GENSHIN IMPACT & HONKAI: STAR RAIL

A UX ANALYSIS BY NEHA PASNOORI

Video Game UX Analysis: Genshin Impact and Honkai: Star Rail

OVERVIEW

The Assignment

This week, I conducted an analysis of two mobile video games that I frequently play and enjoy – *Genshin Impact* and *Honkai: Star Rail*. My main objective was to gauge my emotional responses to both games holistically, while analyzing my user psychology. I specifically targeted the user experience (UX) and user interface (UI).

As brief definitions:

- **UX**: how a user interacts with a product, service, or system.
- **UI**: the space where user interactions occur; the general look/feel.

In total, I uncovered ten things about each game which stood out to me as a user and gamer.

The Methodology

To aid me in this endeavor, I utilized the following Feel-Needs statement structure which allowed me to clearly articulate my emotional responses to each element I identified:

- _____ makes me *feel* _____ because my *need* for _____ is met/ not met.

Alongside this statement , I made use of a list curated by The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) that contains an extensive inventory of needs and feelings vocabulary.

VIDEO GAME BACKGROUND INFO

Genshin Impact

The first game I analyzed, **Genshin Impact**, is an award-winning action role-playing game developed by miHoYo, a Chinese video game development and publishing company. It was initially released on September 28, 2020 for Android, iOS, PlayStation 4, and Windows, with an eventual PlayStation 5 release in 2021. It is completely free-to-play, though there are plenty of paid features.

Genshin Impact takes place in a fantasy world called Teyvat, home to seven nations, each corresponding to a different element. We play as the Traveler, an interstellar adventurer in search of their lost sibling. On their search, the Traveler befriends many individuals across the nations, unlocks new powers, and learns more about Teyvat's mysteries.

Honkai: Star Rail

The second game, **Honkai: Star Rail**, is a turn-based action role-playing game also developed by miHoYo. It was initially released on April 26, 2023 for Android, iOS, and Windows, with a PlayStation 5 release planned for quarter 4 of 2023. It draws on gameplay elements from Genshin Impact, and likewise it is also completely free-to-play, with a plethora of paid features.

Honkai: Star Rail takes place in a science-fantasy universe, where living beings follow paths set forth by entities known as Aeons. We play as the Trailblazer, an amnesia-struck character imbued with a disruptive cosmic force called Stellaron. They join a group of adventurers and travel across universes on the Astral Express, a space train.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI

WELCOME SCREEN

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **Genshin Impact's welcome screen** makes me feel **excited** because my needs for **immersion** and **anticipation** are met.

Explanation

The moment I open Genshin Impact, I am met by a welcome screen surrounded by clouds and architectural ruins. When I tap on Start, the screen whooshes forward and I'm taken to a door, which opens up into the game itself. This lends a magical atmosphere to the whole experience, slightly reminiscent of The Chronicles of Narnia. The first time I experienced this welcome screen, I remember being extremely excited to start my adventure in Teyvat!

In addition, the sky changes in accordance to my local time, meaning it syncs with my time zone. At dawn, the sky is filled with pastel hues, while at dusk, it is shot through with the warm gold tones of sunset. This adds another level of immersion, and is a thoughtful touch on the side of the game's designers/developers.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI

SETTINGS

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The settings panel** makes me feel **blasé** because my needs for **innovation** and **usability** are not met.

Explanation

Though functional and perfectly capable, Genshin Impact's settings panel leaves a lot to be desired in terms of design. I find it to be unappealing and lackluster. I feel that adding more design elements to the settings panel that better fit the game's fantasy aesthetic might work to its advantage.

The usability is also not the greatest as the form fields are so densely packed. Whenever I have to change my Control mode to controller (as I use a mobile controller for comfort), I find the process to be annoying since it sometimes takes a few tries to tap it correctly. It works, but the entire process could be more streamlined. Mapping the controller buttons is also a tedious tasks which takes too many clicks. Thankfully, I am satisfied with the default layout, but for players that prefer different actions for different buttons, this would definitely be a pain point.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI

CHARACTER SELECTION

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The character selection screen** makes me feel **stimulated** because my needs for **challenge** and **strategy** are met.

Explanation

The gameplay in Genshin Impact revolves around a party setup of four characters. Each character can wield a weapon, and has one of seven elemental powers – pyro, cryo, hydro, electro, anemo, geo, and dendro. These elemental powers synergies with those of other characters to create elemental reactions which cause damage to enemies. Certain characters synergies better together, and can defeat enemies more efficiently. As a player, it is interesting to see which characters synergies best, and experimenting with different team compositions. There is quite a lot of strategy involved, and I've spent hours watching YouTube tutorials to create the perfect teams.

