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Brewing Happiness Design Aspects of Coffee Representation in Cozy Games

Abstract

This paper examines the way coffee is represented and used in cozy games. As a genre, cozy games are defined by the concepts of safety, abundance, and softness, which together establish a sense of coziness. Coffee, commonly associated with casual and friendly social situations, has a potential to be a strong contributor to coziness within cozy games. To explore this, the authors identified 27 cozy games containing coffee-related elements, and then performed a qualitative analysis on their content. The analysis found it was comparatively rare for coffee themes to strongly impact the overall game experience; however, there was a significant tendency for coffee to amplify the game's overall sense of coziness.

Keywords: cozy games, coffee, brewing, game design, game analysis, qualitative analysis

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Introduction

Of games and coffee

The goal of this paper is to examine the confluence between the genre of cozy games and the cultural significance of the beverage of coffee. To this purpose, the authors examine in what capacity coffee appears and is represented in cozy games. Considering the way coffee as a beverage tends to be associated with casual, friendly social situations, the initial research question is: do cozy games make use of rituals relating to coffee as a mechanic to build an atmosphere of coziness?

The paper begins with an examination of the historical usage of coffee as a game feature, which can be traced all the way back to the early 1980s; across various genres, coffee or coffee-drinking have been used as a power-up, a resource, or simply a narrative moment. Subsequently, the ideas of coziness, cozy games, and coffee are examined considering existing literature. The main part of the paper then presents a framework used to review the motif of using coffee across 27 cozy games, and the qualitative results of this analysis, emphasizing especially the way coffee is applied within specific game mechanics, and the way coffee is symbolically connected to coziness in games.

The aim of the research was to verify the hypothesis concerning the significance of coffee representation in cozy games as a key element of building coziness. The analysis sought to examine the issue from three perspectives: game studies, cultural studies, but also game design theory. Thus far, coffee has not been examined as a motif in cozy games in detail, but both its quantitative representation in the genre and the spectrum of its meanings vis-à-vis coziness indicated the need for such an analysis.

The results of this research thus indicate a significance of coffee in cozy games across three layers: aesthetic, narrative, and mechanical. We have also noted areas where the coffee motif is especially key in user experience design.

Coffee and games: A history

Coffee – brewing, serving, and drinking it – has been a part of videogame culture since at least the 1980s. Videogames like *Kung-Fu Master* (Irem, 1984) and *Double Dragon* (Technos, 1987) featured coffee as a power-up collectible replenishing the player's health. In the last two decades of the 20th century, some PC videogames contained a coffee-related motif in their gameplay, such as brewing the perfect espresso. As videogame technology evolved, coffee continued to appear in various forms. In the 2000s, games like *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2000) and *Animal Crossing* (Nintendo, 2002) featured coffee-drinking as a social activity, allowing players to invite friends to conversation over for a cup of coffee.

There is a wide variety of symbolism of coffee in videogames. For instance, in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar Games, 2004) an invitation for some “hot coffee” represents a sexual offer. A mod called *Hot Coffee* (2005) enabled players to access sexual graphic content that, although abandoned by the game’s creators, remained hidden in the game. Subsequently, the mod survived the post-release disabling patches and resurrected in *GTA IV* (Rockstar Games, 2008) as a Warm Coffee achievement description: *Have a successful date with a girlfriend to get invited into her house.*

In many games, coffee (the beverage) is a resource able to boost one or more aspects of the PCs’ performance, such as their stamina (e.g., Matapang Coffee in *Cyberpunk 2077* [CD Projekt, 2020], coffee in *Red Dead Redemption II* [Rockstar Games, 2018]). In others, it is something one needs to grow, produce, exploit, and sell (e.g., the *Victoria* series [Paradox Interactive, 2003–2022]). However, this article will not take that latter group into consideration because of the low impact of the coffee for the overall gameplay and/or user experience. Some videogames use the motif of coffee-drinking to justify the main plot – a crown example would be *Coffee Crawl* (Vectorinox, 2018), an RPG Maker action roguelike with RPG elements, in which the protagonist uses coffee to stay awake in a world affected by a sleep epidemic. This is an interesting case – access to coffee beans is crucial from the narrative perspective but in no way does it impact the gameplay, meaning that coffee could have been replaced by any other resource without significant changes to the game’s aesthetics or mechanics.

