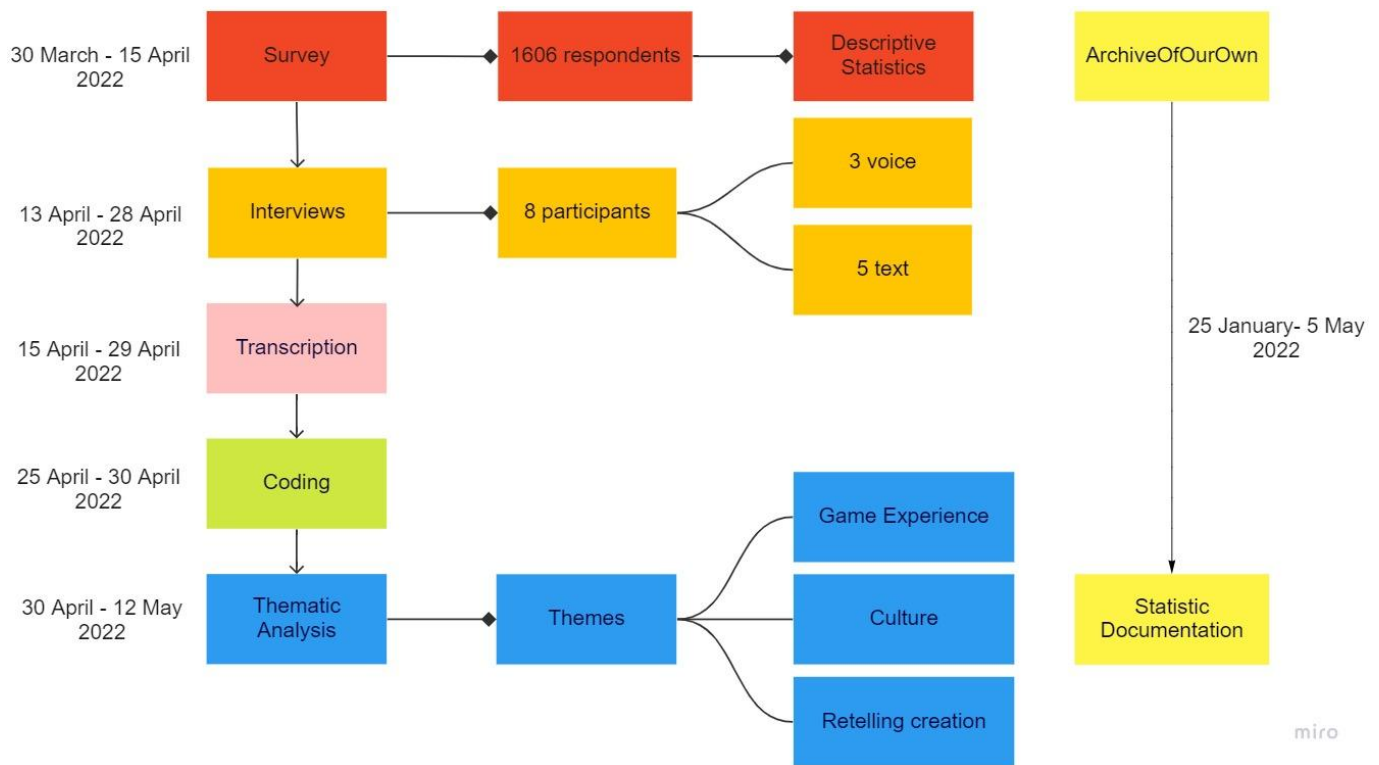


Figure 13 Data collection and analysis process

3.5 Ethical aspects

Denscombe (2010) describes four ethical aspects that research should be conducted in accordance with, (1) that participants' interests should be protected, (2) participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent, (3) avoids deception and operates with scientific integrity, and (4) complies with the laws of the land (Denscombe, 2010, p. 331-338).

3.5.1 Protect participants' interests

To abide by the first aspect and protect participants' interests, Denscombe highlights the importance of ensuring that participants do not come to physical or psychological harm during or resulting from the research (ibid., p. 331). To avoid physical harm to the participants, the interviews were conducted digitally and without any physical labor requirements. To avoid psychological harm, the questionnaire and the interviews minimized factors that could cause psychological trauma or psychological stress to the participants. Intrusive or sensitive questions were avoided as far as possible, and information was given that all questions are voluntary and the interview can be terminated at any time or if they feel uncomfortable. The nature of semi-structured interviews also allow participants to talk more freely about what they want, rather than requiring a strict structure. For the questionnaire, only the questions most relevant to the research question were mandatory, and ones containing potentially personal or sensitive information were made voluntary. However, an aspect that may have caused psychological stress is the slow response time in communication with respondents during respondent validation, due to the study taking more time than planned to get done.

To protect participants' privacy, data collection from both the questionnaire and interviews were entirely anonymized, so that nothing can be linked back to individual respondents. Information was given that the data is used solely for this study, and not shared with people other than the authors of this study, supervisor, course administrators, or peer reviewers. If the study is published, the same as above applies, no information will be included that can be linked to individual respondents.

The only exception to this is examples of retellings, where credit is given to creators, along with links to the post. Linking works by individual creators could be the biggest ethical risk, since it could lead to either positive or negative feedback for individuals. The creators were asked for permission to include their work, and informed that it will be removed from the study if they should change their minds, with the exception for where it may not be possible to change if the study has already been uploaded or downloaded.

3.5.2 Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent

To ensure the second aspect as far as possible, information about the study, its purpose, what data would be gathered, and how it would be used, was specified in both the questionnaire (Appendix C), which respondents needed to confirm before filling out the questionnaire, and in a consent form (Appendix B) that was sent to interview participants before the interview. It was also specified in the questionnaire, the consent form and verbally during interviews, that participation in the study is entirely voluntary. During interviews, options were available to cancel interviews at any time, skip questions, as well as withdraw their participation in the study entirely, and have their data permanently deleted. In the questionnaire, all questions that were not directly related to the research question were made non-mandatory, so that personal questions were entirely optional to answer.

3.5.3 Avoids deception and operates with scientific integrity

For the study to be in accordance with the third aspect, information was given about the study's purpose, what data would be collected, and how the data would be used. To further avoid deception, background information about the authors of this study, along with contact information was included, so that both questionnaire and interview respondents could and can reach out if they have any questions. To avoid misrepresentation of participants' responses, the study was also sent to the interview participants before handing in the final version, to examine whether their responses are portrayed accurately, and subsequent changes were made where necessary.

To operate with scientific integrity, data analysis was made as objectively as possible. Full objectivity is likely not reached due to personal interest in the subject, but as the thematic analysis was done semantically, results build explicitly on what respondents said, rather than authors' interpretations of it. All data was also gone through, analyzed and reviewed by both authors, to avoid biases, assumptions or personal preferences as far as possible. Credit and references are given where information is used from other people than the authors' of this study.

3.5.4 Complies with the laws of the land

As for the fourth aspect, due to the steps taken above, no identifiable laws are broken through this study. Neither the subject of the study, nor its content is deemed inappropriate or violates Swedish law. As long as interviewees' data are protected, proper credit is given, and the study does not include retelling material without permission to use, there are no foreseeable ethical issues.

3.6 Believability and dependability

3.5.1 Believability

Bryman divides believability into four parts; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to whether the results are credible, and is a parallel to the term internal validity in quantitative methodology. Transferability is whether the results are applicable even in other contexts, and a parallel to external validity in quantitative research. Dependability refers to whether the results are dependable after time has passed or when repeating the study, a qualitative parallel to reliability. Lastly, confirmability is whether researchers have let their own values and judgements affect the results, or if they have remained objective; a parallel to objectivity in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 384).

For results to be credible, the research conducted needs to correspond to good practice principles, and members of the demographic group that was interviewed should then get to evaluate the results in order to confirm whether researchers have a correct understanding of the studied group or not. To evaluate this, a credibility evaluation was conducted in the form of respondent validation (Bryman, 2012, s.385), where the people interviewed get to take part of the results and assess whether they seem reasonable or not. This respondent validation was made by creating a copy of the study for each respondent, where all parts of the results and discussions based on their answers were highlighted. The study was then revised according to feedback and suggestions from respondents.

3.5.2 Dependability

Dependability reflects the term reliability in quantitative research, which has to do with whether the research process can be repeated and give exactly the same results. This is difficult for qualitative research as it is much more subjective, different interviewees (or possibly the same people after a month, a year, or longer has passed) would give different answers and possibly completely different results. Instead, Bryman suggests the use of “auditing”, where researchers save an ‘audit trail’ that contains complete registers for all parts of the research process; formulation of the research question, selection of interview participants, notes, interview transcriptions, and similar (Bryman, 2012).

Taking dependability into account, complete records of the questionnaire and interview guide is linked as an appendix. The only thing omitted is the full view of questionnaire responses, due to the promise of protecting participants’ data. Results relevant to the research question are presented later. Voice interviews were recorded for transcription purposes, and the transcriptions are also linked as appendixes, along with the coded interviews. If there are doubts on the authors’ end about the interpretation of responses, interview participants will be reached out to in order to clarify this. The data samples gathered from AO3 are also shown in the appendix, along with the dates they were taken.

4 Results

In this section the results from both the questionnaire and the interviews are presented, in an attempt to answer the research question: *How does immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspire players to create retellings of a particular game?*

4.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was published on two platforms, HoYoLAB and Reddit. A total of 1606 participants filled it out during the open period. Below are figures of some resulting data from the questionnaire. A copy of the whole questionnaire can be seen in Appendix C.

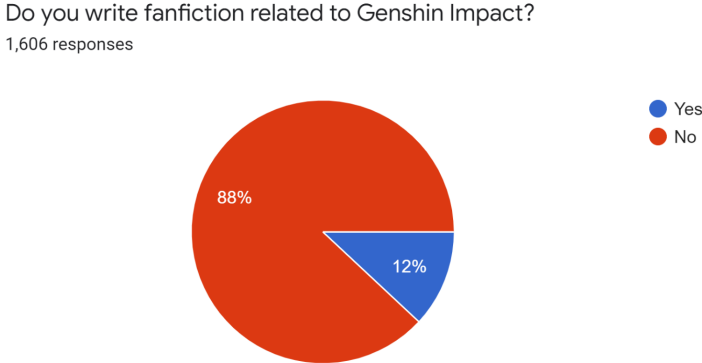


Figure 14 Questionnaire Result - Genshin Fanfiction
Out of 1606 people, 192 (12%) answered that they write fanfiction.

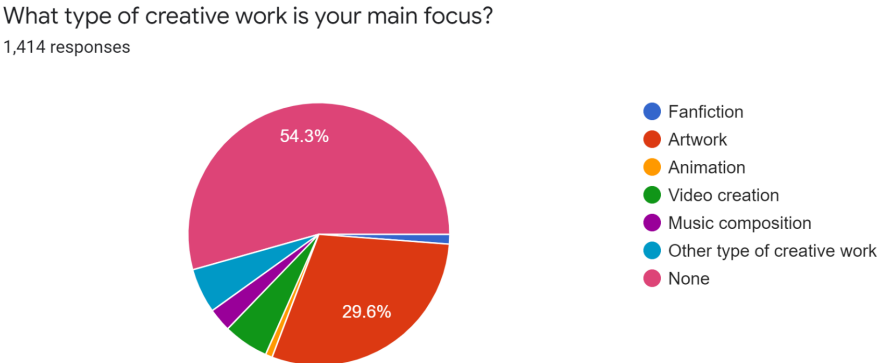


Figure 15 Questionnaire Result - Creative Focus
Inconclusive results due to not specifying Genshin Impact. Figure is included to show a spread across different creative mediums. This question belongs to a section about different types of retellings, reached if answering ‘No’ to writing Genshin fanfiction. Everyone who gave fanfiction as their main focus also answered no to making creative works related to Genshin Impact.