I'd also like to mention that the character selection screens are simply beautiful, and they are different for each region of Teyvat's map. The characters have their own animations and catch phrases when added to the party, which adds greatly to the user experience.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI

TUTORIALS

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The tutorial pages** makes me feel **reassured** because my needs for **understanding** and **comprehension** are met**.**

Explanation

Genshin Impact always offers tutorials for any new mechanic that is patched into the game. All of these tutorials are saved into an easily accessible database, so the player can refresh their memories at any time. There have been times that I was very confused on what to do when I encountered something new while exploring, and reading through the corresponding tutorials helped with that for sure.

There are many different effects and mechanisms scattered throughout the game, whether it's a new elemental reaction or a new enemy, so having a guide to read through is reassuring and puts me at ease when anticipating new game patches. I personally like to research and be as thorough as possible, even when I'm just playing a recreational game, so having in-game resources is appreciated.

# Genshin Impact: UX and UI

SERENITEA POT

Feel-Needs Statement

- **The Serenitea Teapot** makes me feel **invigorated** because my needs for **creativity** and **self-expression** are met.

Explanation

When a player finishes a major quest line in the geo region of Teyvat – Liyue, they are awarded the Serenitea Pot. The Serenitea Pot is a pocket realm which can be customized to the player's own preferences. The player can build architectural elements such as houses and shopping complexes, furniture, and other such things. They also get their own mansion to furnish and decorate, and means to set theme music. The concept is similar to Animal Crossing: New Horizons, which is one of my favorite games.

I enjoy the creative aspect of this, as someone who loves customization of any kind. The player can also choose the landscape their Teapot Realm resides in. I selected one with floating islands and a perpetual sunset sky. Since there is so much combat in Genshin Impact, having a little peaceful haven where I can build pretty artifacts and display them is a treat.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI
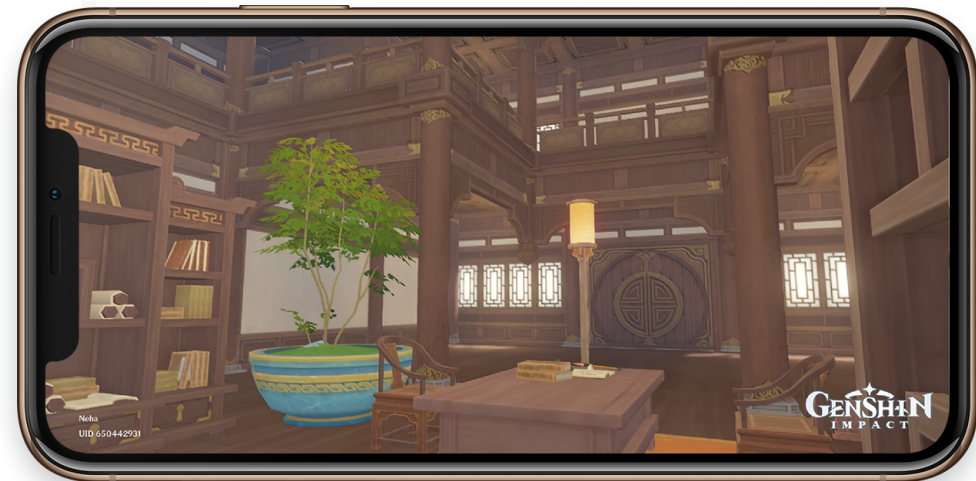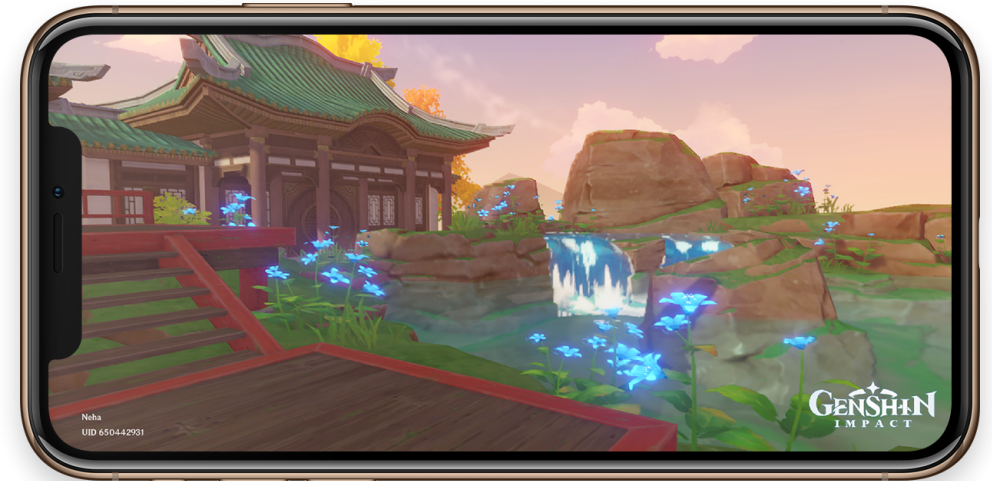
GACHA SYSTEM

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The gacha system** makes me feel **frustrated** because my needs for **financial stability** and **consistency** are not met.

