



Decoding Game Art: A Review of Player-Centric Aesthetic Preferences in 3D Video Games

Naveen Kumar^{*1} and Vinit Bihari² and Parthasarathy PK³

¹Department of Fine Art, Chitkara Design School, Chitkara University, Punjab, India, naveenbhumra@gmail.com

²Department of Fine Art, Chitkara Design School, Chitkara University, Punjab, India, vinit.bihari@chitkara.edu.in

³Chitkara Centre for Game Design & Immersive Technologies, Chitkara University, Punjab, India, parthasarathy@chitkara.edu.in

Abstract

Purpose: The primary objective of this research is to examine players' preferences concerning visual aesthetics in 3D video games, including favored art styles, color schemes, and overall visual appeal. The secondary objective is to assist researchers and industry professionals in navigating the complexities of player engagement estimation, improving game art aesthetics in the competitive gaming world.

Methodology: The author discusses a number of earlier studies from 2010 to 2025 to investigate how visual aesthetics in 3D video games impact players' engagement and enjoyment, which leads to game success. 70 journal articles and 15 conference papers are examined by the author. The author also gathered relevant information from reputable books and online gaming magazines. The author filtered articles to 60 and 10 conference papers by analysing their relevance and quality of studies. By synthesizing previous research, the author highlights the research gap, 3D graphics evolutions, trends and suggestions to improve 3d gaming quality in terms of visual aesthetics.

Results: The review demonstrates that visual aesthetic quality has an impact on overall user engagement and enjoyment, which varies significantly across conditions. The high visual quality 3d game interfaces are more enticing because of the bright and vibrant graphics, which keep users interested; the appearance and feel of the game features are regarded to be more user-friendly. The author adds more on 3d game art style and genre preferences among the players to choose the games.

Conclusions: An extensive literature study on video game art style and aesthetics revealed that the majority of research focuses on overall gaming experience, with very few studies addressing visual aesthetics. So some research should be conducted on visual aesthetics in 3d video games to analyze its impact on game success.

Keywords - 3D video game, Game art styles, Visual aesthetics, Motivation and video games, graphic styles, player engagement

1. Introduction

The video game industry went through massive growth, with global revenues surpassing \$187.7 billion in 2024. This expansion signifies a 340% increase from the \$52 billion market value documented in 2010, positioning gaming as one of the fastest-growing entertainment sectors worldwide (Newzoo, 2024). The 3D Gaming Technology Market was valued at USD 39.81 billion in 2024. It is projected to increase from USD 46.10 billion in 2025 to USD 172.80 billion by 2034, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.81% during the forecast period from 2025 to 2034 (Market Research Future, 2025). With the market becoming more competitive, it is essential for developers, publishers, and researchers to comprehend the factors that influence player engagement and satisfaction (Hamari et al., 2016).

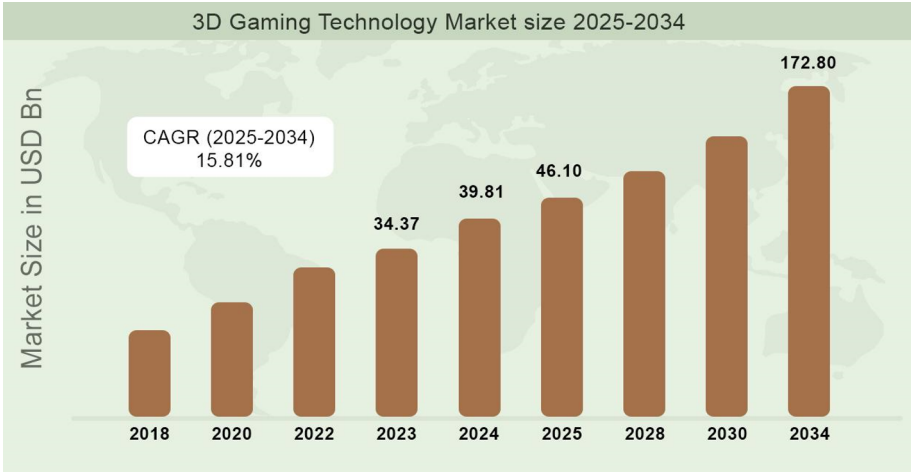


Fig. 1. 3D Gaming Technology Market Size 2025-2034 | Source: Market Research Future, 2025

The evolution from two-dimensional sprite-based graphics to advanced three-dimensional rendered environments has significantly altered the artistic capabilities of the medium. Juul (2013) and Schell (2014) provided the groundwork theoretically to understand how visual design aspects affect player psychology and behavior. Real-time 3D modeling has given artists new ways to express themselves, but it has also made it challenging for game designers to make games appearance better for a lot of different types of players (McGonigal, 2011). Modern gaming aesthetics requires computer graphics, psychology, art theory, and human-computer interaction to grasp (Fullerton, 2024). According to a study by Garver et al. (2018), the quality of the graphics has a big impact on how interested a player is at first. According to the report, 73% of players base their purchases on images and visual previews. Three-dimensional video game visual aesthetics include art style coherence, color palette psychology, dynamic lighting systems, character design appeal, environmental detail density, and user interface visual structure (Adams & Dormans, 2012). Through complex cognitive and perceptual processes, each element work together to impact the player's psychological reaction, level of immersion, and overall gaming experience. Player behavior patterns, such as exploration tendencies, narrative engagement, social sharing behavior, and long-term retention rates, can be influenced by the aesthetic decisions made during development (Sicart, 2023).

Analysing player preferences and the psychological mechanisms that drive aesthetic appreciation is crucial for academic researchers focused on enhancing human-computer interaction theory, as well as for industry professionals striving to develop commercially viable products (Caroux, 2023). The connection between visual aesthetics and player preferences in 3D games has been examined using multiple theoretical frameworks, such as psychological theories of perception (Gibson, 1951), cognitive load theory (Sweller, 2011), and flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Existing research has revealed some important characteristics of visual aesthetics that affect player preferences in 3D games. The art style presents a key aspect, comprising a visual spectrum from photorealism to highly stylized, cartoon-like aesthetics (Wolf & Perron, 2014). The applications of color theory in game design have been thoroughly studied, demonstrating the psychological effects of various color schemes on player mood, arousal, and behavioral reactions (Wilms & Oberfeld, 2018). Principles of environmental design, including spatial composition, architectural elements, and landscape appeal, strongly influence player navigation, exploratory behavior, and emotional attachment to virtual environments (Totten, 2019).