Coffee-drinking scenes are also frequently used in non-cozy games as an interlude between high-tension gameplay parts. In *The Evil Within 2* (Tango Gameworks, 2017), the protagonist takes his time brewing and pouring coffee – these coffee breaks constitute the coziest moments in the game, which, as a survival horror, is definitely far from the cozy genre. The same application can be observed in other games, including *Deadly Premonition* (Access Games, 2010).

Getting cozy

Cozy videogames are a relatively new game genre but they are gaining popularity. They can be briefly introduced as games that pose challenges without raising the players’ stress (which is achieved, among other things, by avoiding negative in-game feedback) and overall enable users to experience a feeling of coziness. At this point coziness will be addressed as a scale of how strongly a game evokes the fantasy of safety, abundance, and softness (Short et al., 2018). Since before the recognition of cozy games as a genre, coffee has been a staple beverage used in videogames to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

While there are few texts on the representation of coffee in videogames (see Werth, 2021), we encountered very few works specifically exploring the coffee motif in cozy games. The concept of coziness has a great potential to be represented through coffee and coffee-related rituals. From the authors' perspective, cozy games seem to be the most natural site for coffee-related motifs. It is here that the symbolic meaning of coffee seems to be the most visible, as well as most visibly affecting game mechanics. This thesis already resounds with some academic voices (e.g., Waszkiewicz, 2021).

Given the nature of the present volume, the authors do not attempt to explicate the concept of cozy games here; that said, it is still worth noting that, while the term was first introduced around 2016, there has been an ongoing discussion on videogame coziness, even though it has also been known under different names such as *wholesome games* (Knight, 2019). For the purposes of the present paper, and similarly to existing research, the term "cozy games" should be understood here in agreement with the definition put forward by the Project Horseshoe collective (Project Horseshoe, 2017), with one distinction mentioned below. According to Short et al., then, the essence of cozy videogames can be summarized in three complementary aspects:

- a) safety – absence or minimization of risk (resulting in not inducing fear-triggered decisions and feelings)
- b) abundance – as opposed to city builders, business simulators, etc., cozy games avoid the scarcity of resources. "Nothing is lacking, pressing or imminent" (Short et al., 2018).
- c) softness – the aspect of softness of cozy games in the perspective adopted in this study is not limited to the aesthetics of the game, but can be represented simultaneously by game art, story, mechanics, game pacing, and even user interface design. As the cited definition was put forward at the end of 2017, while the needs fulfilled by cozy games are gaining in significance both in terms of the player community and their market segment, the meaning of "softness" is treated expansively here. Any uncertainty is resolved by considering the importance of softness for the overall player experience in the given title.

Research objectives

Recognition of cozy games as a genre has immense potential in the work towards understanding the players' needs and mapping them out in existing gamer taxonomies, e.g., the Gamer Motivation Model by Quantic Foundry or Richard Bartle's player typology. Secondly, by introducing a previously unexplored set of player needs, habits, and expectations, further research on cozy games and

their audiences will most likely accelerate the process of revision of the older classifications, like Richard Bartle's (1996) taxonomy, that do not seem to fully cover the variety of player approaches and needs. Understanding cozy games can initiate a transformation of what Juho Hamari and Janne Tuunanen (2012) describe as psychographic segmentation in player taxonomies (2012, pp. 2–3). The need to explore the role of coffee in cozy videogames is also, frankly, driven by the authors' own interest in coffee representation in digital media and in how coffee can be transposed into gameplay in a videogame.

There is, of course, a wealthy body of research on the social practices surrounding beverages, including coffee; such texts examine the beverage of choice from various perspectives, including their history and social roles. Then, there are also myriad other concerns such as business, power relations and structures, especially with regards to the role played by specific beverages in colonial dynamics – an issue certainly important for coffee. Among the numerous works discussing these topics specifically in the context of coffee, there is a consensus on the critical role of coffee as a social drink and the coffeehouse as a social venue (c.f. Fregulia, 2019; Morris, 2019; Kerr, 2021), though rarely in the specific context of coziness. If anything, the social history of coffee focuses on the opposite: Gordon Kerr (2021) begins his book with a series of quotes labeling coffee as a revolutionary drink which makes people think, which enlivens the tired and keeps the exhausted awake. Conversely, Kerr then notes coffee was “the conduit for good conversation and relaxation and escape from the cares of the long, hot day” (Kerr, 2021, p. 9). Coffee thus manages to combine two different strands of association – it is a revolutionary, awakening drink, simultaneously providing space for escape and comfort, especially when in dialogue with another person. The former aspect of exhilaration could be found in the earlier-cited titles where coffee is used as a power-up for players; the latter aspect can be expected in cozy games.