Explanation

Genshin Impact implements a gacha wish system, meaning limited 5-star (the highest rarity) characters and weapons can be randomly attained with in-game or real currency. By randomly, this means that there is a 50/50 chance of a player getting the character they want, or another 5-star character which isn't limited. So essentially, it's a gamble.

Each wish costs 160 Primogems, which is the in-game currency achieved through quests and exploration. The player can also buy wishes in the Shop, with 160 Genesis Crystals equaling a wish. A 5-star character is guaranteed with 80 wishes, but with the 50/50 mechanic, players can end up spending real money. If a player loses their 50/50, that means they are guaranteed the limited character.

This is something that has happened to me on quite a few occasions, since the gambling aspect of the game and my luck don't mix well, apparently. For some characters, I've spent a good chunk of money, though I rarely do so. And it doesn't help that the game makes it very easy to swipe your credit card, user interface-wise. Thus, this has been a point of contention for me, as I spend money without realizing, without a guarantee of actually getting the character I want.
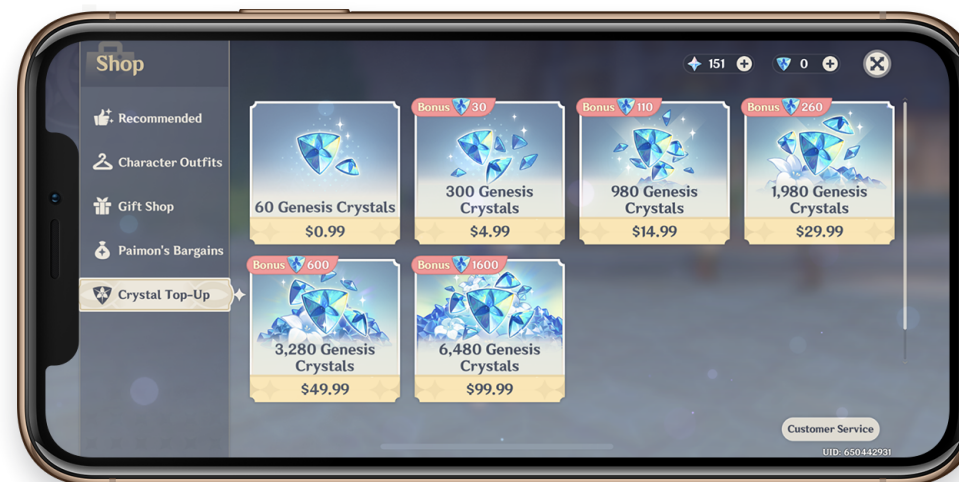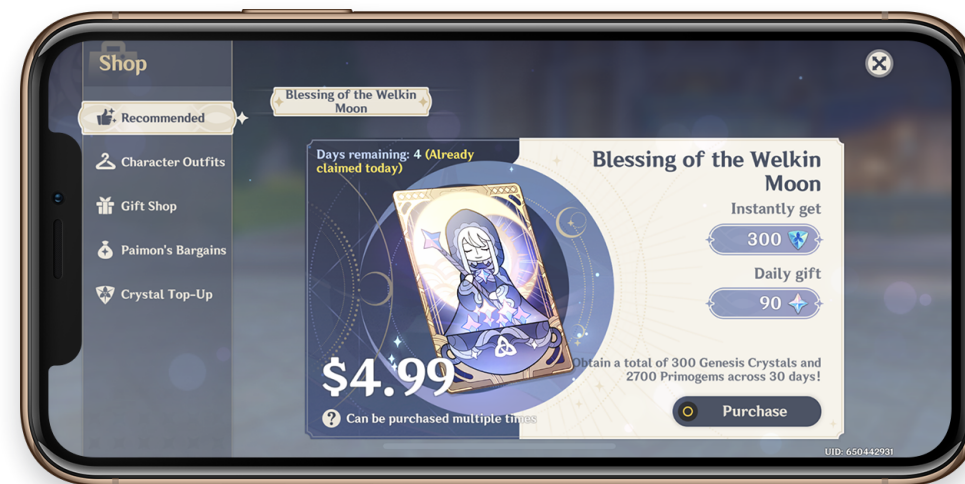
Genshin Impact: UX and UI

SHOP

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ <u>The shop</u> makes me feel <u>wary</u> because my needs for <u>peace</u> and <u>contentedness</u> are not met.