Even though 3D gaming is becoming more popular, the research that has already been done has a lot of gaps and limitations that make it hard to fully understand how players like the looks of 3D games. Several studies look at only certain parts of visual design and not the full aesthetic experience, while others use small sample sizes or don't include a wide range of demographics (Garver et al. 2018). In addition, it's hard to keep up with what players want since new visual styles emerge and evolve rapidly because graphics technology is improving constantly (Kaur & Behki, 2024). There are methodological problems in research on aesthetic preferences, such as how challenging it is to identify visual elements out of other game elements, how cultural biases influence research populations, and how subjective aesthetic judgment is (Jafarkhani et al. 2024). Additionally, the industry's exclusivity limits access to comprehensive player data, creating obstacles for large-scale empirical research (Zackariasson & Wilson 2012). The emergence of virtual and augmented reality technologies has rendered aesthetic preference research more complex, as conventional 2D screen-based results may not seamlessly translate to immersive 3D environments (Halik & Kent, 2021). Because of this change in technology, it's now unclear what graphic styles, color schemes, and overall visual preferences players like in 3D video games.

The aim of this systematic-narrative hybrid literature review was to accomplish two objectives in the 3D game industry: (i) The primary objective of this research was to examine players' preferences concerning visual

aesthetics in 3D video games, including favoured art styles, colour schemes, and overall visual appeal through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, empirical studies, and industry practices. (ii) The secondary objective was to assist researchers and industry professionals in navigating the complexities of player engagement estimation, improving game art aesthetics in the competitive gaming world. This research focuses specifically on 3D video games across multiple platforms, including console, PC, and mobile gaming environments. It explores a variety of genres, such as action-adventure, role-playing, simulation, and strategy, while recognising that aesthetic preferences can differ greatly depending on the gameplay context. This comprehensive review contributes to the field by providing the first systematic analysis of visual aesthetic preferences in 3D games covering the period from 2010 to 2025, synthesising fragmented research across multiple disciplines, and offering practical guidance for industry professionals navigating the evolving landscape of game visual design. The findings will inform future research directions, support evidence-based design decisions, and enhance understanding of the complex relationships between visual aesthetics and player engagement in contemporary 3D gaming environments.

The remainder of this review has the following structure. The "**Background**" section briefly explains the evolution of 3D video games with visual aesthetics. "**Theoretical Framework**" discusses existing relevant theories. "**Materials & Methods**" section, literature review methodology, presents the approach we followed in conducting our paper retrieval. Next "**Literature Findings & Analysis**" section reviews and analyses existing research related to our research objectives. The "**Discussion of Research Objectives**" section is dedicated for discussion of the results in response to research objectives. "**Limitations & Future Scope**" explains the limitations of this review and future study options; and finally, we conclude.

2. Background

2.1 Evolution of 3D Video Games

The evolution of 3D video games has experienced substantial transformations regarding visual aesthetics and historical progression. Initially, 3D games featured simplistic graphics and restricted visual appeal as a result of technological limitations. With advancements in hardware and graphics technology, along with enhanced GPU capabilities, 3D games have developed to feature more sophisticated and visually appealing designs (Arsenault et al., 2013). The quality of graphics in 3D games has evolved from simple 3D art to intricate three-dimensional models featuring texturing and real-time physically-based lighting and rendering (Cho et al., 2018).

At present, anyone with a regular smartphone can play console-quality games at any time, which have immersive gameplay, realistic 3D visuals, and high-quality stereo sound. In the beginning, though, this wasn't possible in 3D games. Table 1 shows that early initiatives like "Maze War" and "Spacewar!" in the 1970s and 1980s laid the groundwork for 3D gaming (James Ivory, 2015). The first games laid the groundwork for later releases by trying out simple wireframe visuals and 3D worlds. "Battlezone" (1980) and "Star Wars" (1983) were two of the first 3D video games to come out in arcades. From 1980 to 1990, 3D graphics became much more prominent. Computers have been more powerful over the past ten years, which has made it possible to generate 3D graphics that are more and more complex. According to Goh et al. (2023), Wolfenstein 3D (1992) was the first game to use 3D graphics, but Super Mario 64 (1996) was the first game to use real 3D platforming. New technologies like texture mapping and fluid animation made it possible for the Sega Genesis, Atari 2600, and Nintendo 64 to push the limits of 3D graphics and gameplay. The release of strong 3D engines like Quake (1996) and Unreal (1998) changed how games are developed. The immersive and visually appealing experience was enhanced by these engines' 3D visuals, lighting effects, and real-time physics simulation. Big-budget games like "Grand Theft Auto" and movies like "Uncharted" highlight how game developers have made players feel more in control, more involved, and more immersed in the story in three-dimensional worlds.

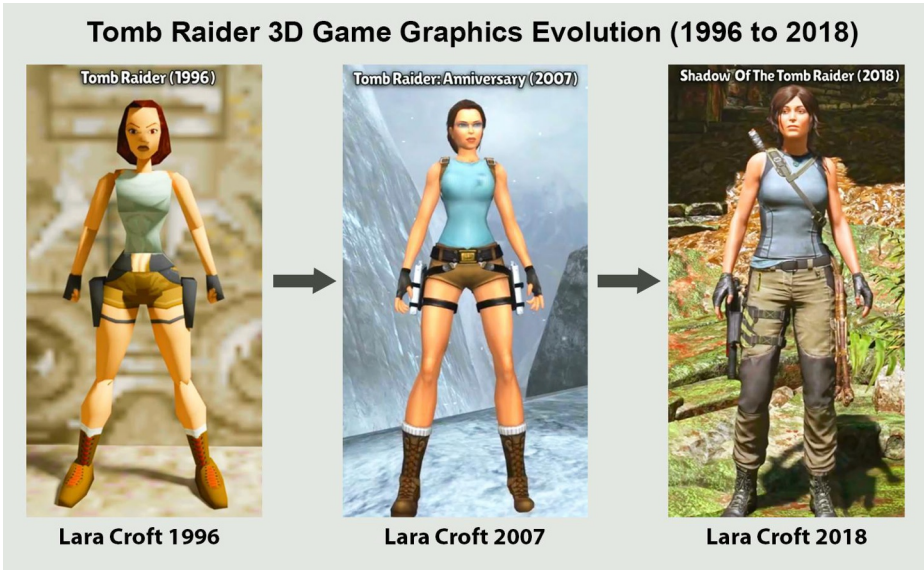


Fig. 2. Tomb Raider 3D Game Graphics Evolution (1996 to 2018) | Source: www.tombraider.com

Figure 2 clearly illustrates how Lara Croft's 3D graphics changed from the low-poly, blocky form of Tomb Raider (1996, 540 polygons) to the photorealistic design of Shadow of the Tomb Raider (2018, 140,000 polygons). During this period, improvements in polygon density, movement, lighting, motion capture, physics-based rendering, and real-time hair and skin technologies slowly changed her from a famous angular figure into a realistic, movie-like character. With the rise of VR and AR technologies in recent years, 3D gaming has reached new heights. The Oculus Rift and HTC Vive are examples of virtual reality equipment that give you an experience that is unlike anything else. Augmented reality games like "Pokémon GO" combine real-world and virtual-world elements to provide unique gaming experiences.