While there is ample research on coffee in general, our research has found that the coffee motif not only in videogames, but even in the broader area of comparative studies in coffee culture between East and West (or rather on the North-South axis, as will become clear), is visibly underrepresented. Furthermore, most of the prominent works from the last five years come from the global South and concern those markets (e.g. Nyu, 2019; Turyasingura & Agaba, 2022; Özkök & Erbay, 2022). The scale of research gaps in the topic of coffee culture becomes clear when the related literature is compared with the numerous works in the overall field of food studies, both treating coffee as a unique cultural element and examining it as a reflection of other aspects of culture. It is also important to note the cross-pollination between food- and game studies (e.g., Ensslin, 2011), which was recently explored in the volume *Delicious Pixels: Food in Videogames*

(Waszkiewicz, 2020). This source is especially noteworthy given that the author of the volume also studies cozy games (Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020).

Finally, a word is needed on the power dynamics around coffee production, or more specifically – on why these topics are omitted here. The authors acknowledge that the history of coffee is intricately tied with colonial oppression and slavery (c.f. Fregulia, 2019). However, this is not in any way an intrinsic aspect of coffee, which in the mountains of New Guinea has also been giving economic freedom to small landholders in postcolonial societies (e.g. Downs, 1986). In any case, while the concerns of postcolonial studies are certainly an important research lens, they are better applied on the aforementioned game genres where coffee is used as a resource. These titles, though, are beyond the scope of the text.

The results of this research thus indicate a notable significance of coffee in cozy games across three layers: aesthetic, narrative, and mechanical. We have also noted areas where the coffee motif is especially key in user experience design.

Methodology

In choosing the games to study, the authors adopted two basic criteria. Firstly, the chosen games had to be identifiable as cozy games according to the basic definitions mentioned here. Secondly, coffee-drinking, rather than coffee as such, had to be of narrative or ludic significance; the games presenting coffee only as a product or resource (e.g., games where coffee is one of the common cultivables) were not taken into consideration.

With regards to cozy games, it is worthwhile to recall here the significance of empathy in their design. Jonathan Belman and Mary Flanagan (2010) distinguish two kinds of empathy while designing videogames – cognitive and emotional. While cognitive empathy is quite self-explanatory, their understanding of emotional empathy as a paradigm for videogame design is especially helpful while discussing cozy games. As emotional empathy “invokes a psychological reaction in the recipient, allowing them to understand what another person is feeling” (Wäppling, Walchshofer, & Lewin, 2022, pp. 6–7), it can be particularly useful in terms of providing players with tools for self-reflection, which is an important aspect of the aforementioned manifesto of cozy games (Short et al., 2018). Furthermore, Belman and Flanagan divide emotional empathy into two categories: parallel, understood as the player feeling the same emotions as their avatar, and reactive, where the player experiences a different feeling as a response to the emotional impact of the scene (Belman & Flanagan, 2010).

The authors had to narrow down the category of cozy games to the titles that subjectively fit the Project Horseshoe definition the best. This almost excluded simulation games, where gameplay involving time management and scarcity of

resources positions these titles close to the very end of the coziness spectrum. It must be noted, however, that even simulators can contain significant cozy elements that are sometimes associated with the coffee motif. Nonetheless, they hardly affect the overall character of the game. As such, simulators are best considered separately from the present research, since the focus on cozy games requires here the design of a specific analysis instrument as described below.

To establish the importance of coffee both as a consumers' treat and a social ritual, the authors, after reviewing the literature, took a next step: manual keyword search in leading game platforms. The keywords searched for included #coffee #brewing #roasting #caffeteria #caffeine; the search was conducted across Steam and Good Old Games (GOG) platforms. These two platforms offered a broad – although certainly not exhaustive – overview of games falling within the scope of this article's interest. Whereas the authors focused on the PC games, they recognize the value of conducting similar research within Nintendo Switch store, as the console is a home platform to several console-exclusive cozy titles such as the *Animal Crossing* franchise.

Beyond keyword searches, it was decided a priori that any titles already known to the authors as being appropriate to the study would be incorporated even if they did not come up in search results. While a rigid search system is crucial in terms of maintaining research replicability, given the exploratory nature of the present study, the authors felt this would be the most appropriate to maximize the range of titles examined.