Out of 1414 respondents, 796 (54.3%) gave None as creative focus. 419 (29.6%) answered Artwork, 79 (5.6%) responded Video Creation, 78 (5.5%) answered Other type of creative work, 41 (2.9%) answered Music composition, 17 (1.2%) Fanfiction (for other fandoms), and 12 (0.8%) Animation.

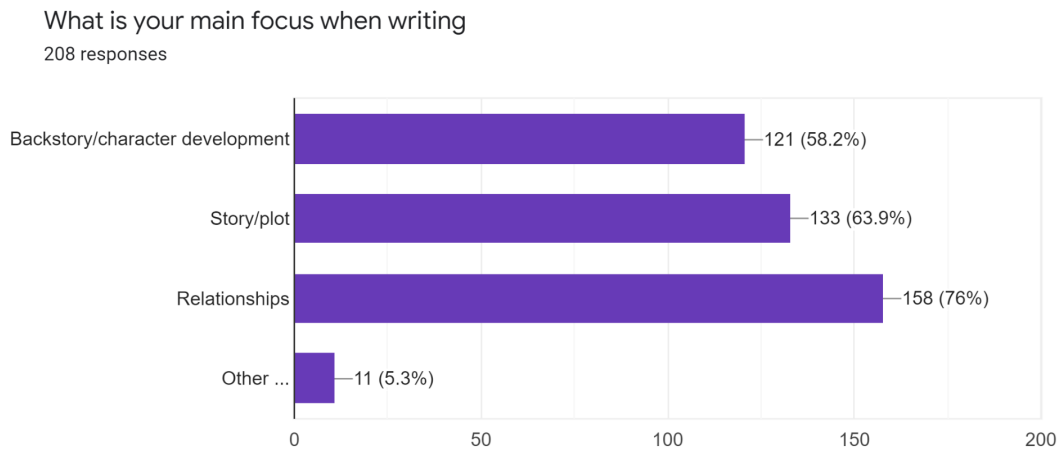


Figure 16 Questionnaire Result - Writing Focus

As for main focus when writing, with the option to select multiple choices, 158 (76.0%) respondents answered Relationships, 133 (63.9%) responded Story and Plot, 121 (58.2%) answered Backstory and Character development, and 11 (5.3%) answered Other.

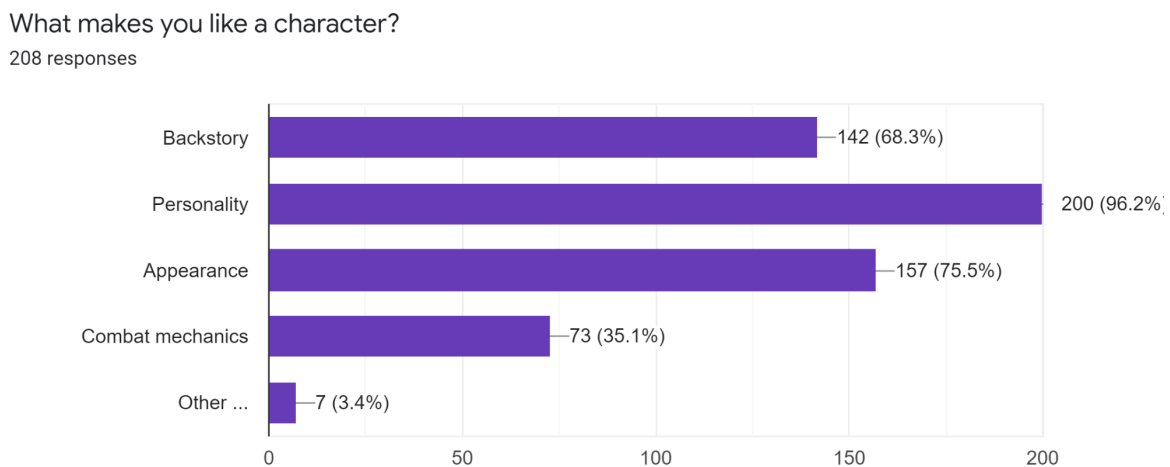


Figure 17 Questionnaire Result - Character

In this multiple-choice question 200 (96.2%) respondents answered that Personality makes them like a character, 157 (75.5%) answered Appearance, 142 (68.3%) Backstory, 73 (35.1%) Combat mechanics and for 7 (3.4%) it is influenced by other aspects.

What do you think attracts you the most in Genshin Impact?

1,606 responses

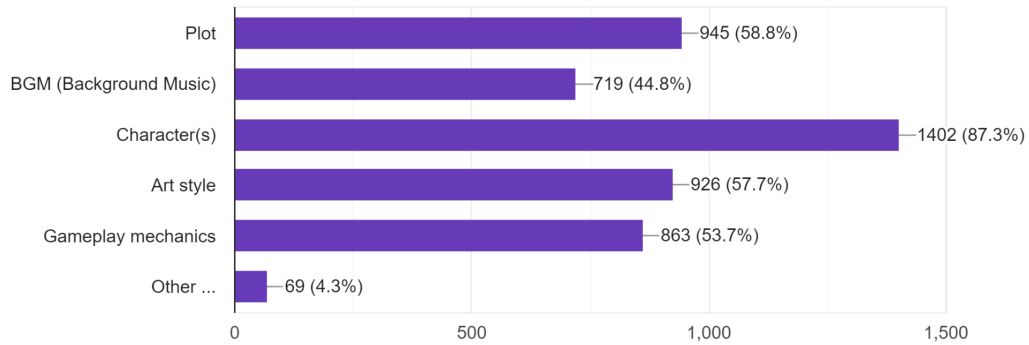


Figure 18 Questionnaire Result - Favorite aspects in Genshin Impact

In this multiple-choice question, 1402 (87.3%) answered Character(s) attract them the most in Genshin, 945 (58.8%) respondents answered Plot, 926 (57.7%) responded Art style, 863 (53.7%) Game mechanics, 719 (44.8%) answered Background Music, and 69 (4.3%) Other.

Which region in Genshin Impact gives you the most inspiration?

208 responses

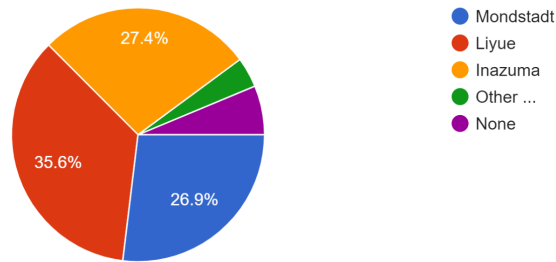


Figure 19 - Questionnaire Result - Inspiration from Regions

When it comes to inspiration, 74 people (35.6%) answered that they are most inspired by Liyue, 57 people (27.4%) are most inspired by Inazuma, 56 (26.9%) by Mondstadt, 13 (6.3%) by neither of the regions and 8 (3.8%) by other or unreleased regions.

What kind of love or intimacy do you like to describe in your writing?

207 responses

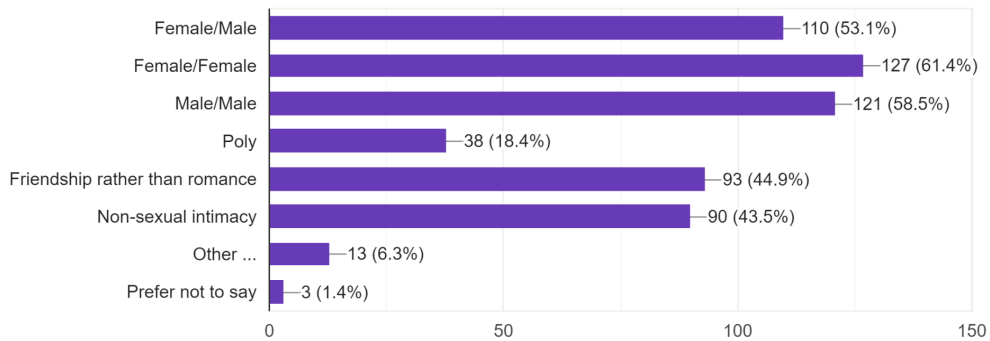


Figure 20 Questionnaire Result - Intimacy in Writing

Out of 207 fanfiction writers, 127 (61.4%) answered that they focus on love between women, 121 (58.5%) focus on love between men, 110 (53.1%) on love between straight couples, 93 (44.9%) on friendship rather than romance, 90 (43.5%) on non-sexual intimacy, 38 (18.4%) on polyamory, 13 (6.3%) on other types of love or intimacy and three (1.4%) respondents prefer not to say.

Which region do you recognize your own culture in the most?

1,595 responses

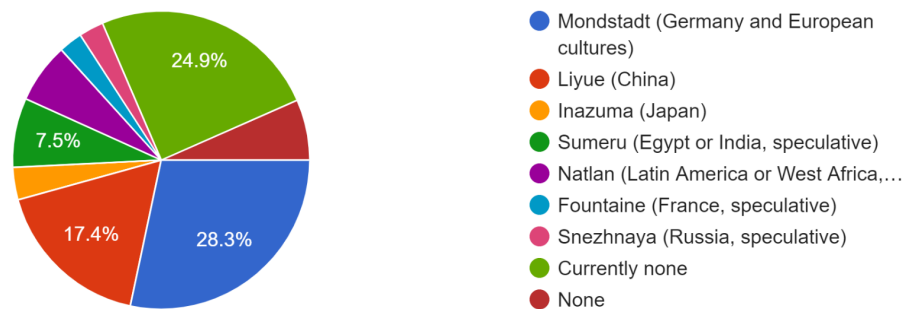


Figure 21 Questionnaire Result - Overlapping Real-Life and In-Game Cultures

Out of 1,595 respondents, 452 (28.3%) answered that they recognize their own culture the most in Mondstadt, 397 (24.9%) answered currently none of the regions, 277 (17.4%) answered Liyue, 120 (7.5%) answered Sumeru, 105 (6.6%) answered none, 104 (6.5%) responded Natlan, 56 (3.5%) answered Inazuma, 43 (2.7%) Snezhnaya and 41 (2.6%) Fontaine.

Do you use social media to share or discuss with others who also play Genshin?
1,606 responses

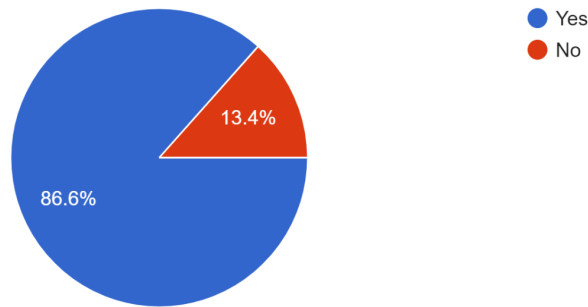


Figure 22 Questionnaire Result - Social Media

Of 1,606 participants who answered this question, 1,391 (87%) use social media to share and discuss with other Genshin Impact players, while 215 (13%) do not.

4.2 Interviews

A total of eight interviews were conducted. Five of the participants are fanfiction writers, two are fanart creators, and one creates both of them. One of the participants who creates fanart also analyzes the lore and history of Genshin through a podcast and discussion posts. Three participants are from Asia, three from North America, and two from Europe, while 75% of them also belong to different Asian cultures. Below is a thematization of the interview answers. Full table with transcriptions and codes can be found in Appendix F (voice) and Appendix G (text).