Explanation

As I mentioned before, it's very easy to spend real money in Genshin Impact. They do a great job with marketing characters, making them as appealing as possible. So the player base runs the gambit of losing their gacha gambles, thus forcing their hand to spend actual money.

In addition to this, wishes are *expensive*. For example, 8080 Genesis Crystals, which costs $100, only equates to 50 wishes. This doesn't hit the 80 wish point, nor does it mean the player will win the 50/50 gamble. Without fully intending to and being carried away by the thrill of gambling, a player can easily spend over $200 to get the limited character of their choice. For me, this experience is not peaceful, and I think it can cause certain gambling addictions if not properly managed.

Genshin Impact: UX and UI

MAP

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The map** makes me feel **overwhelmed** because my needs for **order** and **clarity** are not met**.**

Explanation

With their recent 4.0 patch release, Genshin Impact's development team introduced a multi-layer map system. This was in response to many players' feedback that the current map didn't show underground levels clearly. I appreciate that they took players' feedback into consideration, as this shows good empathy. Regardless, I feel like this multi-level map can be improved. Currently I find it to be overwhelming.

The topography of the map is expressed within the map, which makes it hard to read at times due to the variety of colors and shapes. In addition, many areas of the map, such as teleport points (for quick travel), special event stages, and boss arenas are marked out with an varied array of iconography. This makes the map feel cluttered and unclear.
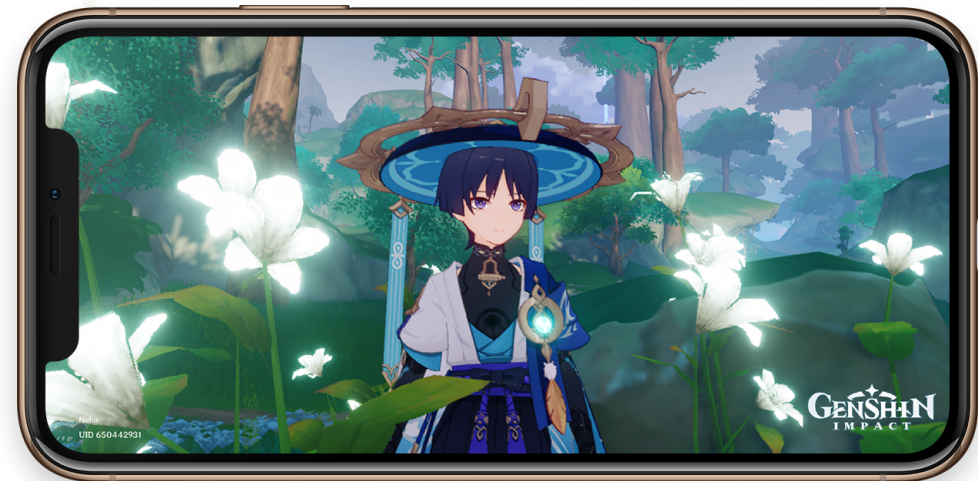
Genshin Impact: UX and UI

EXPLORATION

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **Genshin Impact's exploration** makes me feel **lively** because my needs for **adventure** and **freedom** are met.

Explanation

Exploration is my personal favorite part of Genshin Impact. My play style when experiencing video games is one of a completionist, meaning I like to achieve 100% in everything. Genshin Impact has a handy UI mechanic that lets players know what percentage of an area they've explored on the map. Opening treasure chests, figuring out puzzles, unlocking domains, and collecting special items contribute to this completion percentage.

Besides, the scenery and music in the game are especially beautiful. Sometimes I find myself pointless wandering around simply enjoying my surroundings. It fulfills my inner desire to be an adventurer, free to go wherever I please. There are so many nooks and crannies to explore, and I feel that I find something new and exciting whenever I play.

MINI GAMES

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The mini games** make me feel **entertained** because my needs for **fun** and **variety** are met**.**

Explanation

Every few days, a new mini game or event is released. Not only is this an impressive feat on the part of the developers and designers, but the mini games often have new game play features and mechanics. Due to this variety, players won't feel bored or that Genshin Impact is getting stale over time. There is always some new form of entertainment to be found. I'm a fan of the rhythm games, where I tap buttons to the beat of a song, and the various obstacle courses, where I navigate through arenas under a time limit and take advantage of new ability buffers.

Some mini games also offer limited rewards such as new character outfits (skins), exclusive weapons, and blueprints for Serenitea Pot, which is further incentive for players to take part. This rewards system adds a sense of motivation. I feel a sense of accomplishment whenever I finish a particularly difficult level and obtain rewards.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI



CONTROLS

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **Honkai: Star Rail's controls** make me feel **comfortable** because my needs for **fluidity** and **accessibility** are met**.**

Explanation

Honkai: Star Rail is a turn-based action role-playing game. This means that there is no need for high-flying acrobatics or the ability to mash buttons and synchronize battle commands. The only movement-based actions are walking, running, sprinting, and tapping the attack button to initiate combat. I can easily use the touchscreen of my phone to do all of these, with no need for a controller as I don't need to perform complex actions. I think that the movement itself is very fluid and I've never felt any sense of lag or jerkiness.