Once a set of titles containing significant coffee usage had been defined, it was divided into two categories: games that clearly match the definition of cozy games, and games that, while not fully adhering to the cozy game concept, nonetheless contain strong elements of coziness. However, the latter category of games was not included in the results' summary table.

Subsequently, the results were compared with the number of non-cozy but identifiably coffee-related titles on Steam and GOG to determine whether cozy games (or games with strong elements of coziness) have a statistically stronger presence within independent titles than in mainstream games. A total of 719 titles were identified on Steam using the indicated keywords, which constituted less than 1.4% of 52,100+ available titles (<https://store.steampowered.com/charts/>). Further content analysis narrowed the sample pool down to 268 games, i.e., 0.51% of all games available on the platform. At the timeframe of this research, between 7986 and 7994 PC games were available on GOG, of which a total of 22 games were identified using the keywords; this constituted about 0.275% of the collection.

Given the absence of a cozy game category in both platforms, it was difficult to determine exact numbers of games falling under the label, which made it impossible to compare the two platforms in this regard. Nonetheless, Steam clearly constitutes

the main source, especially with a sharp recent increase in titles: just three years ago, there were only around 10,000 titles, while as of May 2024, the number exceeds 100,000. Around 80% of titles available on Steam were developed and/or released at a time when cozy games were already identifiable as a genre.

In the third stage, the identified games were played; the authors' play was augmented by 'let's play' videos and by reading user reviews. For each game, top 10 positive, negative, and mixed reviews on Steam were selected, ranked by their utility rating (user scores) in the 11.04–06.05.2023 timeframe. The 'let's play' videos and video reviews employed in the study are indicated in the bibliography.

Subsequently, the games were classified based on the relevance level of the coffee-related motifs. The classification consisted of four factors or aspects:

A. Coffee motif – the number of coffee-themed loops/storylines/motifs, considered from either a game or narrative design perspective, divided by the average time of gameplay, as per data given by the publishers or in official reviews. Then the outcomes were grouped depending on the result and recalibrated down to a 3-point significance scale (0–2 points).

B. Experience – the influence of coffee-related activities on the overall user experience, on a scale from 0 to 3 points. The authors adapted the three previously described elements of cozy games, along with the additional criteria, for significance in conjuring the user experience strictly connected to the game's overall theme. Thus understood, significance is what designer Jesse Schell calls the resonance – “figuring out a theme and using every means to support that theme” (Schell, 2008, p. 49). One point was awarded for the presence of each of the three coziness factors (safety, abundance, softness), if they generated resonance, and constituted a gameplay component. Elements functioning outside of the main game space were rejected here.

C. Coziness – this criterium, once again considered on a 0–3 scale, was constructed in a simplified manner by analyzing whether the coffee-related elements of the game evoked safety, abundance and softness in line with the coziness definition. The important distinction between coziness as defined here and experience as defined in B above is that here coziness refers specifically and exclusively to the evocation of coziness by the coffee-related elements of the game.

D. Design aspects – specifically applied to coffee-related elements in the game mechanics, narrative, and game art, with 0 or 1 point added for the presence of coffee in each of these aspects of game development.

It must be stressed that any attempts to build a classification around concepts as intangible as coziness have to be subjective. After all, the definition of cozy games remains a subject of discussions precisely because of this reason. The authors' attempts to classify games within the categories above are subjective and carry

the risk of error, while another researcher might justifiably come up with entirely different assessments. Given the exploratory nature of the presented study, the authors preferred remaining open to this risk, rather than searching for a more objective, therefore more narrow and focused categorization.

The above methodology allows to qualitatively examine the way different games employ coffee motifs to support specific elements of coziness, as well as to analyze the way they are embedded in the game from a game design perspective. Even though the analysis instrument still requires the researcher to make subjective decisions on the perceived presence and strength of these elements, this methodology provides a way to objectify this subjective process.

Results

In the research process, the authors played, watched, and/or read 27 videogames, assessing various constituents over a total of ca. 160 hours of gameplay. Not all the titles proved to be fertile ground for the exploration of coffee. Table 1 lists the nine titles which yielded noticeable results in the classification based on the four essentials of coffee significance. The keys to the elimination of the remaining 18 titles were:

- irrelevance of coffee representation (no influence on the gameplay and/or overall user experience),
- the game using coffee to support elements that contradict the definition of coziness, thus resulting in a game experience that, even if still fulfilling the overall definition of a cozy game, was setting the coffee against it (e.g., time pressure in *My Cafe* [2016] or player exclusion in *Neko Maid* [2022]).