4.2.1 Full table of codes

Theme	Sub-themes
Game Experience	Game Immersion Cultural Immersion Character attachment Patch Events Languages
Culture	Overlap with Reality Future Hopes
Retelling Creation	Motivation Inspiration Characters in Retellings Creative Focus

Table 3 Full table of codes

4.2.2 Game Experience

Game Immersion
<p>NPCs are not just there for the player, nor to be interested in the player character. More motivated by their own lives</p> <p>“Dark Souls-storytelling”. More than meets the eye to story and worldbuilding, Archon Quests contain just a fraction of it. Can be discovered in item or weapon descriptions, exploration, by talking to NPCs, reading in-game billboard notices etc</p> <p>Exploration and World Quests can be more immersive and not as restrictive as the Archon Quests. Likes to non-linearly explore regions, find pieces of lore, uncover their history and similar</p> <p>Cutscenes add life to the game. Especially ones with emotional impact</p> <p>The emotional undercurrent or hype. Hype comes where emotion meets payoff</p> <p>When things that are foreshadowed are circled back to and paid off, makes a story more impactful. Rewards the player by having sniffed out details, when the story loops back to it or it is illustrated in trailers</p> <p>Genshin feels almost like a tabletop RPG, where everything is realized and ready to use in a story</p>
Cultural Immersion
<p>Part of the fun of Genshin is that the game is very authentically based on real cultures, real mythology, and real landscapes</p> <p>Loves that each region has its own region-specific items</p> <p>When changing the language, players can hear NPCs talking in different languages in different regions, and feel the hustle and bustle of their respective cities</p> <p>Periodically chooses a "home base" to do commissions, bounties, requests or to just hang out in. Changes voice over language to chosen region. Switches home base when missing a certain region</p> <p>Cultural differences are reflected in the depth of the story. Many are unspoken but felt through details</p> <p>Going to a region with an unfamiliar culture is like going on vacation, and going to a region with a familiar culture is like going home</p> <p>Archon Quest feels lacking or rushed if mostly action-based rather than allowing immersion in the region and local history</p> <p>In-game references to anime culture, fanwork or doujinshi culture and <i>a lot of</i> popular media is picked up on and appreciated by those who recognize them</p>

Character Attachment

Attachment comes from personally relating to, admiration or respect for characters

Most attached to characters in Patch Events and World Quests because of interesting interactions and dynamics between characters

Most attached to a character from meeting them in Story Quests, where they speak for themselves and you get to know who they are

Gravitates towards characters with a sad past or unresolved tension/conflicts with their current identity

A favorite relationship dynamic: their backstories are interconnected and all dynamics and life experiences play on each other

A lot of focus on character stories & richness. Even NPC's are depicted with their own lives, goals, relationships, and are looped back to as the game progresses

Character design determines initial attachment, but story and personality sustains it

Increased character attachment from reading character biographies and listening to their voice lines

Interpersonal interactions, or voice lines referring to other characters, make a story more exciting, especially when characters interact in a light not seen before

Do not have to ship characters romantically to think 'I wanna see these two interact'. Genshin usually has an answer to that, and it is usually very fun

Anything with a family theme, especially siblings

Patch Events

Patch events give characters a dimension that has not yet been explored in Archon Quests or Story Quests

Festivals are a good way to bring characters together who might not have met in canon

Important interactions/information are put in time-limited events that are then lost forever

Immersive events that make an in-game experience feel as if experiencing an adventure in real life (e.g. traveling around the game world to take photos, comic-con event, festivals and rites based on real-life)

Festivals and their real-life inspiration sources can spark questions on what creators want to see that Genshin has not covered, and fill in potential blanks. Also sparks creativity in how to decorate or embellish sceneries

Languages
Uses most convenient language for subtitles, but likes hearing the intonations etc of other languages for voice over
Switches voice over language depending on character or region
Foundational understanding of Japanese helps pick up on context in the game
Genshin is not beginner friendly for familiarizing oneself with other languages

Table 4 Codes for Game Experience

4.2.2.1 Game Immersion

Game immersion describes what part of the game experience respondents felt to be most immersive. For each respondent, what most added to immersion was storytelling and gameplay, worldbuilding or NPCs.

Regarding how impactful a story is, one respondent answered *“I think it ties in with how immersive the stories are. I like Zhongli because his story quest was him telling stories about Liyue and its history [...] I like Ayaka because she did the same and showed us around Inazuma”*. The most impactful stories to them involve the traditions or history of regions, since they *“treat players as part of the adventures the main character experiences in the game”*.

Another respondent similarly mentioned storylines with history of how something came to be; cultural rituals (Sacred Sakura Cleansing), or why places fell into ruin (The Chasm or Enkanomiya), since *“it gives me more understanding not just about the character/region, but also their place in the world of genshin and their significance to the overarching plot”*.

Regarding Gameplay, one respondent answered that *“Genshin feels almost like a tabletop RPG, if you’ve ever played Dungeons and Dragons, where it’s like everything is realized and ready for you to use in a story”*. This was added onto with:

“One of my favorite things is they do what I kind of call Dark Souls-style storytelling, which is where they give you facts about the world in the form of item descriptions, and inventory entries, and journals that you find. And all these little easter eggs that you come across in the weirdest places, and then you start to put things together, that you get rewarded by when the story loops back to them. Like the Thundering Fury artifact set having a story about it about the Thunderbird, and then way later in the game, two regions later on Tsurumi Island, you actually see the events that were told in that artifact set”.

Two respondents answered that they feel most immersed in *“the exploration part, the open world itself”*, along with World Quests, since they are less restrictive and allow the player to non-linearly find scattered lore and uncover a region’s history on their own.

Several respondents mentioned that NPCs add a lot to the immersive experience, one participant highlighting how both NPCs and the playable characters *“are not just there for the player, and they’re not just there to be interested in the player character. They’re actually more motivated by what’s going on in their own lives”*.

Another respondent answered similarly, mentioning that NPCs having interconnected storylines between different quests makes the world much more fleshed out.

4.2.2.2 Cultural Immersion

Cultural immersion encompasses the immersive parts of the game experience that ties in with culture. Several respondents said that, while it is more an interpretation than direct reflection, the charm of Genshin is the cultural overlap with real life.

One respondent said: *“I think part of the fun of Genshin is that it’s very authentically based on real cultures and real mythology”*.

This can make players feel immersed in the culture of the region they are in. One respondent answered: *“I especially love when you hear NPCs speak in different languages. My favourite is when I’m in Liyue near the crafting table/Wanmin restaurant since you can hear the NPCs talking and yelling about the food they sell. It just makes you feel the hustle and bustle of the city”*, which relates to their personal way of playing the game:

“I periodically choose a “home base” between the three regions. I’d choose my dailies (commissions) to be in that region, do my weeklies (bounties and requests), or just hangout in that region. I change the language to whatever region I choose [...] whenever I miss playing in a specific region I change my home base. [...] I also think by switching home bases I never really get bored or get burnt out of playing the game”.

One respondent highlighted the unspoken cultural differences between regions: *“my favorite storyline was Liyue just because you could feel the lore and all the different details they’ve put into it. They didn’t have to say anything outright but you could really tell that there is a giant cultural difference”*.

Another respondent mentioned loving that *“each region is based on real life places that have their own region-specific items/places. The recent poem event that required you to take photos of regional specialties [...]”* along with its immersive dialogue making it seem like *“you yourself have traveled in these regions so you must know about these things. I think it’s neat that they reference our in-game experience as players actually experiencing it as our own adventures”*.

Several respondents mentioned feeling most connected to the region reflecting their own culture. One said that *“i’m least familiar with mondstadt out of all the regions, and only ever been to europe once. so going to mondstadt (even if it’s the very first region you play in) feels like a vacation, and so does inazuma. but going to liyue always feels like going home”*.

Lastly, a form of cultural immersion is the fandom and media-related one. Genshin leaves references to a lot of popular media in creative naming of achievements, hints to their own upcoming content, or references to anime culture as a whole, along with nods to doujinshi or fanfiction culture.

One respondent highlighted this with: *“this is how good they are at setting these things up- they left a note on the bulletin board at Ritou Village, like, two patches before, it says like, ‘The shrine is doing an event to celebrate light novels’ [...], and then there was. It’s like, they’re so plugged into, I think the otaku culture, that of course they’re going to do a tribute to that in the event”*.

4.2.2.3 Character attachment

Character attachment details what parts of the game experience that character attachment is rooted in. For all interview respondents this culminated in character design and story, dynamics and interactions, or personally relating to them. One respondent said that *“just as the world makes you want to know more about it, so do the characters”* and later on added that *“Aside from romance, characters do all have interesting dynamics with each other. You don’t necessarily have to ship them romantically to be like ‘I wanna see these two interact’, and they usually have an answer to that, and it’s usually very fun”*.

The same respondent also mentioned an important part of character attachment being how the developers: *“keep looping back even generic NPCs. [...] Let’s say Smiley Yanxiao for example, he’s just a cook in an inn. In any other RPG he would have the same two lines of dialogue, and that’s it. But you get to know him as a person. You get to know his found family, you have that sweet moment where he’s cooking for the Wangshu Inn staff at Lantern Rite, and it kind of feels like a real person with his own life trajectory and hopes and dreams”*.

One participant said that what impacts their attachment to characters the most are World Quests and Patch Events, since they allow the developers to get creative and for previously unseen character dynamics to be explored. Several participants said that the characters’ individual Story Quests impact character attachment most, since that is where you get to know who they are. For the respondents whose favorite characters do not have a Story Quests, their introduction in the Archon Quest and inclusion in Patch Events is what made them want to know more, even though they wish for a Story Quest about them too.

One respondent who mentioned Story Quests expanded this with backstories and voice acting playing a large part too, and said that *“i tend to gravitate towards characters with a lot of sadness or unresolved tension in their past / conflicts with their current identity, so there’s a fair amount of a “standard” trope that is more likely to get me attached regardless of the actual stories”*.

Two respondents also mentioned being initially drawn in by character designs, but becoming more attached after discovering their personalities and individual quirks. One of them mentioned that character biographies, voice lines and social media plays a part too.

4.2.2.4 Patch Events

The temporary Patch Events in Genshin are another aspect that impacts game experience and immersion for most, if not all respondents. Two participants mentioned that Patch Events provide space for character development and interactions that the main storyline does not. Another respondent answered similarly, who really likes *“interpersonal interactions with the characters. I like how, for example, there was this bartender event, and a lot of the characters got to interact with each other in a certain light that I haven’t seen before”*.

Patch Events are a way to flesh out character stories and breathe life into the game by picturing both cultural festivals, and what life looks like for different people in these regions. Especially by also including NPCs, as several respondents said, one mentioning that *“I remember thinking “wow, this is boring. I’m just running errands for these people” but then I saw the wishes they (NPCs) wrote on the lanterns it changed my mind. It’s such a joyful and wholesome event that makes me happy. I loved the colourful decorations, too”*. They mentioned both of Genshin’s Lantern Rite events feeling special because they reminded of their favorite movie, and the second one also showed essential workers, healthcare workers specifically, who do not get holidays off.

Another respondent mentioned festival-exclusive decorations too *“partly because it gives me the creative liberty to embellish the cities a little bit more -- how different would it look from the normal undecorated town, or how would decorations differ this year compared to the last? what do i want to see in these festivals that genshin hasn't already covered?”* and added to this with Patch Events generally bringing characters together, and if it is not directly shown it can also be imagined *“because festivals - as they are irl - are the perfect excuse for people to meet when they otherwise wouldn't, right! so it's the perfect backdrop to peel characters away from their day-to-day lives and maybe even cause an interaction / plant a thought that would spark the beginning of the story, or change the plot of the story in some way”*. They also mentioned that character interactions, especially between characters from different regions *“makes the universe feel so much more connected instead of the separate regions that the game is marketed as”*.