Table 1: Evolution of 3D Video Games: Timeline and Innovations

Game Name	Key Innovation	Graphic Quality Description
Maze War (1973)	First-person 3D perspective	Basic wireframe corridors, simple line graphics
Battlezone (1980)	Vector-based 3D graphics	Green wireframe tank combat, geometric shapes
Star Wars (1983)	Cinematic 3D sequences	Colorful vector graphics, Death Star trench run
Elite (1984)	3D space exploration	Wireframe spaceships, filled polygons for planets
Driller (1987)	Solid 3D environments	Filled polygons, basic texturing, limited color palette
Wolfenstein 3D (1992)	Ray-casting engine	Textured walls, sprite-based enemies, pseudo-3D
Doom (1993)	Advanced ray-casting	Higher resolution textures, lighting effects, fluid movement
Super Mario 64 (1996)	True 3D platforming	Smooth polygonal characters, camera control, colorful environments
Quake (1996)	True 3D polygon engine	Real-time 3D rendering, dynamic lighting, complex geometry
Tomb Raider (1996)	3D adventure mechanics	Detailed character models, environmental textures, atmospheric lighting
GoldenEye 007 (1997)	Console FPS excellence	Detailed character faces, varied environments, smooth frame rates
Unreal (1998)	Advanced 3D engine	High-quality textures, colored lighting, large outdoor environments
Half-Life (1998)	Seamless 3D storytelling	Detailed character animations, realistic physics, immersive environments
Quake III Arena (1999)	Advanced shader technology	Dynamic shadows, curved surfaces, high-polygon models
The Sims (2000)	Isometric 3D simulation	Detailed character models, interactive 3D objects, realistic animations
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (2002)	Open-world 3D cities	Large seamless environments, vehicle physics, day/night cycles
Doom 3 (2004)	Dynamic lighting system	Real-time shadows, bump mapping, high-resolution textures
Half-Life 2 (2004)	Physics-based gameplay	Advanced facial animations, realistic water effects, HDR lighting
Gears of War (2006)	Unreal Engine 3 showcase	High-definition textures, advanced shader effects, realistic materials
Crysis (2007)	Cutting-edge PC graphics	Photorealistic environments, advanced physics, dynamic weather
Dead Space (2008)	Atmospheric 3D horror	Detailed character models, dynamic lighting, realistic gore effects
Uncharted 2 (2009)	Cinematic 3D action	Movie-quality animations, detailed facial expressions, realistic environments
Minecraft (2011)	Voxel-based 3D worlds	Blocky aesthetic, infinite procedural generation, creative building
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011)	Expansive 3D RPG world	Detailed landscapes, dynamic weather, advanced character creation

Game Name	Key Innovation	Graphic Quality Description
Journey (2012)	Artistic 3D presentation	Stylized sand rendering, cloth physics, emotional visual storytelling
The Last of Us (2013)	Emotional 3D storytelling	Photorealistic characters, detailed post-apocalyptic environments
Grand Theft Auto V (2013)	Massive detailed 3D city	Realistic lighting, advanced physics, detailed character models
The Witcher 3 (2015)	Open-world 3D detail	Dynamic weather systems, realistic hair physics, vast environments
Uncharted 4 (2016)	Photorealistic characters	Advanced facial capture, realistic materials, detailed environments
Horizon Zero Dawn (2017)	Robot creature design	Photorealistic landscapes, advanced particle effects, dynamic lighting
Red Dead Redemption 2 (2018)	Ultimate realism	Photorealistic environments, advanced physics, detailed animations
Half-Life: Alyx (2020)	VR-native 3D design	Room-scale VR environments, hand tracking, immersive physics
Cyberpunk 2077 (2020)	Ray-tracing implementation	Real-time ray tracing, dense urban environments, advanced lighting
The Matrix Awakens (2021)	Unreal Engine 5 demo	Nanite virtualized geometry, Lumen global illumination, photorealism
Horizon Forbidden West (2022)	Next-gen console graphics	Advanced vegetation rendering, realistic water physics, HDR support
Alan Wake 2 (2023)	Use of path tracing	highly realistic form of ray tracing, incredibly lifelike lighting and reflections
Helldivers 2 (2024)	Cross Play Feature	It stands out for its "gargantuan explosions" and intense action

2.2 Visual Aesthetics in 3D Video Games

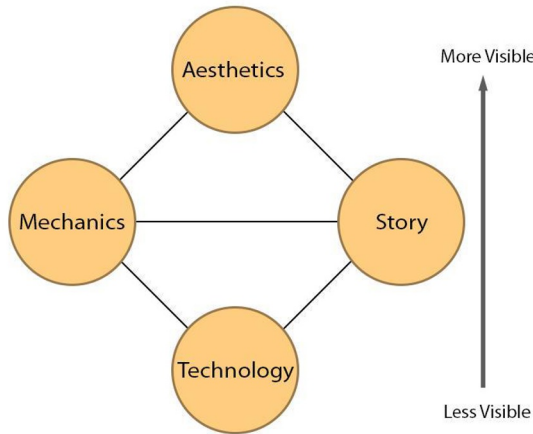


Fig. 3. The Elemental Tetrad by Schell, 2008 | Image source: Author

The visual aesthetics of 3D video games significantly impact players' enjoyment and overall experience. Research indicates that 3D games featuring aesthetic design garner positive evaluations from users, highlighting the influence of visual aesthetics on user satisfaction and engagement (Pantouw & Aruan, 2019). Wilhelmsson et al. (2015) assert that visual elements strongly influence video games. This supports the assertion that vision is the primary sense for humans, with around 70% of perceived information received through sight (Friedman, A., 2014). This aspect must be considered when engaging in game creation. Figure 2 illustrates the Elemental Tetrad, which posits that games consist of four interdependent elements: Mechanics, Story, Aesthetics, and Technology. Notably, Aesthetics tends to be more perceptible to players. A significant challenge in the 3D gaming industry is the prediction of a game's success. Daily, numerous new video games are launched. Only a small number achieve success, whereas the majority do not (Kerim, A., Genç, B., 2022). Research on the success of 3D video games has primarily focused on core elements such as mechanics, story, gameplay, and rewards. However, there is a lack of research concerning the visual aesthetics of video games. This review will examine the visual aesthetics and genres of 3D video games in relation to player engagement, motivation, and overall game success. This study systematically examines empirical research on the relationship between visual aesthetics and player engagement in 3D video games, addressing a complex research landscape. This review synthesizes findings from various methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks to offer evidence-based insights for researchers and industry professionals, facilitating the understanding and optimization of visual design decisions in contemporary game development.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Aesthetic Theory in Interactive Media

Aesthetic theory in interactive media has undergone substantial evolution as designers and scholars see the significance of integrating conventional design ideas into digital contexts. The incorporation of classical aesthetic concepts, such as symmetry, color harmony, and visual hierarchy, into game design and interactive applications creates new challenges and opportunities (Schell, 2014). Fundamental principles require reevaluation within the framework of user agency and dynamic content, where static compositional norms intersect with real-time user decision-making. The cognitive system in interactive media processes visual data through numerous phases of perception and interpretation. Players are required to analyze contextual indications, interface features, and narrative symbols, taking into account their interactivity (Green & Bavelier, 2012). This complex cognitive strain necessitates careful consideration of information architecture and visual design to prevent overwhelming individuals with excessive information while maintaining their engagement. Research shows that effective artwork in games enhances cognitive performance and educational outcomes (Bavelier et al., 2012). Visual stimuli impact player emotions, immersion, and behavior, rendering the aesthetic experience in interactive media highly emotional. Studies indicate that specific color palettes, lighting conditions, and visual effects can provoke distinct emotional responses, including excitement, anxiety, tranquility, and reflection (Kühn et al., 2011). This emotional reaction to visual design gives designers the chance to make user experiences that are more meaningful and powerful. The fusion of aesthetic theory and interactive technology perpetually uncovers novel avenues for creative expression and user engagement, forming a substantial domain of inquiry that connects classical art theory with modern digital practice (Ritter & Winterbottom, 2017).