Table 1. Summarized classification results for coffee theme significance.

| Game title | Year of release | Coffee theme significance by | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------|----------|----------------|-------|
| | | coffee presence | experience | coziness | design aspects | total |
| <i>Coffee Talk</i> | 2020 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 10 |
| <i>Coffee Talk Episode 2</i> | 2023 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 8 |
| <i>Necrobarista. Final Pour</i> | 2021 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| <i>Caffeine: Victoria's Legacy</i> | 2020 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| <i>My Time at Portia</i> | 2018 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| <i>Persona 5</i> | 2016 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| <i>Animal Crossing: New Horizons</i> | 2020 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| <i>Unpacking</i> | 2021 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| <i>Stardew Valley</i> | 2011 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Average: | | 1.22 | 1.56 | 1.11 | 1.89 | 5.78 |

It would be difficult to begin the discussion without looking back to the most representative examples of the genre. In *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe, 2016), undoubtedly one of the most popular cozy farming games, coffee is a significant resource both from the perspective of the game mechanics and the narrative. Players can plant coffee, process the beans, make coffee; they can drink it or sell it to other game characters. The finished product provides an 83-second speed buff. The game also includes specific coffee-related items – the Hot Java Ring, when equipped, increases the player’s chance for coffee loot after killing a monster by 25%, while the Coffee Maker’s award is a free cup of coffee daily.

Being the only resource counted in Kegs, coffee is not considered an Artisan Good, and as such cannot be sold in the General Store. From the narrative perspective, coffee is a tool for cozy breaks and a socializer. Coffee is the only good in Stardrop Saloon described with an evaluative component: “It smells delicious. This is sure to give you a boost” (Coffee, n.d.).

In the aesthetic layer, brewing and serving coffee is not particularly different from other activities, though there is a clear message in scenes depicting coffee-drinking: apart from purely mechanical aspects, it offers a relaxing break from more demanding tasks. This mechanic is emphasized by the fact that, though coffee can serve as a dye or a resource to produce shirts, neither the coffee bean nor the brewed drink is ever used as a quest item.

In *Persona 5* (Altus, 2016), Café Leblanc is a location where the protagonist can rest between levels. There, they can renew the Spirit Points, one of the most important statistics in the game, by serving and brewing a coffee. This café plays another notable role – its location on the peripherals allows the player to listen to a relaxing soundtrack. Finally, Café Leblanc is the launch pad for the PC’s party, the Phantom Thieves. If the owner, Sojiro, is absent – typically after dusk – the player can brew coffee independently; that renews the Spirit Points for all members of the hero’s party.

The next title, *Caffeine: Victoria’s Legacy* (Kikai Digital, 2020) is a visual novel in which coffee is foregrounded as part of the protagonist’s core motivation. As the game tells us: “[t]he protagonist Taka is in search of what happened to his mum, who disappeared from his life just before his 6th birthday. Ever since then, Taka has lost all memories of his past. His only memory is a little coffee house in the corner of an alley, where his parents happily brewed coffee and served customers from all walks of life”. Despite treating coffee as its primary theme, *Caffeine* . . . limits the support of coffee symbolics to the game’s coziness. And it does so in a potent way – using coffee as a symbol of a happy childhood or even the hero’s internal balance; yet, the emotional capacity of the story is dissipated in the gameplay.

Another significant case is *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Nintendo, 2020; AC:NH). The players can “drop by for coffee” by visiting someone else’s island;

it is an important aspect of socialization and an in-game mechanic, allowing the players to control the game's pacing. A similar scheme is also visible in *Spiritfarer* (Thunder Lotus Game, 2020), a cozy adventure game which features scene of characters engaging in heartfelt conversation with the protagonist over a cup of coffee. Regardless the parallelism to *AC:NH*, it was not taken into consideration in this study; *Spiritfarer's* coffee scenes are functionally just cutscenes, lacking in player agency. By contrast, in *AC:NH*, when returning home from a quest, we may visit The Roost for coffee; here, besides a conversation with Brewster (a quest summary intended to amplify the player's sense of achievement), the game also offers inviting other NPCs to socialize around coffee. This is a simple example of a mechanic that creates or augments the player's experience, without grounding in gameplay.