There is a controller option as well, which is similarly fluid. Funnily enough, even though I am more comfortable using controllers for all my games, I prefer simply using the touchscreen for Honkai: Star Rail. This speaks volumes about its accessibility, and I can play the game pretty much anywhere I have data or WiFi due to this.
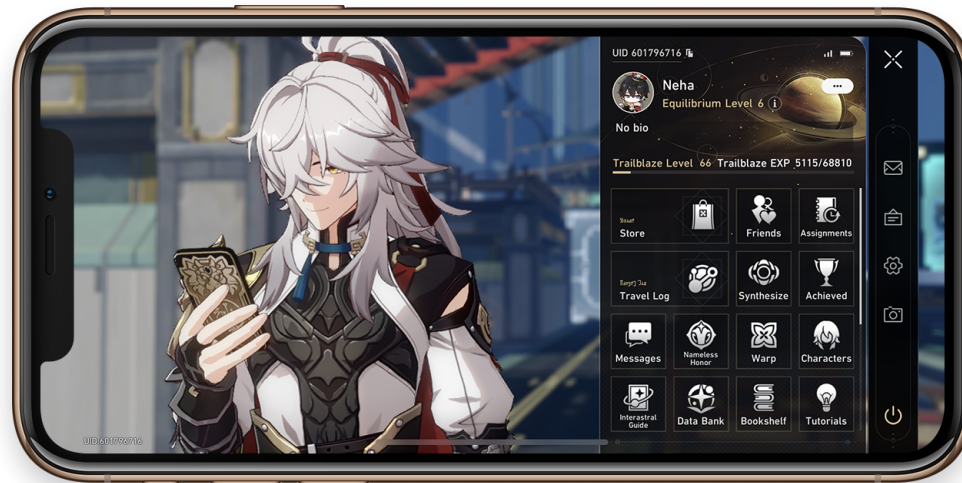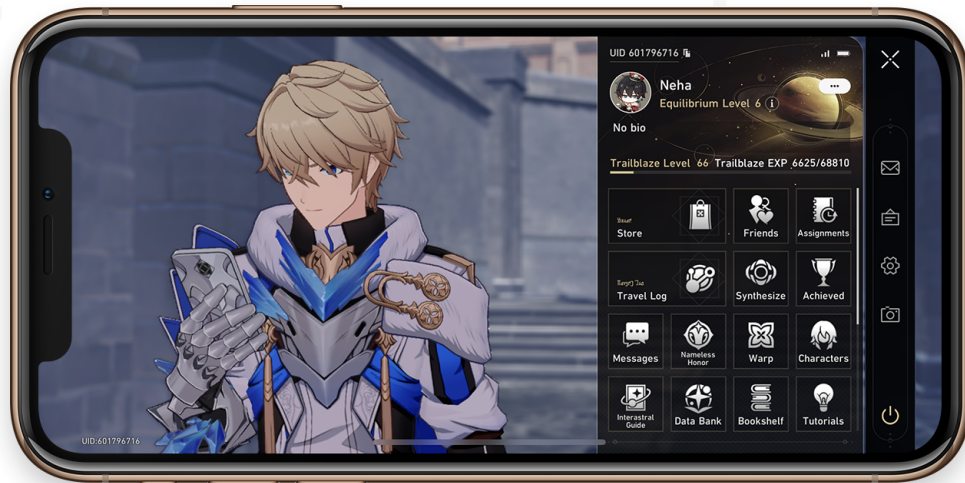
PLAYER PANEL

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The player panel** makes me feel **satisfied** because my needs for **attention to detail** and **ingenuity** are met**.

Explanation

The way the Player panel is designed is quite clever. It shows the currently active character holding a mobile phone, and a side panel pops up, similar to how phone micro-animations function. The options within the panel also somewhat resemble phone apps, further adding to the effect. Plus, each character also has their own individualized phone case, which shows great attention to detail and it overall an engaging touch.

