

An Analysis Of Students' Perceptions Of The Experience Of Playing Honkai: Star Rail As A Source Of Information And Entertainment: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

In the ever-evolving digital age, games are no longer seen as just a form of entertainment, but also as a medium for indirectly conveying information and knowledge. One game that reflects this phenomenon is Honkai: Star Rail, a turn-based role-playing game (RPG) released by Hoyoverse in April 2023. This game attracted the attention of many people, especially university students, thanks to its in-depth storyline, diverse characters, and complex and immersive game world. This study aims to understand students' perceptions of the Honkai: Star Rail game as a medium of entertainment and conveying information. The method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, involving five informants who are active university students and have played this game for at least three months. Data were collected through online interviews in May 2025 and analyzed to identify the themes that emerged in their playing experience. The results showed that in addition to serving as a means of entertainment, the game is also an indirect source of information for the players, especially regarding mythology, popular culture, and philosophical concepts tucked into the narrative. Some informants also mentioned that the game helped them develop strategic thinking skills and empathy for the characters. However, there are also challenges in the form of complex and text-heavy narratives, which can be a barrier for new players or those who are less interested in the story. This study concludes that modern digital games have great potential as an educational entertainment medium, with the caveat that the content needs to be simplified to be more inclusive.

Keywords: Honkai: Star Rail, narrative game, student perception, entertainment media, informal learning

INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of digital technology, the way young people obtain information and enjoy entertainment has also changed. One form of entertainment that is increasingly in demand is video games. According to Adhicondro et al. (2015), video games are a form of implementation of technological advances in the realm of communication media that not only functions as entertainment, but also as an interactive messaging medium. This means that players are not only passive consumers, but can also respond to the content they enjoy.

Similar findings were presented by Husain (2022) who proved that educational puzzle games can introduce national figures to students in an interesting way. Pramuditya et al. (2018) also stated that Android-based games can support students' understanding of mathematical logic. These two studies strengthen the view that video games can be utilized as an effective medium for delivering information and learning.

In a more current context, one game that stands out in this context is Honkai: Star Rail, a turn-based role-playing game (RPG) developed by HoYoverse. Since its release in April 2023, the game has attracted the attention of millions of players around the world. According to data from activeplayer web, the number of monthly active players of Honkai: Star Rail reached more than 19 million global users, including a sizable player base among Indonesian university students. This shows that Honkai: Star Rail is not only popular as entertainment, but also has potential as a massive digital communication and interaction space.

The popularity of Honkai: Star Rail is inseparable from the various elements it offers, one of which is a turn-based gameplay mechanism that is challenging and requires mature strategies from the players. According to Deri et al. (2014), turn-based games are games that require strategy where players control a number of characters to control territory and defeat enemies according to turns and limited movement areas. In each turn, the player chooses the action performed by each character in the team being controlled. These actions can include issuing skills to attack opponents, moving, using items, and other actions according to the context and rules of the game. The mission of each battle also varies such as eliminating all enemies, surviving until a certain turn, etc. But in general, the mission of each battle is to eliminate all the enemies encountered. In the game Honkai: Star Rail, characters have turns according to their speed. If their speed is high, then the character will have an earlier turn than characters or even opponents with lower speed. This proves that Turn-Based games are actually strategic games because in order to defeat an opponent, we as players will not only be concerned with the character's power but also in our decision to choose our turn to attack based on the character's class.

In addition to the interesting turn-based mechanics, the characters in Honkai: Star Rail are also not only visually appealing, but also in the personalities and backgrounds that are built complexly in a science fiction world that is able to arouse the emotions and thoughts of the player.

For students, this game is not only a means to fill spare time and relieve stress in the midst of academic pressure, but also a medium to absorb various information. This phenomenon is interesting to study further, especially in seeing how students interpret the experience of playing games as entertainment as well as a source of information.

Based on this background description, this study aims to explore more deeply the perceptions of students towards the experience of playing Honkai: Star Rail. This research uses a qualitative approach to identify students' perceptions of the game as a medium of entertainment as well as a means of conveying information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Games as Entertainment Media. Technological developments have driven the evolution of video games from mere games to complex forms of entertainment that combine narrative, visual, audio and interactivity elements. One clear example of this transformation is the game Honkai: Star Rail, a narrative-based role-playing game developed by HoYoverse. The game offers not only strategic game mechanics, but also an immersive storyline, emotional orchestral music, and cinematic visual design that play a major role in building an immersive experience for players.

Research by Domingues et al. (2024) shows that narrative elements designed with appropriate challenges and interesting characters in role-playing games can significantly increase players' emotional engagement, especially when players feel immersed in the story and can empathize with the characters. This is in line with the findings of Li et al. (2023) who stated that storytelling through the viewpoint of a customizable main character, such as Trailblazer in Honkai: Star Rail, can strengthen the players' sense of involvement in a fictional world.

Visual and audio aspects also play a big role in shaping immersion. Saputra and Andelina's (2025) study analyzing the interface design of Honkai: Star Rail shows that color selection, animation, and intuitive layout increase comfort and visual appeal for the player. Meanwhile, the background audio created by HOYO-MiX is specifically designed to reinforce the emotion and atmosphere of each act of the story, making it similar to the scoring of an interactive animated movie. Furthermore, research by Blount & Spawforth (2019) shows that games with emotional storylines and mechanics that express "pathos" such as loss, regret, or helplessness are able to provide a cathartic experience for players. These games help players contemplate and reflect on their emotions, thereby improving emotion regulation, managing stress, and providing a space of escape from complex realities. In this context, Honkai: Star Rail acts not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a space of expression and escape from complex realities.