Several respondents highlighted how Patch Events can include really weird or fun character combinations that you might not at all have thought of bringing together. One respondent also brought up the downsides of these events being temporary, because a lot of information can be lost after the event duration ends: *“If there's anything I think is weird about Genshin's storytelling, it's that they put a lot of interesting, if not very important, character interactions in time-limited events that then go away, forever. [...] So it's gonna be weird as more of these important moments happen that people just coming into the game are not going to have access to”*.

4.2.2.5 Languages

Which voice over or subtitle language is used also impacts game experience, as not everything has the exact same meaning or feeling across different translations. Almost all respondents play the game with English subtitles and switch between different languages for voice over. Some respondents have foundational understanding of several languages they switch between, and almost everyone has some familiarity with Japanese from anime or other types of Japanese media. For two respondents the switch of languages is based on region or character background. For three other respondents, it is based on the sound of the voice acting or when feeling like it, and for two others it is a mix of both.

One participant answered that they play the Archon Quests in English for easier understanding, and for the rest of the game experience they switch language depending on region: *“When I started I only played in English dub, and when they released Liyue I pretty much only played in Chinese (other than the Archon quests as I mentioned). After Inazuma's release I did the same thing and switched to Japanese mostly”*.

Another participant answered similarly: *“I find that I keep it in English for story, and then if I'm doing a lot of overworld stuff where the most character audio I hear is just like, the battle barks and in-world phrases, that's when I'll switch it up, mostly 'cause I get bored with the audio”*.

Another respondent also answered that *“I like to switch around sometimes for the regions, for Inazuma I feel like Japanese is very natural for example”*.

4.2.3 Culture

Overlap with Reality
<p>A lot of the culture is emphasizing the local cuisine</p> <p>If familiar with a culture's mythology, one can notice connections/loose parallels in Genshin. If not familiar, Genshin is a cool way to learn</p> <p>Cultural references can spark curiosity to look up more information, which in turn can spark 'if they loop this myth back in, what would it look like?'</p> <p>Reflections of cultural and mythological elements they grew up with</p> <p>HoYoverse develop games about other cultures through the lens of their own culture, positives found in unexpected parallels and negatives in formatting content to own culture rather than diverse representation</p> <p>Interpretation rather than reflection of cultures, but themes, artistic focus & pillars are kept</p> <p>Culture shapes your worldview, reflected in how characters from Liyue and Mondstadt can give varied answers about the same concept</p> <p>From the details that overlap with real life, players can learn tidbits of how daily life might look or have looked in that region</p> <p>First or second time seeing Chinese culture in media</p>
Future Hopes
<p>Wants characters with darker and more varied skin colors to be included, and more varied body types</p> <p>Hopes Natlan and Sumeru are done justice; worried about diverse cultures (especially Middle Eastern or South- and South East Asian cultures) being combined or inaccurately condensed</p> <p>Wants to see Mesoamerican (e.g. Mayan), or Polynesian cultures represented in the game</p> <p>Personally interested in French culture, also excited for region (Fontaine) inspired by it</p> <p>Hopes regional specialities and architecture in Natlan will correspond to South Asia, specifically Bangladesh and India</p> <p>Hopes to see more mappings of South East Asian cultures in future regions, as there is not much representation of it</p> <p>Wants to see Latin/Spanish cultures in future regions, as their culture contains influences from them as result of colonization. For example architectural or mythological references, and culturally relevant items or food</p> <p>Wants to see Aboriginal culture represented, but similarly to Middle East would also be difficult</p>

to depict in a politically and factually correct way

Fan of Egyptian and Greek mythology and would love that mystique in Genshin too

Hopes for Sumeru to turn out better than expecting. What is currently known is pretty far divorced from personal experience, partially due to mashup of cultures that are not that similar, and all NPCs being white

Wants to learn more about cultures and the voice over language(s) they use in Genshin

Table 5 Codes for Culture

4.2.3.1 Overlap with Reality

A very specific part of cultural immersion is the overlap with cultures in real life. Many respondents went into deeper detail about this, and mentioned things that corresponded with, or differed, from their own cultures. One respondent said that *“It’s not obviously a direct parallel, but it’s got themes and things that if you know the literature, or the history, or some of the historical figures, or the mythological creatures, you can infer some things about Genshin. And if you don’t know about them, Genshin is kind of a cool way to learn about them”*.

In response to whether a character’s culture also play a part in retellings, one participant detailed differences between characters from different regions, resembling especially architectural and culinary differences in real life too: *“i think your culture ultimately plays a big part in shaping your view about something, and characters from liyue and mondstadt for example can give very varied answers about one concept”*, followed by *“it doesn’t even have to be [...] individual vs. collective or anything. even really small stuff like mondstadters drinking out of more english-looking teacups, while liyue chars might comment on how the style of teacups are different from theirs (both ceramic but different motifs), or a lack of spicy food in mondstadt compared to the hot stuff they’re used to getting at wanmin”*.

Several participants highlighted how details that directly overlap with their own culture can feel much more personal, and are easier to connect to the mythology they are drawn from. One respondent also mentioned how this was from a different perspective than seen before: *“I grew up with a lot of the [Japanese] fairytales and the youkai, and I have always loved seeing that in media. One of my all-time favorite games is Ōkami (大神), which is deeply based on these fairytales and the folklore and stuff. And I loved Inazuma because it’s not just that, but it’s also a Chinese developers’ perspective on that culture, and that is super interesting to me, because usually for me it’s either been like, kind of a westerner’s perspective or the Japanese perspective, so seeing how the Chinese devs at Mihoyo would write a fantasy Japanese world was really, really interesting to me”*.

The same respondent also highlighted the parallels resulting from HoYoverse portraying and drawing connections between different cultures: *“I’ve always heard that like, the Chinese- the Tengu comes from the Chinese word Tiangou, which is like, a meteorite dog thing, and that’s never something that’s come up in Japanese mythology, but in Genshin they made that connection - and Tengu are associated with falling stars and traveling worlds - in a way that would not have happened without them being aware of that Chinese-Japanese pun, and I was like, ‘That’s cool, you guys are thinking about it’”*.

Most respondents said that playing Genshin made them learn more about cultures different than their own. Many respondents also said that Genshin is their first or second time seeing Chinese culture extensively represented in media and that playing through Liyue made them want to learn more about it. For some it is about learning more about a culture different from their own; the language,

mythology, architecture, cuisine, and Chinese Opera from one of the characters and stories that beautifully featured it. For others' it is connected to research for characters and stories, and for some it is also about the in-game experience making them want to learn more about their own culture:

“the culture i ended up wanting to learn more about was my own: chinese culture [...] i grew up more exposed to western media and i actually don't speak chinese well... there are things about the culture depicted in genshin that i experience every day, and yet there are things that you wouldn't know about unless you read up about it - like the dragon & phoenix chopsticks, funeral/passing rites, exorcism/clan ideology, branches in old government. and playing genshin made me go read up about the actual thing, to see where the roots of it all are”.

The same applied to the other regions, but Liyue and Chinese culture were the most prominent in the interviews. Many were also familiar with Japanese culture from anime.

4.2.3.2 Future Hopes

Future Hopes encompasses the hopes and concerns that respondents expressed for the future regions of Genshin Impact, relevant to the research question and retellings since the characters are so deeply tied to their culture.

Three respondents mentioned wanting to see more South East Asian cultures in the game, as they are closely related to their own cultures and they are not as widely represented, especially in western media. Another respondent hopes to see South Asian cultures for the same reason, and cuisine, architecture, and scenery resembling that of Bangladesh and India. One respondent also expressed concerns about several South East Asian cultures being blended together, as some existing media has done.

One of them added that *“I also want to see Latin/Spanish culture in the future. I've mentioned I'm Filipino and that's basically what our culture is as a result of colonization. Our culture is a mix of both and I'd love to relate more if they ever release a region inspired by those cultures.”*

Several respondents do not want to see inherently separate cultures mixed into one, or characters being portrayed as white when their culture is inspired by regions with much more diverse skin colors. One respondent expressed this with *“We don't have a ton of info on Sumeru, so I can only go on rumors, although a lot of the stuff we do know is pretty far divorced from my experience [...] The mix of such separate cultures paired with the fact that all the Sumeru NPCs (and PCs like Cyno) we've seen have been white doesn't really inspire confidence that they'll handle the region with sensitivity or respect, but I'd love to be proven wrong”*, and another similarly mentioned *“I really hope they don't mix India and Middle Eastern cultures together because, because I have a friend from the Middle East and she was really pissed off about different Asian Games doing that”*.

A third respondent mentioned looking forward to Sumeru, but also concerns about condensing Middle Eastern cultures into one, and the likelihood of that being done inaccurately. They also extended this with *“i would love to see a take on aboriginal culture because i feel that's not represented nearly enough, and would be insane to imagine coming from a chinese company lol. but again i also feel it could be tricky to depict in a politically correct and factually accurate way, so until the devs figure out how to do that, maybe it'd be best to leave this one as just my own pipe dream”*.

One respondent also mentioned wanting to see Polynesian culture represented, and hoping Mayan mythology will be a part of future regions. A few also mentioned being excited for the region inspired by France, and liking French fashion and cuisine. Another respondent mentioned Egyptian and Greek mythology, hoping they might be a part of the game too.

4.2.4 Retelling Creation

Motivation
<p>Interested in the inner workings of Genshin along with character and lore interpretations; wants to explore the history of Teyvat more deeply</p> <p>Exploring characters further than the game has</p> <p>Likes pairings that are less common and wants to let friends understand why</p> <p>Main reason for creating is when having questions about something they want to see answered. Only way to do that is through own interpretation and own research</p> <p>Dissatisfied with the depth of a character's story; motivated them to re-write it along with the character's role in the Archon Quest</p> <p>The stories they want to see are too niche and does not exist yet, so they have to create their own to read about it</p> <p>Wants to tell stories that have not been told in the game's overarching plot, or that expand on it; slice of life, how characters' lives might look in the future, stories about their pasts or AUs</p>
Inspiration
<p>Characters are written with enough hooks. Getting to know more about them makes them more intriguing, but there is enough space left to wonder and create from</p> <p>A lot of dialogue is open-ended and can be interpreted or expanded upon. Much room to write fanfiction based on 'what did this character mean when they said that?'</p> <p>References to Genshin's 'hidden' lore and information can fill out fanfictions by referring to details that aren't part of the Archon Quests</p> <p>Inspired by places they loved while playing; incorporates region-specific details and locations for more immersive stories</p> <p>Characters with implied connection to or history in places, that are not shown in the game's story</p> <p>Genshin gives an outline, but enough is up for interpretation to spark curiosity or experimentation with "what if's"</p> <p>Characters' culture or backstory sometimes serve as a source of inspiration</p> <p>A character's gameplay animations, element and combat skills is inspiration for writing</p> <p>The interesting (found) family dynamics, made up of different shapes and sizes, and sometimes different species who build a family together</p> <p>Using a team with favorite characters or characters with related backstories can give inspiration for retellings</p>

Takes lots of in-game reference pictures on the off-chance that they'll be drawn

Sees parallels between book characters and Genshin characters when reading. Starts as small ideas to share with friends, then grow until ending up writing AUs about it

Game has complex setting and characters, likes when that complexity is kept in fanworks too

Different regions inspire stories of different kinds, such as lighthearted, or of sacrifices and rewards

Characters in Retellings

Finds it difficult to write characters they are not emotionally attached to; makes it difficult to deeply analyze them and get into their emotions

Main character does not impact retellings; focus is on other characters and exploring their personalities

Loves exploring what would happen when bringing characters together, who have not met in-game

Very different characters sharing a certain trait can be an opportunity to bring the two together, and they might learn something from each other

Headcanons characters who move to another region picking up cultural elements from it, while also staying true to their homeland

Research

Reads up extensively about culture and lore in order to build the world as accurately and realistic as possible

Looks up corresponding fashion trends in culture that region is inspired by. Either from personal interest or in search of casual clothing to simplify character outfits

Looks up more information about characters they like for deeper understanding and more accurate portrayal

Goes around region to have better idea of what it looks like when writing

Creative Focus

More character-focused than region-, culture- or lore-focused writer (exception when it is relevant to the character)

Lore-focused writer, writes discussion posts and essays on Reddit.