I find that this dark color scheme works successfully, as it really stands out against the overall environments within the game. The more subdued colors are easy on the eyes, especially since the rest of the game design is so vibrant and energetic. I also love the little detail of the phone power button, which stands for turning the game off.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

GACHA SYSTEM

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The gacha system** makes me feel **mollified** because my needs for **gratification** and **fairness** are met.
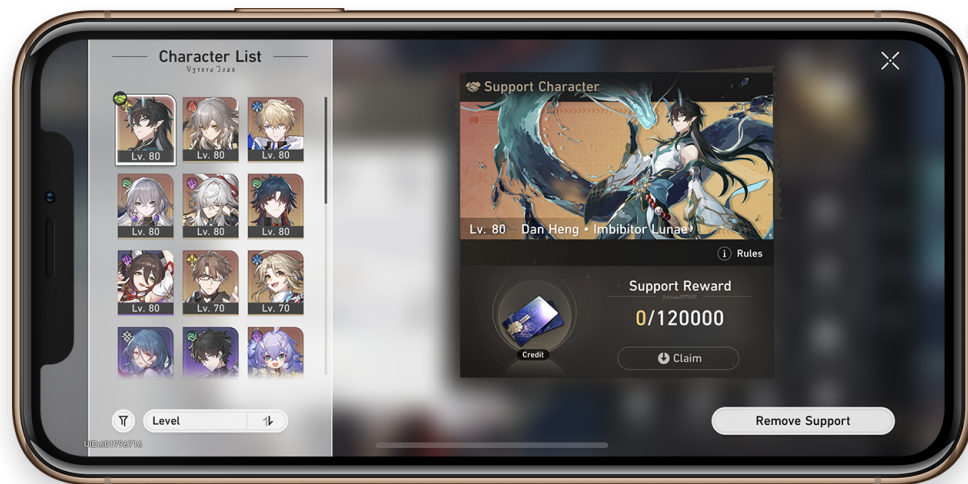
Explanation

Like Genshin Impact, Honkai: Star Rail also employs a gacha system for limited characters and equipment. The same 50/50 chance mechanic is used as well. However, a new addition was introduced to Honkai: Star Rail, which I believe makes the gacha system more tolerable. Players have the ability to select a 5-star character of their choice off the standard (the non-limited) banner once they reach 300 Warps on the standard banner.

I feel like this is a good trade-off, since there may be a standard character that a player wants, but is unable to obtain even after losing their 50/50s numerous times. So with this addition, they have a guarantee of getting the standard character they were never able to get before.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

SUPPORT CHARACTERS

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The support characters** make me feel **connected** because my needs for **companionship** and **assistance** are met.

Explanation

When in combat, players have the ability to use a support character, which is a character from another player's team, to help them in battle. This is beneficial for lower level players who have just started out and need help defeating enemies. Additionally, some enemies have certain combat types they're weak against, which support characters can take care of. As an example, I've used one of my friend's characters, Seele, against enemies who are weak to her Quantum combat type.

The player who sets this support character receives rewards every time their character is used in battle. It is an interesting mechanic, and I've received quite a few rewards from other characters using my support characters in battle. This makes me feel more connected to the player base, and also appreciated.
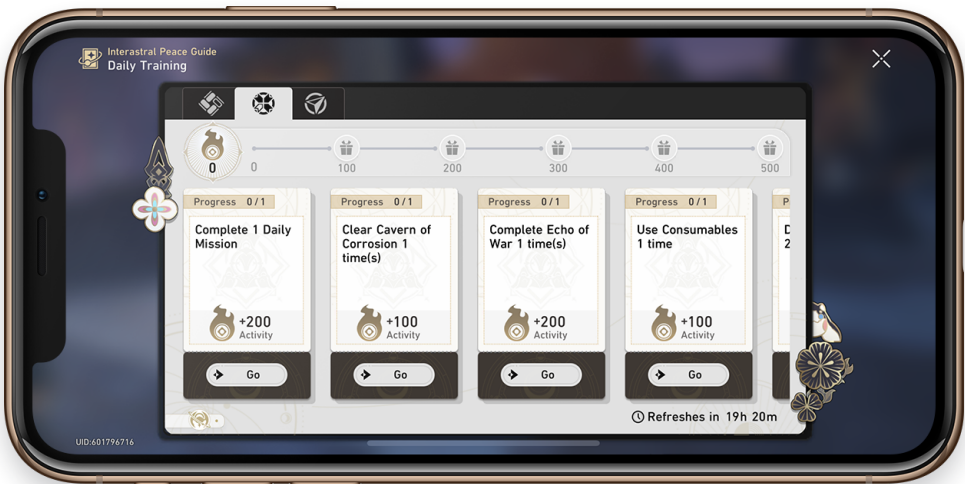
Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