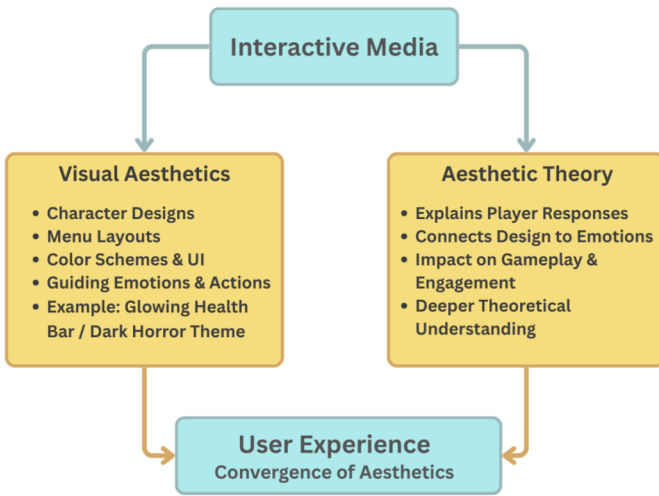


Fig. 4. Visual Aesthetics & Aesthetic Theory in Interactive Media

Aesthetic theory and visual aesthetics collaborate in interactive media; however, both emphasise distinct aspects of the user experience (Figure 4). Game and app visual aesthetics include character designs, menu layouts, colour schemes, and interface elements that make a game or app feel appealing (Moshagen & Thielsch, 2010). Visual aesthetics are used by game designers to influence player emotions and actions when they implement features like a bright health bar or use gloomy hues in horror games. In interactive media, aesthetic theory delves further, attempting to explain how and why players react to specific visual designs and how this, in turn, impacts gameplay and user engagement (Palmer et al., 2013).

3.2 Player Engagement Models

The psychological and behavioural mechanisms that engage players in video games are studied and improved using systematic frameworks. According to these theories, engagement is a complex phenomenon with cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Rashed et al., 2025). The main goal is to determine the essential factors that maintain player engagement, thus encouraging extended gameplay and satisfaction. These frameworks are very important for game designers who want to make games that are more entertaining and successful. Analysing player motivations, including achievement, social engagement, and immersion, allows developers to optimize game mechanics and content, enhancing player retention and satisfaction (Huang et al., 2019). Multiple models prioritize various factors influencing engagement. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that games are particularly attractive when they fulfill players' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan et al., 2006). Alternative models, such as the GameFlow framework, use the concept of "flow" in gaming, pinpointing critical components like clear objectives, immediate feedback, and a balance between challenge and skill as vital for fostering an engaging and enjoyable experience (Sweetser & Wyeth, 2005). Researchers evaluate involvement through various methodologies, including questionnaires, gaming data analysis, and physiological indicators, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the player's experience (Rashed et al., 2025).

3.3 Visual Perception in Digital 3D Environments

3D gamers utilise depth perception to interpret perspective and occlusion. These cues, field of vision, and stereoscopic 3D influence players' distance perception and intuition (Qiu et al., 2020). Effective depth signals make games accessible and engrossing (Lee et al., 2025). Virtual color psychology influences emotions, attention, and knowledge (Geslin et al., 2016). Blues convey calm and reds threat in the game (Friedman, A., 2014). Color can simplify user interfaces and highlight crucial elements. This enhances game aesthetics and usability (Azarby & Rice, 2023). Gestalt principles organise game interface information intuitively, reducing player cognitive load (Johnson, 2022). Grouping health and stamina bars by proximity and similarity makes the UI clear. This speeds up information processing and lets players focus on games (Koffka, 2013).

4. Materials & Methods

This section describes the comprehensive approach used to conduct the literature review, with a focus on the visual aesthetics preferences of 3D video game players. We followed a few guidelines and rules of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to ensure comprehensive and unbiased paper selection.

4.1 Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review was performed to discover relevant research investigating the correlation between visual aesthetics and player involvement in three-dimensional video games. Scopus was chosen as the primary database because of its vast coverage of peer-reviewed academic papers and indexing of multidisciplinary research in computer science, media studies, game design, and human-computer interaction. The results were confined to publications published from 2010 to 2025. The search was limited to English-language publications, concentrating exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings to maintain academic rigour and accessibility. Two search queries were formulated based on the two objectives:

(1) For objective 1: ("visual aesthetics" OR "art style" OR "visual design") AND ("3D games" OR "video games" OR "digital games") AND ("player engagement" OR "player preference" OR "user experience")

(2) For objective 2: ("gaming industry" OR "Visual aesthetics and player retention" OR "Player engagement estimation" OR "market trends" OR "game components" OR "game aesthetics")

We conducted our research by searching the databases using the search query for-mulated previously. We performed our search in the Scopus and Google Scholar data-bases as the first is one of the most professional indexing databases and the second is the most popular, so it helps to identify further eligible studies. The search was performed in June 2025. Although the Scopus database indexed the publication abstracts, most of the articles were not available through Scopus, and the articles were retrieved from the top publishers: ACM, IEEE, Springer, SEMANTIC SCHOLAR, MDPI, (Game & Cultures), Science Direct.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A comprehensive understanding of player engagement with 3D video games requires a focused approach to research. The following table outlines the specific criteria for including and excluding studies in a specialized review of this topic.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Scopus-indexed & other reputed publications: Ensures that the research has been peer-reviewed and meets a certain standard of academic quality.	Non-peer-reviewed publications: Excludes articles from blogs and other sources that have not undergone a rigorous review process.
Focus on 3D video games specifically: The research must center on games that utilize three-dimensional graphics and environments.	Studies focusing exclusively on 2D games: Research that only examines 2D or non-digital games will not be included.
Empirical studies on visual aesthetics and player responses: The research should be based on the collection and analysis of data regarding how the visual aspects of a game affect players.	Research without empirical methodology: Theoretical papers or those that do not present data from participants are excluded.
Research addressing player preferences or engagement metrics: Studies should investigate what players prefer in terms of visual style or how their engagement is measured.	Publications not available in English: To ensure accessibility and a consistent understanding of the research, only English-language studies will be considered.
Studies published between 2010-2025: This timeframe ensures the research is relevant to contemporary video game technology and player experiences.	Technical papers without player-focused findings: Papers that detail graphical techniques without examining the impact on players are not relevant.