Memorializes fun things that happen while playing (especially co-op) with a drawing or a post about it

<p>Draws fanart of favorite characters (e.g. for their birthdays) or pairings</p> <p>Creates original characters based on Genshin, gets ideas as more lore is introduced</p> <p>Unreleased regions are not part of retellings as to not make premature assumptions, but are topics for discussion</p> <p>Mainly writes romances or comedies. Especially loves to write characters pining</p> <p>Fun to write own version of character interactions showed in-game</p> <p>Enjoys writing anything that allows exploring the human psychology and really dig into emotions with</p>

Table 6 Codes for Retelling Creation

4.2.4.1 Motivation

The different motivational sources, as the main reasons for creating retellings, brought up by respondents were intrinsic motivations such as deeper analysis of characters and relationships, or curiosity about the game world, lore and history, and connections between them. Extrinsic motivations were also brought up in the form of wanting to share ideas with others.

For some players questions arise while exploring the game, and answering these questions then become a motivation for creation. For example, one respondent said that their *“main reason for creating is when I have questions about something that I want to see answered. And the only way to do that is my own interpretation and kind of my own research.”*

As one of the core features of Genshin Impact, wanting to explore characters can also be a motivation. One respondent answered *“Mostly to explore character stuff that’s beyond the scope of the game. Since the nature of Genshin is that we aren’t ever going to really get super granular with character relationships it’s kind of an open area/free real estate for my found family agendas”*.

Several respondents mentioned a primary motivation being to expand on stories or dynamics between characters through their own interpretations, such as pairings not mentioned in the game *“I guess that’s my biggest motivation for writing things, [...] exploring friendships and relationships and stuff like that”*.

One respondent also mentioned how dissatisfaction with a character’s story motivated them to create their own version of it: *“I wasn’t too happy with Raiden’s story quest part one and Kokomi’s, but they impacted me to try rewriting Kokomi’s role in the Archon Quest and story. [...] I felt like she had so much potential to be morally gray”*.

There is also an extrinsic motivation through wanting to share their own ideas or works with others. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they create retellings through discussion on social media and through Direct Messages (DMs), or because they wanted their friends to understand why they like a character pairing. Two respondents also mentioned being inspired to start writing by friends who also write or recommended them fanfictions.

4.2.4.2 Inspiration

Dialogue and interactions being open-ended enough to have room for players' interpretations, worldbuilding, storytelling and regional differences are some aspects that can inspire retellings.

As this interviewee expressed *“There’s a structure, and a history to this world, and these characters, like every character you get has some- has a lot of stuff going on in their life, and some intrinsic motivations that are really interesting. So, I find that, if a world is- even if it’s very deeply realized, if it’s too open-ended, I don’t get that creatively inspired. But if it’s too closed off, then there’s nowhere for me to kind of insert my questions that become my creative pursuits. Genshin just has like, the right amount of hooks and intrigue, that I think energizes people like me and creators to insert their own interpretation of what we’re given”*.

And another interviewee also said *“something that genshin contributes specifically is the amazing lore that the devs have put into place! that alone makes me want to worldbuild by myself, building off existing foundations”* and *“i’d say those fragmented pieces do the most for sparking ideas - it’s because they’re little morsels of information that you can speculate freely :) like i enjoy writing about/discussing how liyue harbour came to be, and of course i can add my own spin to that and colour in the specifics, but that’s already been documented quite extensively in the game, right? compared to something like the dandelion sea/mondstadt port that has only been referred to in passing - that makes you wonder!! is the architecture different? white pillars by the seaside? Can you feel barbatos’ wind there too? Where do the ships go? Is it like liyue, bustling and bright, or like ritou, quiet and mysterious?”*

The same respondent also mentioned implied connections between characters, places and different pieces of lore *“there are so many places implied to have deep connections to characters that have never been there in-game”*.

In addition, when asked what inspired their retellings, many respondents answered characters and character interactions. One specifically mentioned how characters are *“written with enough hooks, where they’re fleshed out enough, but not too much so that you can still wonder about things about them [...]. And there’s a lot of spaces that are left for you to wonder about, and to create and play in”*. The same respondent also mentioned there being a lot of room to expand on what characters meant by saying a specific thing.

Another participant similarly responded with: *“I like the character interactions a lot. Also the fact that they gave me an outline, but there’s just enough they’re missing in each character that I can experiment”*. The same respondent also mentioned an important factor being the types of quests where characters *“get to interact with each other and it plays on more interesting dynamics than just you and the character”*.

When asked about whether a character's culture impacts creating, most respondents answered that it did. One said that since characters are deeply tied to a region it is unavoidable. Another respondent also answered: *“I think your culture ultimately plays a big part in shaping your view about something, and characters from liyue and mondstadt for example can give very varied answers about one concept... it doesn't even have to be [...] individual vs. collective or anything. even really small stuff like mondstaders drinking out of more english-looking teacups, while liyue chars might comment on how the style of teacups are different from theirs (both ceramic but different motifs), or a lack of spicy food in mondstadt compared to the hot stuff they're used to getting at wanmin”*.

Another respondent also highlighted how regional differences can inspire different stories: *“Mondstadt is a region associated with freedom and free will, and it inspires me to write about more lighter topics (ie. a vacation to take your mind off things, the freedom to choose your own path regardless of what it brings in the future, seeing the “bright side”) [...] Liyue is more about stability and contractual agreements (being trusted and trusting in a way) which inspires me to write about heavier topics (ie. tragic endings due to broken promises, choosing what is technically and lawfully right but it feels wrong, standing your ground on things you believe in) [...] that inspires me to write stories that involve sacrifices and rewards”.*

Small details to character designs and personalities can be significant for retellings, as one participant mentioned: *“I believe that's the magic of character design/art, and I also feel like one of the most intimate things (in writing something with romance) is remembering the absolute smallest detail instead of grand big gestures.”*

Another participant gave their opinion from the audience's point of view *“because they're giving us this cool, complex setting and characters, I tend to like it more when they keep that complexity in fanworks. I know it's always kind of easy to like, reduce them to tropes or something, [...] but I find that doesn't hold my attention as much as when people take all of these details into account.”*

When the topic turned back to whether characteristics give inspiration to retellings, one participant gave a specific example *“They have, such as Kokomi's love for the ocean and books so I'd revolve writing and drawing around that and find things to symbolize with her character, such as flower languages or symbolism of certain seashells, sea creatures etc. Same applies for my other favorite characters.”*

Characters and lore aside, there are also creators who take inspiration from in-game experiences. Two respondents told us about their creative experience. One of them said *“When I do write about games, I always like to include little hints at the gameplay itself. For example [...] Venti's element energy, I would try to lean a bit towards his skills and how he works in the game”.*

Another respondent similarly mentioned *“I've written a lot about memorable enemies/battles I've gotten into (like the time Xiao beat the primo geovishap with 150 hp and everyone else in the party down...) and I really like using actual map locations when it's applicable.”*

4.2.4.3 Characters in Retellings

Different creators have different habits for the description of characters in their retelling works.

Most of the people interviewed do not have the protagonist of the game as the main character in retellings, or base characterization after themselves. One of the respondents who focuses on other characters said that they *“don't want to include the main character, or myself really. I prefer the other characters to some sort of self-insert type.”*

The main characters in retellings are often characters that the creators love or have emotional attachment to. Other characters can be included as side characters. One interviewee mentioned *“i'd find it difficult to write characters that i don't absolutely love, because i probably don't like them enough to analyze them on a deeper level and i want to try to be as realistic/non-ooc as possible. they might be involved if the story calls for it, but only as side characters.”*

There are also creators who like to explore different character combinations, scenarios and settings “*I think what I like about pairings a lot is when you have two characters that share a certain trait, or they share a liking for something. [...] finding things characters have in common despite cultures and then the cultural like, part comes after that. And they might learn new things from each other*”. Another also mentioned “*I love trying to explore what characters would do if they met others they have not in canon and what they'll do when they visit other regions*”.

In addition, there are also creators who imagine characters who have moved between regions also picking up cultural habits from different regions, like the example given by this participant “*I would headcanon Kazuha adopting some of Liyue's traditions while still staying true to Inazuma*”.

Creators use a character's story and personality in the game as a starting point, and expand on it in different ways, such as a deeper analysis of the characters' inner worlds, possible interactions and dynamics between different characters, or creators' own ideas (headcanons) about characters.

4.2.4.4 Research

In the process of creation, creators sometimes look up information on their own, or do their own research for more background and to add authenticity to their works. One participant answered that “*whenever I feel like writing about a character or I get a story idea, I try to actively look up lore that would be relevant to that*”.

Most of the participants look up more about their favorite characters, along with mythology or cultural aspects that are relevant to them “*I looked into quite a few myths about it. For example the qiling dragons*”.

This can also apply to analysis of the story of Genshin. One respondent mentioned that “*Genshin will inspire me to, you know, go look up something on Chinese mythology, and then I'll be like, 'oh, maybe they'll, you know, what if this part of Chinese mythology was looped back into Genshin like, what would that look like?'*”

One participant also mentioned clothing and fashion trends “*The Mondstadt characters' clothing is some of my favorite in the game so I've looked into some German fashion trends [...] usually casual clothes (cuz the Genshin clothes are so complicated u want to bawl my eyes out), but their region influences the kind of casual wear it is*”.

Another mentioned that they “*usually go around the region just to like, have a rough idea of what it looks like.*”

Two participants mentioned that their reason for looking up more information on their own, was to construct the story world more accurately and to avoid stereotypes. One of them highlighted this through “*i read up extensively about something so i can build the world as accurately as possible and see if there isn't a way i can slip this all in for extra realism*”, and another mentioned “*I always look up backstories before I start writing a story, [...] I think if people don't look at backstories, that's how the stereotypical portrayals come from. I know for like, a lot of people in the Childe fandom complain about how Childe often becomes like a caricature of his own self, or he's just like a flustered hopeless man when he's paired with Lumine, for example. Or he's just extremely power hungry and goes berserk, and they ignore his like, family focus, and stuff like that*”.

4.2.4.5 Creative Focus

What kind of retellings people make, and the focus of them, can differ between creators. For all interview participants characters are a central focus, and for some regions and lore are a large aspect too.

Several participants mentioned characters being the main focus, and including culture or mythology relevant to the character, rather than inspiration being rooted in a culture or region. One of them said *“it's more character dependent, and I don't think of any region that makes me want to write about characters.”*

Another participant is focused on both lore, culture, characters, and all the connections hidden in details within the story and worldbuilding *“I like to just kind of discuss the inner workings of the world, interpretations of characters, so basically about writing like, essays”*.

Different creators also focus on different genres. Several participants mentioned focusing on love stories between different characters *“I mostly write romance/romantic comedies. I especially love writing characters who pine for who they love. Mostly about Zhongli since he's my favorite character and his story makes for a perfect love story in my opinion.”* Several respondents mentioned loving the found family dynamics in the game, and one specifically writes stories centered around family as well, with older characters taking in the younger ones, becoming a makeshift family that several of them never really had.

In addition to this, there are also creators who create their own original characters (OCs) based on theories in the game, such as this respondent *“I draw any character in general. OCs are based off of loose theories in genshin, like there being a time god, previous gods/immortal creatures like the thunderbird”*.