DAILY TRAINING

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The Daily Training** make me feel **calm** because my needs for **simplicity** and **saving time** are met.
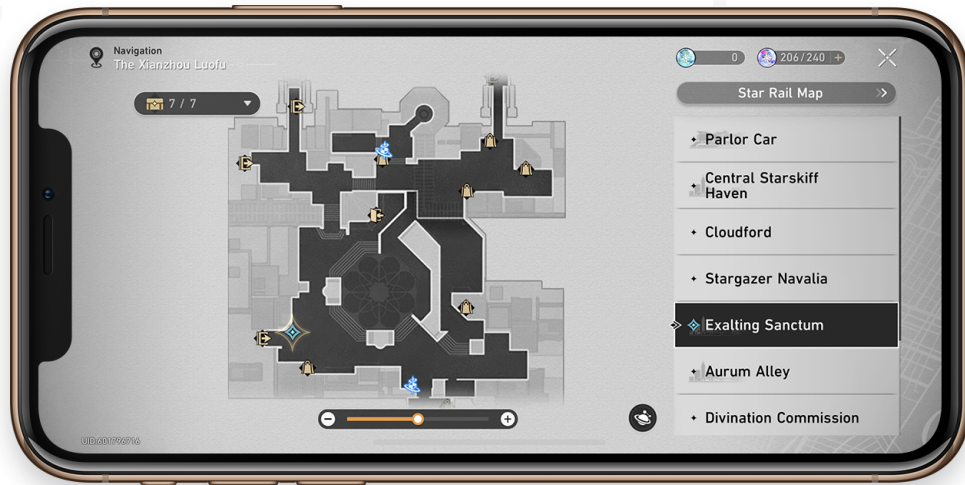
Explanation

Every day, the player receives Daily Training tasks to complete in exchange for Stellar Jades (the Honkai: Star Rail version of primogems), and other rewards like in-game currency. This is also the case in Genshin Impact. However, in Genshin Impact, players have to traverse all across a region to complete these tasks and it can sometimes be time-consuming. After listening to player feedback, Honkai: Star Rail made the process much simpler and less time-consuming. In fact, it takes me less than 2 minutes to do all of the tasks.

Most of the tasks themselves are extremely simple, such as taking a photo or breaking 3 breakable objects while exploring the map. I appreciate this, since I am more of a casual gamer and I don't want to spend too much time on tasks that can get repetitive on the daily.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

MAP

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The map** make me feel **reassured** because my needs for **clarity** and **navigability** are met.

Explanation

Honkai: Stair Rail's map is incredibly intuitive. It is linear and straight-forward, without many colors or symbols cluttering it up. I can find where I need to go within seconds, and don't have to finagle with figuring out if I need to be at a higher or lower altitude to reach my destination. Granted, the characters cannot jump, glide, or swim so there is no need for any sort of obstacles in the terrain. Thus exploration is uncomplicated and it takes me less than 20 minutes to find all the treasure chests in a newly introduced region.

There also exists another map view, which I find to be utterly spectacular. It introduces all the regions the player has unlocked visually. The gold against the dark background is so striking and aesthetically pleasing. It encourages players to unlock new regions just to see the new visuals be added!

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

COMBAT SYSTEM

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The combat system** make me feel **productive** because my needs for **automation** and **efficiency** are met.

Explanation

Since Honkai: Star Rail is a turn-based RPG, that means that the player has the option to autoplay and speed up battles. To be honest, I didn't know of this ability since this is the first real turn-based game I've ever played. So when I discovered this ability, I was flabbergasted. Essentially, this means the game fights battles for the player, and is honestly quite effective too. The artificial intelligence adapts to new enemies and characters, and the player can also input their own commands such as prompting Ultimate attacks.

With this, I am able to multi-task. I can clean my room or organize my files while battles are ongoing in the game. This makes me feel productive and that I am using my time more wisely. Other players also feel the same way, and since the world is so fast-paced, such a feature is appreciated.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

MUSIC

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The music** make me feel **energetic** because my needs for **discovery** and **choice** are met.

Explanation

Players have the chance to earn soundtracks when they complete certain quests, which they can unlocks and download into the in-game phonograph on the Astral Express. The music in Honkai: Star Rail is quite spectacular and also makes great background music while working, exercising, getting chores done, or just easy listening. Earning these soundtracks acts as a motivator for the player base, many of whom are fans of the music as well.