To select the relevant studies for this literature review, a manual screening was performed. The initial search resulted in 276 studies from academic databases (n=270) and online magazines for statistics (n=6). After removing duplicates (n=18), 258 articles were retained for screening. 89 articles were excluded based on the title and abstract not matching with 3D game art context.

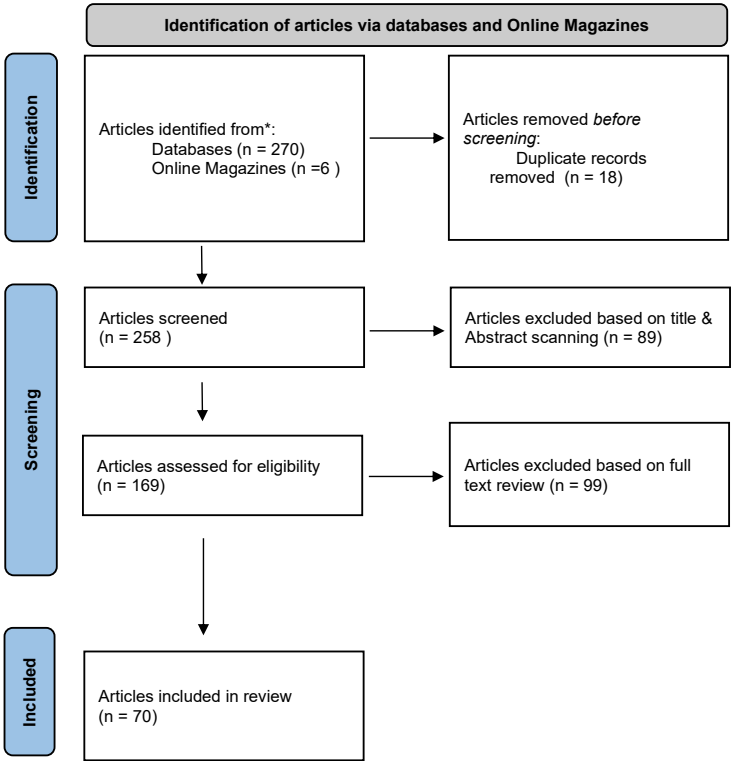


Fig. 5. Literature review selection process. The above flowchart explains the screening and selection process for studies on 3D games' visual aesthetics.

To examine the situation regarding visual aesthetics in 3D video games, we excluded 2D game-related articles. We manually filtered these articles by title and abstract based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, which led to the exclusion of 89 articles. After reading the full text of the remaining 169 articles, 99 articles were excluded from the research. After completing the searching and filtering processes, we identified a total of 70 articles that met all inclusion and exclusion criteria and reviewed them fully in this paper.

Table 3. Result of reviewed articles based on research context

Study Purpose	Focus Area	References
Visual Fidelity Impact & Art Style Preferences	Player preferences for art styles in 3D games	(Garver et al., 2018), (Tondello and Nacke, 2019), (Riefard et al., 2024), (Hemraj, 2024), (Jamal et al., 2023), (Sepúlveda, 2020), (Kokil, 2018), (Shiau Gee et al., 2019), (Schell et al., 2019), (Cho et al., 2018), (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020), (Fullerton, 2024), (Wolf & Perron, 2014), (Jafarkhani et al. 2024), (Pantouw & Aruan, 2019), (Okur et al., 2024), (Friedman, A., 2014), (Bavelier et al., 2012), (Moshagen & Thielsch, 2010), (Palmer et al., 2013), (Wilhelmsson et al., 2015)
Color Psychology and Player Response	Impact of color schemes on engagement	(Kallabis et al., 2024), (Garver et al., 2018), (Gu, 2023), (Wilms & Oberfeld, 2018), (Haghi et al., 2020), (Kühn et al., 2011), (Geslin et al., 2016), (Azarby & Rice, 2023)
Environmental & Character Design	Role of environments and characters in immersion	(Damastuti et al., 2024), (Tian et al., 2021), (Pallavicini et al., 2019), (Cho & Lee, 2014), (Utomo, 2025), (Caroux, 2023), (Totten, 2019), (Halik & Kent, 2021), (Qiu et al., 2020)
Physiological & Behavioral Response Measurements	Biometric & behavior data on visual aesthetics	(Kumar et al., 2022), (Peng & Bai, 2025), (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020), (Chen et al., 2024), (Rashed et al., 2025), (Ferreira et al., 2022), (Ruqeyya et al., 2022), (Kokil, 2018), (Juvrud et al., 2022), (Sree et al., 2024), (Hamari et al., 2016)
Cross-Cultural Visual Art Style Preferences	Cultural impact on art style choices	(Vindigni, 2023), (Yu et al., 2022), (Cho et al., 2018), (Riefard et al., 2024), (Wattanasoontorn et al., 2019), (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020)
Visual Art Style & Genre	3D Game Visual Art Style & Genre Correlation	(Schell, 2014), (Adams & Dormans, 2012), (Arsenault, 2013), (Vargas-Iglesias, 2018)
Technology & Aesthetic Innovation	Industry practices in technology & aesthetic testing	(Wang, 2024), (Umarov et al., 2024), (Ye, 2024), (Li, 2025), (Tathod & Bhosale, 2024), (Okur et al., 2024), (Kaur & Behki, 2024), (Halik & Kent, 2021), (Goh et al., 2023)

5. Literature Findings & Analysis

5.1 Visual Aesthetics in 3D Video Games

Aesthetics and Perceived Efficacy in 3D Games. After conducting an in-depth analysis, Our Research findings reveal that the visual aesthetic quality of game interfaces influences perceived efficacy. Interfaces with low visual aesthetic quality are deemed unusable (Jamal et al., 2023; Garver et al., 2018). Tondello and Nacke (2019) conclude that players who score high on this trait enjoy aesthetic experiences in games, such as exploring the world, observing the scenery, and admiring the quality of the graphics, sound, and art style. However, low-scoring players may be more concerned with the flow of the game than its aesthetics. Low-quality graphics can dull players, thus it's crucial to design everything from characters to interfaces properly (Okur et al., 2024). Some studies indicate that appealing graphics play a crucial role in math games that teach (Riefard et al., 2024). Consequently, game designers should put more effort into generating high-quality visuals (Shiau Gee et al., 2019).