One respondent also mentioned how their retellings can be rooted in fun things that happen while playing: *“I play with my friends and we usually get in a voice call or something, like, we'll be goofing around and something funny will happen to us while playing, and then maybe I'll, you know, memorialize that in like, a little shitpost or a drawing or something”*.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine "*how immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspires players to create retellings of a particular game*". The results show that there is a link between immersion in a game and inspiration to create retellings based on it. Specifically for Genshin Impact, characters, storytelling, and worldbuilding seemed to matter the most.

All respondents mentioned characters being an inspiration and central focus. The results from the questionnaire overlap with characters likely being the most significant factor, as 87% answered that characters are what drew them most to Genshin Impact (Figure 13). All respondents brought up being inspired to further explore the personalities of, or dynamics between, characters they have become attached to in the game. What specifically inspired many interview participants are the interpersonal interactions between the characters. These are all explored to a certain extent, but left vague enough that creators can build on them, and add their own interpretations to relationships.

Several respondents mentioned that it is the fragmented pieces and stories that sparked the most ideas and made them wonder. Inspiration came from realizing that there is so much more to characters, the gameworld and the in-game cultures, than is shown at first glance. In contrast to this, dissatisfaction with a character's depth, or lack of immersion in stories, can also motivate people to create a version they want to see instead. Participants' responses about immersion were largely similar to what gave inspiration, especially in the form of character attachment along with immersion in the game world and storytelling. This ties in with McMahan's (2013) theory about immersion partly being rooted in elements that provide context and meaning, but also including a vital part of player engagement, in the form of attachment to the game on a non-diegetic level. Responses indicate that while interesting, detailed characters make retelling creation attractive, there is also an important layer of creators' personal attachment to them, that determines which characters and aspects of the story are explored deeper, which can differ from person to person. Inspiration can also come from lack of character depth, where attachment to a character can make players want to rewrite parts they were dissatisfied with.

Several respondents brought up the advantage of having an outline to base retellings on. Both authors, and likely most of the audience, are already familiar with characters and settings from the game. Hence there is no prior introduction required, and in-game characters do not have to be imagined or introduced from scratch. This aligns with Stein and Busse's (2009) arguments that part of the appeal of fan creation lies in creating along with the framework that the source material provides. Additionally, the limitations of the source material can provide a fun challenge to create stories that complement, or diverge from it, but remain close enough for e.g. characters to be believable (Stein, Busse, 2009).

Characters having individual designs and personalities allow for details to be referred to in art or stories. When depicting character pairings, the creator can have these details be noticed by other characters, which can create intimacy between them. It can also add a second layer of recognition for the reader, who might have noticed these details from the game. If not, they can learn more about the characters this way, which could, in turn, impact their attachment to them. Another driving force that might make retelling creation attractive, in complement to the richly detailed characters that Genshin has, is that each playable character has elemental abilities, and are deeply tied to their specific element. This allows for a lot of elemental symbolism and parallels, which participants mentioned including both in writing and art. Stein and Busse (2009) also bring up how character and relationship trends are

established in fandoms. Several participants also brought up perspectives that supported and added onto this. One participant discussed how reliance on fandom-established trends, or not reading up on a character's backstory before writing, can lead to stereotypical portrayals and neglecting parts of a character's personality that is actually established in the game. Several participants mentioned that their initial attachment to character relationships lies in recognizing small details two characters have in common, or reasons they might be fascinated by or learn from each other, and create stories from that starting point. Here the popularity of already established fandom pairings did not draw them in as much as their own observations. For some participants the pairings they write about are lesser known or feature newly released characters, resulting in fanfiction writing to let their friends know why they like them, or to bring a story into existence that they are aching to see, but that so far only exists in their imagination.

Of significance to most, if not all, respondents is when lore and history is deeply interconnected with worldbuilding. When level design reflects the in-game culture and history, in turn partly inspired by real life, exploring a place lets the player make connections of their own. This can spark imagination and result in ideas for retellings, especially if the places are tied with character stories or lore told elsewhere in the game. Participants also mentioned how fragmented information and lore spark inspiration for details to include that the game has not covered or expanded upon. This ties in with Eladhari's (2018) definition of retellings as artifacts co-created by the player and the games they play, and describes that studying these narrative artifacts can enable a deeper understanding of the games they are based on. Kreminski et al. (2019) further detail how players can make use of games as storytelling partners. This was found to be true in this study as well, with players telling their own stories or creating art centered around characters and different aspects from the game. One respondent also mentioned creating their own original characters based on in-game lore, with backstories set in the Genshin universe. Kreminski et al. further mentioned how players, in some cases, seek out games with the intent of using them as support for story construction. This, however, was found to be the opposite for all the people interviewed. Rather they started playing after seeing posts, art, or videos of Genshin content on social media, or having friends that play who recommended it. Their creation of retellings was then a response to playing the game, as a result of character attachment and immersion in the story, game world, and cultures. This, however, does not mean that games cannot be sought out to support story construction, just that for people interviewed for this particular study, it was not the case.

Additionally, just as gameplay impacts retelling creation, retelling creation can in turn also impact gameplay. Several respondents mentioned going around regions or re-visiting places to have a better idea of what it looks like when writing.

Another aspect is that Genshin allows multiplayer. If memorable events happen in-game, creators can make a drawing or comic about it or feature it in a story, similarly to how moments during campaigns in D&D can become subject for art or writing. Co-Op mode and Genshin's camera feature also allow people to take photos with different characters in different locations, which is another way to create retellings, and can serve as inspiration for art or stories.

5.1 Correlation between diegesis and retellings

Diegetic elements, everything inside the game world experienced by the in-game characters, were found to be the most significant source of inspiration. Most non-diegetic elements have no direct impact on retelling, many creators did not consider them at all when writing or drawing. However, results found that they can have an impact on retellings in the form of 'hidden' lore, meaning details that are not yet brought up in the main story or quests, and can be found if e.g. reading item descriptions of weapons, artifacts (strength-enhancing materials), or quest items.

Two participants made their own breakdown of the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic elements, and why they do not affect their retellings. One respondent said that they have always considered non-diegetic elements as external elements that they can control as the player, it does not relate to the character: "*essentially I control the time and whatever happens in my inventory so I've always considered it an external element*". Another answered that since their main focus is character and relationship dynamics, and not wanting to base characterization on themselves, what relates to the player character does not impact stories.

However, for some respondents, the opposite applies if the non-diegetic elements are related to the game's storytelling. Item descriptions of weapons and artifact sets are examples of non-diegetic elements that can be inspirations for retellings. Some weapon descriptions contain stories of the original wielder (occasionally related to playable characters). Artifact sets are strength-enhancing rewards from Material Domains, with gameplay unrelated to the story, but the item descriptions become a form of narrative reward, containing story fragments about characters or places that have not been told, or are not expanded upon until later in the main story. This relates to Salen and Zimmerman's description of how diegetic elements can influence game progression through narrative reward systems, providing story progression or explanations that can impact emotional ties to characters, objects, or places (Salen, Zimmermann, 2004, pp. 51-52). If relating this back to McMahan's (2013) definition of immersion requiring an emotional component, diegetic elements that influence emotional ties to games can, in turn, potentially also influence retellings.

The soundtrack of the game is non-diegetic, therefore not part of retellings, but players occasionally walk around a region to hear more of the soundtrack. Soundtracks may also impact other types of retellings than writing and art, as 41 (3%) respondents answered music composition, and 79 (6%) answered video creation as their main creative focus in the questionnaire (Figure 10 - Creative Focus).

5.2 Correlation between cultural immersion and retellings

Genshin Impact is partly inspired by different regions in the real world, which becomes a form of cultural immersion both through elements that reflect reality and can be related to, and the game's own extensive worldbuilding and storytelling, which contains a multitude of connections for the player to figure out or speculate on. Cultural elements being central to Genshin's worldbuilding also means they can be an inspiration for retellings, as characters and their cultures are inseparable when writing stories set in the Genshin universe, something that was true for all interview participants to different degrees. The way HoYoverse incorporates cultural elements and mythologies also gives players a way to experience different cultures through the lens of Genshin's storytelling.

Furthermore, when something in the game is rooted in real-life culture, it can spark curiosity to look up more about it to learn what the origins are. For people who already know that culture, it allows them to draw connections between in-game lore and real-world history or mythology, and they may write this out to share their thoughts or knowledge with more people too. Some creators also look up more about cultural aspects for better understanding and portrayal of characters, for example, myths about Qilins (a mythological creature with Chinese dragon-like features, known for their gentleness and said to appear near wise and benevolent leaders, symbolizing luck and prosperity) for an in-game character who is half Qilin.

For most people interviewed, playing Genshin Impact made them learn more about cultures different from their own. For most participants, Genshin Impact has also been the first media with extensive representation of Chinese culture, which has made many of them learn more about it, either as a previously unfamiliar culture, or through learning more about their own culture. This reflects what Salen and Zimmerman (2004) bring up about games reflecting the cultural and societal values in which they are played. One participant also brought up that it was interesting to see Japanese culture represented from a Chinese developer's perspective, as it was their first time seeing a perspective other than Japanese or western. This was further strengthened by the connections the game makes between Japanese and Chinese mythology, along with parallels between Japanese and ancient Greek culture, made possible by the developers being aware of both.

Several participants look up more information about culture or myths as research for retellings, or to understand the origin of elements in the game. As Genshin Impact is a fantasy game world, containing a combination of storytelling and elements from real life, in-game content cannot fully be taken at face value for players who want to learn more. This reflects the risk mentioned by Dede and Barab (2009) that players can end up with an understanding inconsistent with evidence-based views, as learning relies heavily on the accuracy of the source material. However, in-game content can be used as a springboard or foundation for players who want to look up more information to learn about the cultures in the game.

For many respondents, details that resonated most heavily were the ones that overlapped with their own culture. Representation of their own culture, or cultures they are interested in is also what they hope to see in future regions. All respondents mentioned learning more or seeing cultures in a different light than they did before playing. However, based on the responses of several participants, cultural immersion is also something that can break with inaccurate representation, especially if it does not correspond to lived experiences. Several respondents mentioned the lack of characters with darker skin colors, and all NPCs so far being white from regions indicated to be inspired by Middle East, South Asia, Indigenous America or West Africa. Several also mentioned NPCs as one of the biggest

immersive aspects, which in turn makes colorism something that breaks immersion in regions where it does not reflect reality. Whether creators look up more information regarding cultures, mythology, and character details, or rely solely on the content in the game varied among respondents. This indicates that accuracy of retellings rely on accurate portrayal in the source material.

One participant mentioned appreciating how the game treats the player as if having experienced the same adventures the Traveler (main character) has. How players learn about in-game regions alongside the traveler, through different perspectives from local characters and characters in different regions. Later dialogue in the game is then written as if the player has also traveled to these different regions, shared the same adventures, and knows what the Traveler does. This relates to what Gee (2003) refers to about players' actions co-creating the game world. Dialogue in the game reflects the player's current progress, and the aspects of the game world that have been changed by the player's actions. Patch Events with pre-requisite quests can provide a quick-start option if all relevant areas have been unlocked, but recommend playing through the relevant quests beforehand, for the player to have experienced all the stories that Patch Events expand upon. It also relates to Gee's findings in how games can be good for learning. Gameplay, stories, and cultures are learned by introducing what the player needs to know on a smaller scale. It is then iteratively expanded upon at relevant stages in the main story, and non-linearly through open-world exploration, where the player needs to use or reflect on what they already know and is rewarded with new story or game progression (ibid). Another participant also mentioned how the game includes unreliable narrators. A lot of information, both related to story and culture, is given in different contexts, from different people, and the player has to figure out how different narratives fit together into a greater whole.