Using the in-game phonograph on the Astral Express, players can select what they want playing within the parlor car. This is a neat customization option, and I enjoy changing the tracks out to whatever is my current favorite. Since this system relies on gathering collectibles, it's also right up my alley as a completionist.
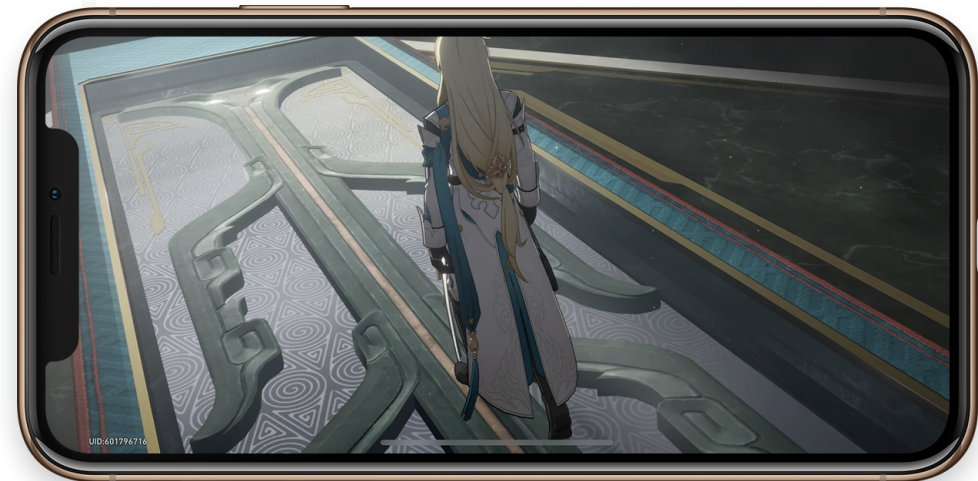
Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

CINEMATICS

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The cinematics** make me feel **awe-struck** because my needs for **beauty** and **inspiration** are met.

Explanation

There is definitely something to be said about Honkai: Star Rail's cinematics and animation. It is clear that the artist and animator teams put huge amounts of effort into each cutscene. All of the colors are thought out, making the scenes look cohesive and atmospheric. I value all of the care taken to produce these visuals and view it as a source of inspiration, being an illustrator myself.

The Honkai: Star Rail community as a whole is always excited and awe-struck when new animations drop, as evidenced by YouTube comments and Instagram posts. The fact that this happens displays good user experience in a sense because of the way it engages the community and inspires them.

Honkai: Star Rail: UX and UI

CONVENTIONAL MEMOIR

Feel-Needs Statement

❖ **The Conventional Memoirs** make me feel **relieved** because my needs for **rediscovery** and **participation** are met.

Explanation

Each version patch update of Honkai: Star Rail introduces a variety of new events, similar to Genshin Impact. Some of these events are pertinent to the main storyline, and add more personality and development to the game's characters. A major issue players had in Genshin Impact was that if they missed a event during a certain patch update, they had no chance to play it and unravel more of the story and characters. The players felt they were missing out on a lot of important story details due to this.

So in Honkai: Star Rail, the Conventional Memoir was introduced. With this, players are able to play through an event if they missed it as any time they desire. Unfortunately, they won't be able to received the limited time completion rewards, but they will still be able to progress with the story in this way.

Video Game UX Analysis: Conclusion

GENSHIN IMPACT

Genshin Impact features an immersive and interactive open-world map, which is a major draw for the player base. The game has the ability to transport the player into another world, and allows them to live vicariously through the eyes and footsteps of the Traveler. Every character is designed to be appealing, with their own personalities, gimmicks, motivations, and quirks. Because of this, there is something for every player. The wide variety of content that Genshin Impact offers – such as mini games, combat arenas, challenging mini boss fights, the Serenitea Pot, and more – also add to this notion. The game offers multiple hours of engagement and emotional motivators for players to keep playing. I estimate that I've spent over 1,000 hours playing since I started May of last year.

It does have areas which could use some UI improvement, such as the world map and setting panel. They can be made more functional and accessible. In addition, the gacha system could be optimized to be more rewarding for players.

HONKAI: STAR RAIL

Honkai: Star Rail took a lot of Genshin Impact's UI shortcomings , worked on fixes, and implemented them. This shows that they took player feedback into great consideration. Overall, I find it to be a more combat-based game rather than exploration-based. The character designs are appealing and the story is interesting, but I find it's not as immersive as Genshin Impact. Since Honkai: Star Rail isn't an open-world game, this is to be expected. I don't find much fault with it, as it does offer many convenient aspects such as being able to autoplay through combat, as well as replay past limited events. These aspects enhance usability and accessibility. I also appreciate all the care given to the visuals, animations, cutscenes, and music.

A few nitpicks that I have is that the characters could be developed more so I could be more emotionally attached to them. This is an aspect from Genshin Impact that Honkai: Star Rail doesn't have.

FINAL THOUGHTS

After playing both games for many hours each, I find myself more emotionally invested in Genshin Impact due to its immersive nature. However, if I want to go through a few rounds of combat, which can prove challenging and engaging, I can play Honkai: Star Rail. The added convenience that Honkai: Star Rail offers through autoplay means I can multitask (and perhaps even play Genshin Impact simultaneously on my PC!).

Overall I enjoy both games, for different reasons. They both offer different play styles to players; this variety means there is something for every player. I think it's wonderful that the designers and developers are taking player feedback into consideration by adding fixes in upcoming patch updates.

THANK YOU FOR READING!