Player Preferences for 3D Game Art Styles. Game art style analysis proves that player preferences for 3D art styles are influenced by variables such as gaming experience, cultural background, age demographics, and individual aesthetic sensibility. Kokil (2018) also adds that the selection of art style by players is impacted by their age, cultural background, and the genre of games they prefer. Hemraj (2024) examines contemporary research and evaluates a range of games recognized for their unique art styles, illustrating the influence of these styles on narrative and player engagement. According to Sepúlveda (2020), game designers should focus on creating realistic images in order to maintain player attention, since gamers prefer realistic styles over abstract ones. Stylised or minimalist images convey clarity and emotion. Some players favour photorealistic pictures for a deeper sense of immersion (Shiau Gee et al., 2019). Schell et al. (2019) conducted research that reveals a distinct age gap in visual style preferences, revealing that adults are inclined towards photorealism while teenagers like stylised or cartoonish images, which effectively engage adolescent players and enhance their focus. Riefard et al.

(2024) demonstrate that players had unique art style preferences, frequently associated with demographics; nevertheless, studies have not identified a direct association between these preferences and their preferred game genres. A general inclination towards realism over abstract forms did not correlate with individual genre selections (Sepúlveda, 2020). Players' familiarity with a game was linked to how well they thought a certain art style fit it. This shows that preferences are shaped not only by how appealing something looks, but also by how much they have played games before and how much they have seen certain visual styles in their culture (Cho et al., 2018; Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020).

Cross-Cultural Visual Art Style Preferences. Cultural backgrounds strongly impact 3D video game players' aesthetic tastes. East Asian players, inspired by anime and manga, favour simplistic designs with brilliant colours. Game players from the West prefer environments with realistic textures and details (Vindigni, 2023). The study of Genshin Impact statistics indicates regional disparities in players' perceptions of visual art forms throughout Europe, North America, and Asia. Cultural symbols and stories from their pasts (Yu et al., 2022) are what define these differences. Cho et al. (2018) discovered that cultural narratives affect player engagement and visual style preferences by integrating historical and contemporary art forms into building features, character designs, and landscapes. The photorealistic method uses pictures with a lot of detail to make things look real. Riefard et al. (2024) state that this strategy is popular with people who want to play immersive first-person shooter and simulation games. Players that value originality and innovation over technical realism favor abstract visual designs, cel shading, and cartoonish aesthetics (Wattanasoontorn et al., 2019). As computer power fluctuates, photorealistic visuals may become less useful (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020). This style will stay longer. These studies show that people's preferences for clean, vibrant minimalism versus realistic textures and deep detail change with their age, genre, and cultural background. These results show that international game producers should take into account the aesthetic preferences of different regions while making games for those areas.

3D Game Visual Art Style & Genre Correlation. The connection between art style and 3D game genres is quite important for players' experience in games because visuals impact gameplay and its narrative. Modern game developers use photorealistic rendering, stylised cartoon aesthetics, cel-shading, and hybrid visual paradigms (Schell, 2014). Art style substantially impacts player involvement and emotion, according to research. Studies show that stylized graphics can overcome technology restrictions and last longer and appeal more than photorealistic ones (Adams & Dormans, 2012). Game genre and art style are becoming more variable. Horror games are using minimalist aesthetics, racing games are using abstract visuals, and role-playing games are using varied cultural art traditions to assist storytelling and world-building (Arsenault, 2013). Scholars argue that genre is characterised by aesthetics and visuals as well as mechanics. Visual design and genre affect game classification and comprehension. Some experts believe genre categorisation may hide games' visual and narrative traits. Whether genre borders should be visual, narrative, or mechanical is a hot topic (Vargas-Iglesias, 2018).

Color Psychology and Player Response. Multiple research studies indicate that color significantly impacts 3D video game design, affecting player emotions, engagement, and interaction. Research indicates that there is no significant overall effect of hue or saturation on player emotional state. However, notable gender differences were observed, particularly with male players exhibiting a significant interaction between hue, saturation, and emotional valence (Kallabis et al., 2024; Garver et al., 2018). Additional research shows that color improves players' perception of interaction and vitality, offers visual continuity, and enhances data visualization, establishing it as a critical component in human-machine interfaces in gaming (Gu, 2023). The integration of color psychology, alongside animation theory and the designers' individual experiences, contributes to the development of 3D game elements that elicit positive emotions and improve the overall player experience (Wilms & Oberfeld, 2018). Haghi et al. (2020) identified that the use of blue and red colors can improve time perception in computer games; however, further scientific research is required for a comprehensive analysis.

Environmental and Character Design Impact. The analysis of the reviewed research indicates that the aesthetic of virtual environments is essential for enhancing player immersion and emotional involvement in 3D gaming experiences. Higher visual fidelity, adaptable environmental aspects, and integrated sensory feedback greatly improve players' immersion and emotional reaction (Tian et al., 2022; Pallavicini et al., 2019; Damastuti et al., 2024). This makes experiences more engaging and meaningful. Incorporating changing day-night cycles and environmental changes that respond to the player can make the game 25% more visually accurate and immersive. Researchers who use EEG and skin conductance to check how people feel have found that 3D settings make people feel more emotional than 2D ones. This is due to the fact that people find it easier to grasp and connect with 3D environments (Tian et al., 2021). Furthermore, modifying lighting, fog, and interactive components in response to player emotions can enhance immersion and emotional resonance (Cho & Lee, 2014). Emotional connections are strengthened and reminiscence is evoked by narrative and culturally significant aesthetic components, which thereby intensifies the immersive experience (Utomo, 2025). The results show how important it is to carefully design the virtual aesthetics of 3D games to make their psychological and emotional effects stronger. This is important information for future game development and research projects.

5.2 Player Engagement Metrics and Visual Aesthetics

3D video game visual aesthetics has much impact on psychological and behavioural engagement according to different research. High-quality, well-designed visuals enhance enjoyment, motivation, and sustained play, while also driving measurable behavioral responses (Chen et al., 2024). Engagement is multidimensional, that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, and is influenced by factors such as visual quality, artistic style, and user experience satisfaction

Table 4. Player Engagement Metrics and Visual Aesthetics in 3D Video Games

Dimension	Main Findings	Metrics	Sources
Physiological Response Measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EEG shows reward pathways activated by pleasing visuals. • Engagement 31% with preferred styles. • Visuals mediate enjoyment & continuance intention. • Aesthetic contemplation deepens emotional engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EEG (alpha waves) • Neuro-activity mapping • Motivation surveys 	Kumar et al. (2022); Peng & Bai (2025); Atkinson & Parsayi (2020); Chen et al. (2024)
Behavioral Engagement Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement seen in playtime & session frequency. • Visuals improve focus, usability & reward. • Heart rate & pupil dilation during interactive play. • ML predicts engagement from gameplay data. • Eye tracking shows design affects performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playtime logs • Eye tracking • HR & pupil dilation • ML predictive models 	Rashed et al. (2025); Ferreira et al. (2022); Ruqeyya et al. (2022); Kokil (2018); Juvrud et al. (2022); Sree et al. (2024)

Physiological Response Measurements. Of the studies reviewed, we found that recent advances in biometric monitoring have enabled more precise measurement of player responses to visual stimuli. As shown in table 4 EEG studies by Kumar et al. (2022) revealed that visually appealing visuals trigger reward pathways in the brain, with alpha wave patterns indicating relaxation and engagement increased by 31% when players encountered preferred visual styles. Subjective preference surveys are objectively validated by these neurological findings. Visual aesthetics influence enjoyment and the intention to continue, particularly among core players, suggesting that attractive visuals can enhance long-term psychological commitment to a game (Peng & Bai, 2025). The opportunity for aesthetic contemplation, wherein players engage with visual environments, can enhance emotional engagement; however, this necessitates game design that facilitates such experiences (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020; Chen et al., 2024).