Another aspect of cultural immersion is the voice-over languages. Most of the respondents switch between different voice-over languages (Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean), sometimes depending on region, to get a more immersive gaming experience. Several participants also mentioned wanting to learn more of the Japanese, Chinese or Korean languages. Players have a complete understanding when using subtitles in a language they know, but can also familiarize themselves with the sound of different voice-over languages. Genshin is not beginner-friendly for learning languages, but by hearing different voice-overs, players can pick up on linguistic specifics, names, repeated terms, and similar. Another example is honorifics in Japanese, where e.g. -san, -kun, -chan, -sama, or e.g. xiān shēng (先生) and dà rén (大人) in Chinese, can be added to the end of people's names in show of respect or depending on closeness. If having heard the language and how in-game characters refer to each other, this can be incorporated into retellings, but might be missed if only using English. This relates to studies by Soyoo (2018) and Thorne and Reinhardt (2008), that games can provide linguistic, cultural, or task-based environments that allow players to learn the culture of a new language through their engagement in playing (Soyoo, 2018; Thorne, Reinhardt, 2008).

One participant mentioned how Genshin Impact has its roots in otaku and doujin culture, and uses a lot of fandom-specific genres, in a way bridging fandom culture in the west with otaku and doujin culture in East Asia in a way no media has quite done before. They highlight how fanworks are actively encouraged by the developers through e.g. fanart and poetry competitions, something that also spurs retellings, and increases publicity for the game itself. The global spread of Genshin, along with references to and connections between both doujin and fandom cultures, may also be what motivates retelling creations outside of the game itself.

5.3 Conclusions

The results strongly indicate a link between immersion in Genshin Impact and the creation of retellings, especially in the form of character attachment. Cultural immersion can play an integral part as well, both in the form of elements that reflect reality and can be related to, and the game's own extensive worldbuilding and storytelling, containing a myriad of connections for the player to figure out or speculate on. Characters are also deeply intertwined with their culture, something that carries over when drawing or writing about a character, making cultural aspects a part of retellings as well. Immersion in Genshin Impact could serve as a stepping stone for learning more about different cultures and mythologies. Positives were found in feelings of familiarity and unexpected parallels between cultures, and negatives were found in inaccurate portrayal and colorism.

Creators write about or draw characters from the game, leaning on details or settings from the game to tell their own stories and further explore characters, relationships, and lore. Some players also look up more information about characters, culture, or mythology to portray them more accurately and capture their complexity. Playing as characters they like and write about can also help spark ideas for some people.

It is mainly the diegetic elements that affect retellings, since they encompass everything in the gameworld that the in-game characters experience. However, non-diegetic elements in the form of lore in item descriptions or scattered throughout the open game world, and not yet brought up in the main story, were inspiration for and referenced in retellings. Whether non-diegetic elements impact retellings seems to depend on the author's style and whether they are related to the game's storytelling. If they are part of the story, they can also impact retellings. If they are only there for the player, they tend to not impact retellings.

Culture was a significant part of immersion for most people interviewed, and also a part of all participants' retellings in different ways. Cultural elements inspired by real life bring an additional sense of immersion, particularly for people who recognize them. In a sense, players of Genshin become travelers themselves, experiencing the same adventures and picking up the same knowledge as the main character called 'Traveler'. Regional differences become a source of immersion for both people from these cultures, with nuances or a feeling of home only noticeable if relating, and to 'travelers' who get to learn more of a culture they might not have known about before. The depiction of mythology, architecture and other elements reflective of real-life cultures, can also serve as a springboard to learn more about other cultures. Both for creators in the form of research for stories, and for players who are curious about the origins of something in the game. However, if cultural elements are portrayed inaccurately, it can result in an immersive disconnect, especially for people from that culture. An example of this are all NPCs so far being white who are from unreleased regions indicated to be inspired by Middle East, South Asia, Indigenous America or West Africa. Another example is indications of inherently separate cultures being combined in future regions of Genshin (Middle Eastern and South Asian in Sumeru, Indigenous American, Spanish and West African in Natlan), risking inaccurate portrayal of each individual culture, and making it difficult to distinguish which aspects belong to which culture. Whether players look up more information related to characters and culture varies between creators, making culturally accurate portrayal in retellings something that partially depends on the accuracy of the source material.

Additionally, the entirety of Genshin Impact being free to play (apart from acquiring all characters and weapons), the global spread of Genshin, along with parallels between doujin and fandom cultures both within the game and in HoYoverse's marketing tactics may also be part of why it lends itself so well to creative retelling creations.

Some of these findings may be applicable to games and media as a whole, specifically that character attachment and immersive worldbuilding can inspire people to create retellings. Cultural immersion also goes hand in hand with respectful portrayal of cultures, as the opposite can result in an immersive cultural disconnect, especially for people from that culture.

5.4 Ethical aspects and societal consequences

The study adhered to the four ethical principles that are discussed in Section 3.5.

1. Participants' interests were protected through anonymization of interviews, and avoidance of intrusive questions or sensitive topics. Participants were informed that the interview, along with all questions, were optional and could be canceled at any time. Personal information about the participants is not expected to be traceable to interview participants and therefore would not have a negative impact on individuals, the only exception being links to referenced retellings which poses a risk for negative feedback.
2. Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent. Information was given about the authors of this study, its purpose, and what the data would be used for in the questionnaire, that had to be accepted before filling it out. The same information was detailed in a consent form (Appendix B) that was sent to participants to be signed before the interview. Information was also given that both the questionnaire and interview are entirely optional, and that interviews can be canceled at any time, and participants have their participation withdrawn.
3. Avoids deception and operates with scientific integrity. Information was given about how data would be collected, what it would be used for, along with background information and contact information to the authors, so that participants could reach out if having questions. A respondent validation was conducted to ensure that the study did not misinterpret their views, by sending a copy of the study to each participant and revising it based on feedback. To operate with scientific integrity, the data analysis was made as objectively as possible. The entire study has also been reviewed by both authors to minimize bias, assumptions and personal preferences. Full objectivity may not be reached however, due to personal interest in the study's subject.
4. Complies with the laws of the land. No identifiable laws are broken through this study as neither the subject, nor its content is deemed inappropriate or violates Swedish law.

The study is not expected to have significant societal consequences. Personal information has been anonymized and therefore should not negatively impact the individual. The findings and conclusions of this study may help to bridge the knowledge gap between immersion and retelling, and provide game developers or media creators with insight into what makes an immersive experience impactful and can further inspire retelling creation.

5.5 Quality and limitations of findings

The results of this study must be viewed in light of a number of limitations. Initially, retellings in the form of fanfiction and fanart were the focus of this study. By solely focusing on two types of retellings, conclusions from the study can not be applied to other types of retellings without further study. Connections found between immersion in a game, and inspiration to create or share, may be universal across all or more types of retellings, however, this also requires future studies.

Additionally, the media platform for publishing the survey was HoYoverse's own forum HoYoLab, and later Reddit, due to concern of not reaching enough respondents. The data collected can therefore not be assumed to represent people who use other social media, or Genshin players or retelling creators as a whole.

Due to time limitations, only eight of the ten interviews that were planned at the start were conducted. More than ten people were reached out to, but several were unavailable, and due to transcribing and coding taking more time than expected, we were unable to complete the total of ten interviews. This means that one fifth of the originally planned data is missing, potentially having an impact on the results and conclusions of the study. A big reason is also that several weeks went to creating the survey, and interview questions, then another two weeks trying to reach people through HoYoLab, accidentally creating posts in the wrong channels as well. A better approach might have been to immediately post the survey to several social media sites instead of limiting it to one. In the end, the survey got far more responses than expected. This resulted in more interesting findings, such as longer text responses with reasons for creating, character attachment, and other media than Genshin they have created retellings for before. However, since they were outside the scope of this study, not all findings could be included.

Additionally, using an alternative methodological approach may have given different results as well. This study combined qualitative interviews with quantitative survey questions, enabling comparison between the two. However, through statistical tests significant correlations between survey questions could have been examined. Alternatively, observation could have led to results of which types of retellings are commonly posted on social media. Content analysis of fanfiction or artworks could have led to insights of which details and characters from the game that are most often referenced in retellings, possibly showing what has personal impact.

5.5.1 Believability

The survey used in this study is mainly posted on the official forum for games developed by HoYoverse, HoYoLab, and forums about Genshin on Reddit, meaning that all respondents have heard of Genshin Impact and have some understanding of the game. The statistics from the questionnaire indicate a larger number of people specifically using reddit, which is likely due to the majority of respondents being reached from there.

If Yes, which platform do you use?

1,427 responses

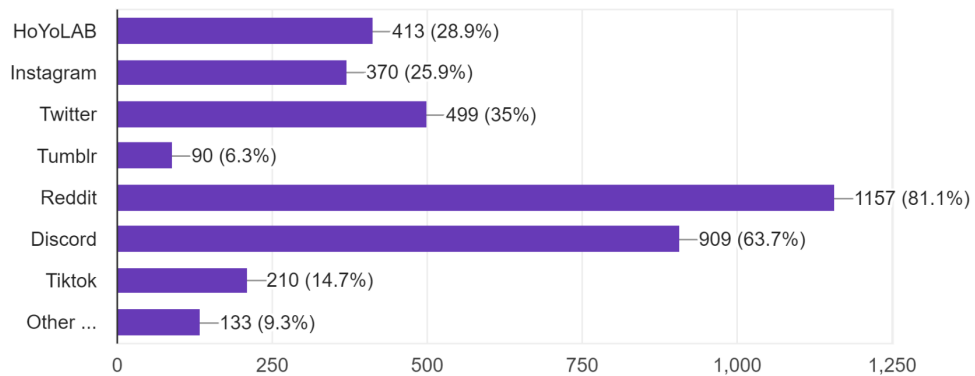


Figure 23 Questionnaire - Social Media Platforms

This was subsequently not included in Results, as it inaccurately represents how Genshin players are spread out over different social media. The results may also not give an accurate depiction of Genshin players across all platforms, or creators as a whole.

The selection of interview participants in this study was not entirely random, which lessens the believability of the study. Two participants who reached out before having gone through questionnaire responses were included, one of them having studied similar fields for over a decade, who we were very interested in talking with as well. In order to avoid an excessive proportion of interview targets in the same region, the eventuality of the majority of participants being from the same country was avoided. Three of the interview respondents are from Asia, three from North America, and two from Europe. However, 75% also belong to different Asian cultures, which may have impacted the results to an unknown extent.

Questionnaire respondents with realistically impossible answers (e.g. marking every option to each multiple-choice question) were filtered out. Survey questions, interview scripts used, interview transcriptions, and interview coding have all been linked as appendices in order to support the credibility of the results.

5.5.2 Dependability

On several questions in the questionnaire, feedback was given that more alternatives were needed, as the ones available were not applicable to everyone. These were added, and the ones that had been mandatory were changed to optional. A graph of results from one of these questions was pictured in the study to show a spread of creative mediums in retellings, with indications that the numbers are not reliable. The rest of the revised questions are not included.

All interview codes were second-reviewed, i.e., only used in the results if confirmed by both authors of this study. The same applies to the analysis and reasoning in the discussion, which builds on what respondents said. Thereby the study is kept objective as far as possible, and is not mixed with personal or subjective opinions of the authors.

5.6 Future research

This study analyzes the influence of the culture and diegetic elements of game immersion on the creation of retellings. There are many other games than Genshin Impact that retellings are created for, and a future area of research would be to examine how these results correspond to games as a whole, and further to other types of media. All results from this study can with certainty only be applied to Genshin Impact. Character attachment and immersive worldbuilding may be universal factors that inspire retellings for any type of media, but future studies would be needed to explore this. E.g. a phenomenological study could compare experiences across different video games or media, and lead to generalizations between them. It could also include personal experiences, such as what internal or external factors make people create fanworks, as opposed to only playing a game.