Games as a Source of Information In the digital era, video games are not only a means of entertainment, but also have potential as a medium for information delivery and informal education. Games with complex narratives often implicitly include information on moral values, philosophy, history, and science. Honkai: Star Rail is one example of a game that integrates aspects of knowledge through story and world interaction in the game.

According to research by Hussein et al. (2022), digital games are able to enhance conceptual learning through active play experiences, where players learn contextually in a virtual world. This is seen in Honkai: Star Rail, where players are invited to explore various planets with themes of existential philosophy, science fiction, and complex socio-political settings. Every interaction with a character or element of the game world brings implicit knowledge of conflicts, values, and alternative ways of thinking.

A study by Naul & Liu (2020) showed that narratives combined with empathic characters and distribution flows in serious games can enhance understanding of social and cultural themes. In the context of this game, themes such as destiny, justice, free will and determinism are presented through dialog and missions, triggering players to think critically about the characters' actions and their impact on the game world.

Furthermore, Li's research (2024) analyzed the communication and marketing strategies of Honkai: Star Rail, and mentioned that community involvement in content development plays an important role in the continuous customization of game design. This two-way interaction creates an information ecosystem that is constantly evolving according to the needs and interests of players globally.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with an inductive approach that aims to understand the meaning and experience of individuals in depth, especially regarding how students interpret the game Honkai: Star Rail as a means of entertainment and a source of information. According to Wiwin (2018), descriptive qualitative methods focus on describing phenomena naturally, where researchers draw conclusions based on data obtained from special cases through an inductive approach.

This research design uses a phenomenological approach because this approach allows researchers to capture the meaning that students feel when interacting with games. According to Abdul et al. (2023), the phenomenological research approach is research that tries to understand human life events within the framework of people's thoughts and behaviors as understood or thought by the individuals themselves. The research subjects consisted of five active students in undergraduate or diploma education programs who had played Honkai: Star Rail for at least three months and are willing to participate and share their experiences openly. The informants selected based on these criteria are Musa, Syathir, Danendra, Reivan, and Otway. The study was conducted in May 2025. The entire interview process was conducted online through the Discord application with a duration of between 10 and 15 minutes each. The researcher then recorded and transcribed the interviews with permission from the informants.

The research instrument consisted of 7 questions designed to explore students' perceptions regarding their experience of playing Honkai: Star Rail as a source of information and entertainment. The research procedure includes selecting informants, scheduling interviews, conducting interviews via Discord, transcription process, and data analysis. Data analysis was carried out by reading the transcripts thoroughly, then looking for important parts that contain meaning. The pieces of data were grouped into certain themes that would be interpreted to explain the informants' perceptions as a whole. This method is in line with the research objective, which is to deeply understand how students interpret Honkai: Star Rail not only as entertainment, but also as a source of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through in-depth interviews with five student informants named Musa, Syathir, Danendra, Reivan, and Otway who actively play Honkai: Star Rail, interesting stories and insights emerged about how this game is interpreted in their lives. Most informants stated that Honkai: Star Rail not only provides entertainment, but also conveys interesting information. The storyline and character backgrounds in the game were considered to present cultural and mythological elements that they had never known before. One of the informants, Musa, revealed that the storyline in the game introduced him to various mythologies that he had not previously known about, making the gaming experience more meaningful for him.

This finding is in line with the results of Al Fauzan & Hidayah's research (2024), which shows that serious games with structured narratives can increase player understanding and engagement emotionally and cognitively. In the entertainment aspect, all informants agreed that Honkai: Star Rail provides an

enjoyable gaming experience as well as a means to relieve stress. One informant, Syathir, revealed that the game helped her feel more relaxed after studying, while creating an emotional attachment to the characters.

This finding supports Sadira's research (2024) which shows that playing online games has a coping function, which improves mood and helps reduce stress and depression in adolescents or students.

Table 1. Interview results based on questions

Name	Sources of information	Sources of entertainment	Additional comments
Musa	Yes	Yes	Favor mythological elements enrich the story
Syathir	Yes	Yes	Feel emotionally connected and reduce stress
Danendra	Yes	Yes	Appreciate the storyline and character development
Reivan	Yes	Yes	Thinks games are educational and fun
Otway	Yes	Yes	Captivated by design and lore

The research results in the form of the table above show a strong relationship between the informative and entertainment aspects in Honkai: Star Rail. This proves that digital games can effectively combine learning and entertainment. This dual role is important to consider in educational game design, and supports the growing trend of interest in game-based learning.

In addition, the emotional attachment experienced by the informants shows the important value of storytelling in digital media, which can encourage higher engagement and motivation from players. However, some informants also revealed that certain storylines felt complex and difficult to follow. This points to the need for future simplification of narrative elements to make them more accessible to new players.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the game Honkai: Star Rail is perceived by students not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as a source of meaningful information. The game presents narrative elements that are rich in cultural values, mythology, and emotions, providing a gaming experience that is not only fun but also informative. The informants revealed that emotional engagement with the characters and stories in Honkai: Star Rail made them feel more connected, as well as helped relieve stress in the midst of a busy academic life. This suggests that this narrative-based game has potential as a medium for informal learning and personal reflection. Thus, modern digital games can be utilized not only as entertainment, but also as a means to broaden horizons and foster interest in diverse stories and cultures. This research is expected to be an initial reference for the development of similar studies in the fields of digital literacy, media, and informal education.

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