Behavioural Engagement Indicators. Behavioural engagement is reflected in observable actions such as playtime, frequency of sessions, and in-game behaviours. Physiological signals, eye tracking, and gameplay data are some of the ways to measure behavioral involvement (Rashed et al., 2025; Ferreira et al., 2022; Ruqeyya et al., 2022). Studies have shown that interfaces with good visual appeal keep users more interested, as shown by focused attention, perceived usefulness, and reward (Kokil, 2018). Real-time physiological and behavioral data, like a faster heart rate and bigger pupils, show that people are more alert and interested when they play with others than when they watch others play (Juvrud et al., 2022). Sree et al. (2024) say that machine learning models that employ behavioral data may accurately guess how engaged someone will be. This demonstrates the significance of actions and responses in games as essential measures.

5.3 Industry Applications and Professional Insights

The utilization of player preference data in art direction is standard. Studios use data analytics to measure player behavior, heat maps of visual attention, and aesthetic A/B testing. Technological advancements and visual design innovation are fundamentally changing the game production industry, enabling the creation of more immersive, interactive, and visually compelling experiences. 2D and 3D technologies like 2.5D design allow developers to combine depth and spatial complexity with creative freedom, improving visual appeal and gameplay dynamics (Wang, 2024). Advanced rendering, real-time graphics, and AI-driven animation allow developers to push realism and interactivity across platforms (Umarov et al., 2024; Ye, 2024). Visual design is being transformed by VR and AR, which provide immersive environments for rapid prototyping, real-time collaboration, and user-centered experimentation, boosting creativity and efficiency (Li, 2025; Tathod & Bhosale, 2024). If clarity and gameplay balance are preserved, strategic use of visual effects (VFX) and dynamic visual design systems improves aesthetic quality and player engagement and emotional reaction (Okur et al., 2024; Ye, 2024). Robust game engines and graphics APIs simplify development and integrate new technology (Umarov et al., 2024). In current game creation, technology and visual design are raising the bar for originality, user experience, and industry competitiveness (Tathod & Bhosale, 2024; Wang, 2024).

6. Discussion Of Research Objectives

After in depth reviewing all 70 relevant articles, chapters, and conference papers we synthesized useful information to discuss these objectives. This review began with two main objectives to achieve and contribute to the game design domain. The study of literature comprised 70 research publications on visual aesthetics in 3D video games that includes other categories like visual art styles, game genre, color scheme, and many more. These studies analyzed a wide range of parameters, namely the impact of visual fidelity on players in enhancing engagement and experience, and the integration of technology to enhance the visual quality in game design settings. The researched papers were grouped by research type categories, visual aesthetics, visual art styles, color psychology, physiological & behavioral response, cross-cultural art preferences, technology & aesthetic innovation etc.

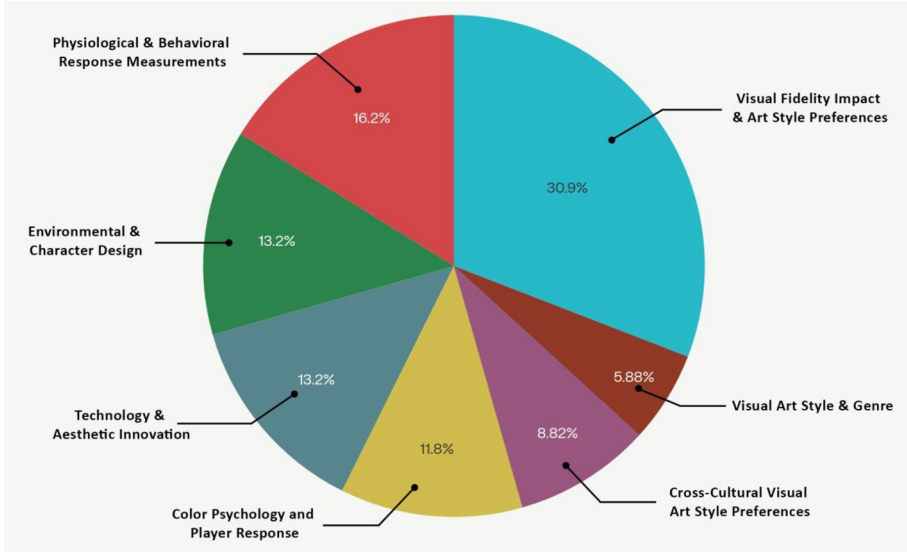


Fig. 6. Pie chart showing percentage distribution of research topics in visual art studies

Objective 1: To examine players' preferences concerning visual aesthetics in 3D video games, including favored art styles, color schemes, and overall visual appeal.

To achieve primary objective, an in-depth analysis of the collected core articles and chapters was conducted, which revealed that high-quality game aesthetics significantly influence perceived efficacy and usability, while low-quality visuals can negatively impact player experience and usability (Garver et al., 2018; Jamal et al., 2023; Okur et al., 2024). game players with a strong taste for aesthetics relish in exploring and praising the visual and auditory quality of games, whereas others with a lower appreciation may put gameplay above aesthetics (Tondello & Nacke, 2019). High-quality graphics are essential for the efficacy of educational math games, necessitating that creators emphasize superior visual elements (Shiau Gee et al., 2019; Riefard et al., 2024).

Research reveals that cultural background, age, gaming experience, and personal preferences influence player choices for 3D game visual styles (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020; Cho et al., 2018; Kokil, 2018; Shiau Gee, 2019). Some research imply realistic styles boost motivation and engagement (Hemraj, 2024; Sep?lveda, 2020), while others show that players prefer stylized or minimalist designs for emotional resonance and clarity (Shiau Gee et al., 2019). Age also has impact; Adults prefer photorealistic visuals, whereas youth prefer cartoon or stylized ones (Schell et al., 2019). Researchers Atkinson and Parsayi (2020) and Cho et al. (2018) discovered that how well players think an art style fits the game depends on how well they know the game and how much experience they have with games. Cultural background, age, and game type influence 3D video game aesthetics (Cho et al., 2018). East Asian players prefer vivid, simple designs, while Western players like realistic textures and intricate landscapes (Vindigni, 2023). While photorealistic art styles are appealing to individuals who are interested in immersion (Riefard et al., 2024), stylized approaches are more appealing to players who appreciate creative expression and offer greater longevity, as they are less susceptible to technological obsolescence (Atkinson & Parsayi, 2020; Wattanasoontorn et al., 2019). Thus, global game producers must address regional aesthetics (Yu et al., 2022).