It is worth noting that 87% of the 1,606 respondents answered that they use social media to discuss with other people who play Genshin. Several respondents mentioned using Discord or Reddit, one also mentioned Twitter. An aspect of future research would be to examine potential differences in retellings across different platforms, both creative medium and content. Another important area of future research is how community aspects and social media impact the creation of retellings. Whether players themselves experiencing other Genshin-inspired retellings also impacts their own creativity or long-term interest in Genshin Impact. Another aspect is how people who create retellings can inspire each other, by sharing ideas and theories or building stories together in DMs or Discord servers, potentially similar on other platforms, that then become posted retellings. The community aspect is an additional layer to immersion, as it is more than just being inspired by something in the game. The social aspect could add more layers of meaning by mutual support and inspiration between people who also create. With the release of future game updates, how the fandom and content of retellings change can also be studied.

Genshin Impact might be the first of its kind in its amount of global outreach, a potential area of future research in terms of how Genshin became this popular, and its potential in bridging cultural gaps. As future updates are released, it can be studied to which extent Genshin Impact faithfully portrays cultures around the world, which impact this has on cultural representation in media, and whether it opens up for inclusion of more cultures that are currently underrepresented. As a game developed by a Chinese game company, containing references to several cultures around the world, and playable by anyone with an internet connection and appropriate hardware, Genshin Impact likely impacts cultural communication. By bridging fandom, otaku, and doujin cultures in addition to real-life cultures, Genshin Impact facilitates communication between players in different countries and transmission of culture both through discussion on social media and in the content of retellings. Language barriers and separate servers currently prevent players in different regions from communicating or playing together. However, forums and social media can still permit communication or sharing regardless of region. To which extent Genshin Impact has or will influence intercultural communication is something that merits future studies.

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[Kf9o8vNzquYL36gangM~JoFi~zfl5M8Yh5tiOvI0~PmAZLvVaN1-eOar332-y9tVn5HGSGK-ee54LN Mbhs9WfMVAH1c84~4Ib30H~Ahhq8BNPbLyFewKBPTxedoJ2PRslbd8KKzShbmUz0k06381AYwL 3gUpO8j1u38sOt5UFfIMZfb02XMIPmXafokdT~OIdbWqix7r-16IRN4zbow__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJ LOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33894-7_21) [Accessed 2022-06-08].

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Appendix A – Data from A03

25th January

原神 | Genshin Impact (Video Game) (55411)

Video Games

Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (340562)

Star Wars – All Media Types (182101)

Minecraft (Video Game) (87110)

Final Fantasy Series (80283)

Dragon Age – All Media Types (74161)

25th February

原神 | Genshin Impact (Video Game) (60530)

Video Games

Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (346635)

Star Wars – All Media Types (185866)

Minecraft (Video Game) (91690)

Final Fantasy Series (81938)

Dragon Age – All Media Types (74564)

25th March

原神 | Genshin Impact (Video Game) (64415)

Video Games

Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (350678)

Star Wars – All Media Types (188314)

Minecraft (Video Game) (95419)

Final Fantasy Series (83332)

Dragon Age – All Media Types (75070)

5th May

原神 | Genshin Impact (Video Game) (70692)

Video Games

Harry Potter – J. K. Rowling (356661)

Star Wars – All Media Types (191885)

Minecraft (Video Game) (94844)

Final Fantasy Series (85141)

Dragon Age – All Media Types (75637)

Appendix B - Consent Form

- 1. Background and aim** This study is conducted as part of a bachelor thesis by two students, Miranda Greting and Xiehui Mao, who study Game Development at Stockholm University. The research question for this study is: **How does immersion, specifically through diegetic elements and culture, inspire players to create retellings of a particular game?**
- 2. How is the study conducted?** During the research, data collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews. Before this a survey will be posted to HoYoLab and other forums related to Genshin Impact, to find people who create retellings and could be willing to participate in interviews. The survey also contains general questions about game experience in Genshin, culture and retelling creation. The survey is anonymous, which means that people potentially interested in interviews can either leave their contact information, or reach out to the authors of this study. As for the interviews, they will be semi-structured, with questions divided into four categories; introduction, retellings, diegesis/immersion and culture. The interview is estimated to take approximately 30-45 minutes. It is planned to be held through Zoom, but could also be done by text, either through the chat in Zoom, Discord or similar. Interviews would need to be recorded, so that they can be transcribed and looked back on to remember what was said.
- 3. What are the risks?** A potential risk is that there could be questions respondents are not comfortable answering. During the interview there is no question that is mandatory, and the option to skip a question or end the interview is available at any time. Another risk is the interview exceeding the planned amount of time, in which case we will ask if the respondent can continue the interview, and the respondent can also choose to end the interview at any time needed. Another risk is interview participants not being comfortable with interviews being recorded or conducted verbally through zoom, in which case there is also the option to conduct it through text. That way a written record also exists of the entire interview. Lastly, a risk is the interviewee changing their mind about submitting data for the survey or participating in the interview. If this happens before the interview, we can permanently delete their survey responses upon request. If it is after the interview has been conducted, upon request we will also permanently delete survey responses along with interview recordings, transcripts, and all parts of results and discussion based on them.

4. Data management

To safely handle any data, all interviews will be anonymized. Interview respondents might be named through pseudonyms when transcribing, but will be completely anonymous when compiling results and discussion. It will not be possible to trace answers back to individual respondents. The only exception to this is if a particular retelling or fanfiction is referenced, in which case appropriate credit will be given with the respondents consent. The same applies for any other potential situation where credit is needed. The data is handled solely by the two authors of this study, and is shared only with our supervisor, course administrator and peer reviewers. If the study is published it will be accessible to the public, but the same principles as above apply; the data will be anonymous except where credit is necessary or wanted.

5. Voluntariness

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and can be interrupted at any time without further explanation. Consent may be withdrawn at any time in accordance with the GDPR.

6. Responsible

The study is conducted by:

- Miranda Greting, student at Stockholm University, Email: migr8962@student.su.se
- Xiehui Mao, student at Stockholm University, Email: xima9446@student.su.se

Informed consent

- I confirm that I have received this written and other verbal information about the study.
- I give my consent to participating in the study and know that my participation is completely voluntary.
- I am aware that I can withdraw my participation at any time and without explanation.
- I allow that the information I have received and that collected data about me is stored and handled electronically by study supervisors.

.....
Date

.....
Participant's Signature

.....
Name clarification

Miranda Greting
.....

Interviewer, Miranda Greting, Signature


.....

Interviewer, Xiehui Mao, Signature

Appendix C - Questionnaire

Link to a copy of the survey that was sent out: <https://forms.gle/3KkgeHD3twVZE3YK9>

Changes that have been made after feedback while the study was open have been pointed out:

- Middle East added as option to Place of Birth and Cultural Habits
- Mandatory questions that were not applicable to all respondents were changed to optional (and not included in results)
- Clarifications of descriptions and authors' contact information added in the 'Further Interviews' section

Appendix D - Survey Posts on Social Media

Reddit:

https://www.reddit.com/r/DilucMains/comments/u17ee6/genshin_survey/

HoYoLAB:

<https://www.hoyolab.com/article/4115347>

Appendix E - Interview Guide

Introduction

Hi! Thank you again for participating in this interview. We are two students from Stockholm University, our names are Xiehui and Miranda, currently in our third year of studying Game Development. For our bachelor thesis we are conducting a study about the game experience of Genshin Impact, and how it relates to the creation of retellings (fanfiction, art and similar).

We think you might already know a little about this interview from the survey. The purpose of this interview is to go into more detail about creations of retellings and your experiences from playing Genshin Impact. Please speak as freely as you want, there are no right or wrong answers, and there is nothing you have to answer if you are uncomfortable with it. You can end the interview at any point for any reason, or if the interview ends up taking up too much time. (If voice interview: Are you okay with recording the interview?)

Introductory questions

1. How long have you played Genshin?
2. How often do you play Genshin?
3. Which language(s) do you use for voice over and subtitles in Genshin Impact?
 - Is this/are these language(s) you already knew?
 - If no: Have you learned a bit more of the language(s) by playing Genshin?
 - If relevant: Do you switch language depending on region or which character you are playing as?

Questions about retellings

1. What are the fanfictions you write, or the artworks you draw about?
 - Is there anything specific in Genshin that inspired you to make them? If so, what?
2. Which characters are your favorite characters?
 - Are they the same as the characters you write about or draw?
 - If not, and if not already answered: which characters do you write about or draw, why?
3. What is your main reason for writing or drawing?
4. Before playing, did you already have thoughts about writing fanfiction and drawing fanart, or was it a response to playing the game?

Questions related to diegesis

1. What in the game makes you feel the most immersed, almost like you are actually part of the Genshin universe?
 - Is this something that has impacted your creations?
2. Have you noticed any hidden story fragments in the game? (for example artifact sets with pieces of character backstories, weapon or item descriptions with lore, things not part of main story, but available if exploring menus or similar)
 - Is this anything that inspires your stories or artworks?
3. How are the characters you write about or draw impacted by the characters you play/have on your team in Genshin? Do you write about or draw the same characters you play as?

- Do you get most attached to a character by e.g. playing as them, meeting them in story quests, learning about them through character biographies? (Or perhaps inspired by social media and other people who also like them?)
4. What makes a story important to you? Is there anything specific that makes certain quest lines, character stories or events matter more to you?
 5. Are things that happen in-game while playing also inspiration for your stories or artworks? (can be any in-game events, e.g. recounting a battle or enemy encounter, seeing a place when exploring and deciding to write or draw characters visiting that place, wanting to expand on pieces of dialogue or certain scenes)
 6. Are UI/HUD elements a part of your writing or drawing? (for example anything that's part of the menus, such as traveler's inventory system (perhaps mentioned as a bag), Paimon controlling time, or visual elements only there for you as the player, such as health- or stamina bar).
 7. Do small details in the game meant to add realism or immersion also impact your writing or drawing? (Such as characters having different walk speed or swim speed, tall characters sometimes being able to walk in water while shorter characters have to swim, or personality traits and character design details)
 - If yes, have any of them been inspiration for writing or drawing? How?

Questions relating to culture and regions

1. Which region (or regions) are you most inspired by when writing or drawing? Why?
2. Do you know which cultures that the regions in Genshin are inspired by in real life?
 - What is the difference between the culture embodied in this region and your experience/familiarity with it in real life, if you have thought about any?
 - If relevant: Will you create based on reality or in-game?
3. Are there any cultures you were not as familiar with before but have been inspired to learn more about by playing Genshin?
 - Is this something you use when making retellings?
4. Do character's culture or backstory also make an impact on your writing or drawing? If e.g. a character is from Inazuma, do you also include details of Inazuman (or Japanese) culture when writing about or drawing that character?
 - Do you write or draw about a mix of cultures if including characters from different regions?
5. Which main story or event story is your favorite? Why?
 - Is this inspiration for writing or drawing?
 - Are you familiar with the virtual festivals in the game and their corresponding real life festivals? (e.g. Lantern rite or Inazuma's summer festival) If so, have these been inspiration for your writing or drawing? How?
6. Which cultures would you like to see represented in the unreleased regions? Why/how?
 - Are theories about future regions something that is already part of your writing or drawing? If so, how?

Appendix F - Voice Interviews Transcription and Coding

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rvwIApYFMVgK_ffofNv-cPTduQA2Dzg1f5mmogjXTw/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix G - Text Interviews Transcription and Coding

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rMsmK3fLPJNdxSpQmI_KOn4RBtmF4umR7mlhkqBXig/edit?usp=sharing