Color strongly impacts the design of 3D video games. It affects players' involvement, emotions, and their sense of vitality and interactivity (Gu, 2023; Wilms & Oberfeld, 2018). Other research suggest that color and saturation typically do not affect emotional states; yet, they underscore notable gender-specific differences

(Garver et al., 2018; Kallabis et al., 2024). Specific hues, like as blue and red, affect a player's perception of time (Haghi et al., 2020), highlighting the importance of color psychology in improving the player experience. Notwithstanding this, additional study is necessary for a thorough analysis of these impacts (Haghi et al., 2020). The relationship between a 3D game's artistic style and its genre is a complex and evolving element of player experience. The art style is no longer merely a preference; it is a crucial element of a game that influences player engagement, emotional response, and gaming duration (Adams & Dormans, 2012; Schell, 2014). However, some research suggest that there is no direct association between art style preference and a player's favored game genre (Riefard et al., 2024; Sepúlveda, 2020). Therefore, more examination of the relationship between art style and genre is essential.

To keep players interested and emotionally involved, 3D virtual environments need to have more realistic visuals, dynamic elements, and stimuli that impact more than one sense (Damastuti et al., 2024; Pallavicini et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2021). Enhancing the sense of presence and emotional arousal, these aesthetic elements contribute to more profound and unforgettable experiences.

Objective 2: *To assist researchers and industry professionals in navigating the complexities of player engagement estimation, improving game art aesthetics in the competitive gaming world.*

After conducting an in-depth review of player engagement research publications, we discovered that visual aesthetics influence player involvement both physically and behaviourally. Biometric research indicates that attractive visuals stimulate the brain's reward systems, fostering enduring psychological engagement (Kumar et al., 2022; Peng & Bai, 2025). Superior visuals impact behavioural metrics such as playtime, thereby improving engagement and perceived usability (Kokil, 2018). This is backed by real-time data indicating elevated heart rate and pupil dilation during gameplay (Juvrud et al., 2022; Sree et al., 2024). Eventually, worldwide game developers need to consider for these relationships and regional aesthetic preferences to guarantee the success of 3D video games (Yu et al., 2022). The combined use of 2D and 3D technologies, like 2.5D design, enables developers to merge depth and spatial intricacy with artistic liberty, thereby augmenting visual allure and gameplay dynamics (Wang, 2024).

Game Developers should prioritise visual fidelity, careful integration of effects, user-centred design, and the utilisation of modern technologies to enhance game visual aesthetics. Matching the visual style with player preferences and ensuring clarity will enhance visual appeal and player engagement. A uniform visual language throughout all components, such as elements, characters, environments, user interfaces, and branding improves immersion and builds player trust. The consistent use of color, typography, and iconography improves both usability and aesthetics (Okur et al., 2024; Riefard et al., 2024). The incorporation of visual effects increases engagement, adds layers, and evokes emotional responses; nonetheless, it is crucial to maintain equilibrium to ensure that gameplay clarity is not undermined. Systematic playtesting and comprehensive user feedback are crucial for enhancing VFX integration. The principles of user-centered design, including prototyping and usability testing, guarantee that visual elements are not only visually appealing but also serve a functional purpose, thereby enhancing understanding for a wider audience (Kokil, 2018). The realism or stylization of visual experiences in games is influenced by the game's objectives and supported by advanced rendering techniques, real-time graphics, and AI-driven tools (Wang, 2024; Umarov et al., 2024). The visual style of a game plays a crucial role in shaping player motivation and engagement, with tendencies frequently favoring realistic or stylized imagery over abstract representations. Grasping the preferences of the target audience is essential for guiding informed aesthetic choices.

7. Limitations & Future Scope

This extensive review constantly shows the essential function of visual aesthetics in enhancing player engagement, immersion, and motivation in video games, despite certain enduring constraints. Numerous studies concentrate on certain visual styles or genres, frequently utilizing tiny sample sizes, thereby limiting the generalizability of their findings across the varied spectrum of video games and player preferences. There is a propensity to emphasize rapid engagement or initial impressions rather than the analysis of the long-term effects of visual aesthetics on prolonged gameplay and player retention (Schlüter et al., 2021). Moreover, research frequently neglects the impact of cultural and emotional settings, with limited studies investigating how visual features elicit intricate feelings or memories across diverse cultural backgrounds. A lot of studies treats aesthetics as something that doesn't alter as the game and story go on. This is another topic that hasn't been looked at enough. Only using self-report surveys and qualitative methodologies could be biased and not reveal all the different experiences that gamers have. On the other hand, work is still being done on objective and computational methods.

Longitudinal and cross-genre research should be conducted in the future to further understanding of the impact of visual aesthetics on player motivation and engagement over time. Incorporating participants from many cultures and emotional states in the study will yield a more thorough comprehension of the impact of visual aesthetics on individuals globally. Looking into how visual aesthetics and interaction elements are related, as well as using computational and physiological measures, can provide more objective and nuanced insights into player experiences (Bucchieri et al., 2024). Finally, future research should look at ethical problems that come up with visual design, mainly when it comes to manipulative techniques like dark patterns, and try to come up with rules for fair and useful visual design in games.

8. Conclusion

The research, which examined 70 peer-reviewed studies on visual aesthetics in 3D video games, shows that appealing visual design is essential for keeping players interested, making the game easier to use, and improving the overall experience. Players' preferences for art styles, color schemes, and visual appeal are influenced by a multifaceted interaction of cultural background, age, gaming experience, and individual taste. Usually, players prefer realistic visuals because they help them get into the game and stay motivated, but stylized and minimalist designs are also very popular because they are clear and have an emotional impact, especially among younger players and cultural groups. Some studies show that there is no apparent relationship between art style and game genre, which means that more research is needed in this domain. Color combinations have an immense impact on players' engagement and emotions, with small hues and saturations that can even impact how players perceive things and their physical reactions. There are differences in color preference based on gender, and certain colors can change how a player feels about time, which proves how important color psychology is in game design. This research also indicates that both physiological and behavioral responses to beautiful sights affect how engaged players are. Biometric studies have indicated that heart rates and pupil dilation increase during games. Structures of visual attention, optimizing views, and carefully creating integrated visualization all make the game experience fun and easy to enter into. Developers should concentrate on visual consistency, user-centered design, and constant playtesting to get the most out of visual aesthetics. The result will make sure that the visuals are both useful and attractive. Ultimately, creating entertaining and successful 3D video games necessitates comprehending and adapting to the diverse tastes of the target audience while using sophisticated technology. These new technologies are revolutionizing the game business in big ways, but they also make things tougher, including making development pricier and needing unique talents. To be competitive, developers also need to keep up with how quickly technology changes. But putting these technologies together might transform how players play games and establish new norms for how the industry comes up with novel concepts.

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