Unpacking (Witch Beam, 2021) fully matches the definition of cozy games. This is an interesting case: while in terms of a genre, it is categorized as a simulator, it turns into an *anti-simulator* when one considers the user experience: the resource limitations exert no pressure on the user, the aesthetics do not amplify a sense of time constraint, and the user's progress is quite subjective. There is no binary success/failure in the main questline, nor is there a progression tree as one might expect from a simulator. The coffee shows up in *Unpacking* as a Rare achievement: "brew some coffee"; after unpacking the coffee maker and other necessary equipment, the player can make and drink some coffee with no effect on the mechanics or story – just for pure pleasure of the activities.

The two episodes of *Coffee Talk* (2020–2023; CT) are challenging to summarize as the symbolics of coffee is literally flowing over. The social phenomenon of a coffee shop as a symbolic safe space to share personal stories is a clue of the gameplay. That said, whereas in the first part of the game the story revolves around coffee, *Episode 2: Hibiscus & Butterfly* introduces another experience both in aesthetics and the nature of the interactions; further possibilities of world exploration amidst the calming sound effects and music keep the coziness of the gameplay activities unrelated to coffee.

Necrobarista: Final Pour (2021; NFP) can be compared to *Coffee Talk* in terms of intensity of the coffee theme and its significance to overall user experience, but NFP's aesthetics are much farther from coffee than the CT series. In NFP, the coffee shop is a literal threshold (in its traditional, hero's journey-oriented meaning); yet there is no clear distinction in the artwork or music between the intro and the coffee shop.

In *My Time at Portia* (2018), the Portia Café is an inaccessible location, used by one of the NPCs to sleep or relax. This shows how little importance coffee bears to the gameplay in this title.

While researching games for this text, the authors found some drinks on the way – cozy games in the making. One upcoming title, potentially important in the discussion on coffee-themed cozy games, is *Affogato* – an indie RPG with tower defense mechanics made by Befun Studio. It is being introduced by its developers as a *Cozy Coffee Shop RPG*. The teasers show the importance of grinding and brewing the coffee. The coffee shop as a safe space for social gatherings, as well as serving the coffee to build or maintain relationships, are portrayed as crucial: *Mind treating your old friend to a cup of coffee?* (Davidinc RPGs, 2023).

There is at least one more beverage-themed cozy game worth mentioning. Like *Affogato*, *Pekoe* is still in development but its release date keeps being moved. “Pekoe is a cute cat-filled tea-making simulation game about taking the time for self-care and connecting with the things that make you happy” (Pekoe Presskit, n.d.). The game is oriented towards slowness and ritual perfection, clearly in reference to tea culture proper to the Global South (see below). The game depicts the tea journey from plantation, through processing, brewing, and finally to serving. It reveals many tea rituals, worthy of mention because none of the games reviewed in this paper have devoted any attention to this aspect, even when allowing coffee to be served. The authors suspect this gap will soon be filled.

Conclusion

This analysis revealed that while it is comparatively rare for coffee to impact the overall game experience, the coffee-focused games certainly tend to use the coffee for amplifying the game’s overall coziness. The primary symbolic meaning of coffee seems to differ between the coffee-oriented games and the cozy games containing just coffee-related narrative elements. While the latter treat coffee as a positively associated resource, power-up, or reward, the former emphasize the social interactions constructed around brewing, pouring, and drinking coffee.

In this regard, one can observe a dichotomy between cozy videogames and games that merely include any cozy elements (usually aside from the main storyline). Both types use coffee to enhance the coziness. However, while cozy videogames – if they use the theme of coffee at all – support the coffee-related cozy elements with the game story, the analyzed games containing a limited amount of recognizably cozy coffee-themed features tended to implement the aesthetic aspects of coffee in the game. All studied games use the mechanics dedicated to coffee-related activities, but in cozy games those mechanics are significantly more present and connected to the protagonist’s skillset and/or backstory (except for *The Unpacking*, explained earlier).

While it might seem that the role of coffee in these games could be filled by any other beverage, like tea, their images in the Global North and South are somewhat

different. The literature frequently discusses the Global East and South's association of coffee-drinking culture with Westernization. As Wang (2022, p. 27) argues, "By drinking coffee, Chinese people absorb the enthusiastic and romantic adventure spirit of Westerners". Ayo Oniku and Olamide Akintemehin (2020) make similar claims regarding Nigeria, while John Bosco Turyasingura and Moses Agaba (2022) point at the changing coffee culture in Uganda as an adaptation of the Western values represented by coffee. One of the authors has – coincidentally – travelled extensively through South East Africa, observing that while Zambia, Tanzania, and Kenya developed a strong coffee plantation market, the locals appear to mainly drink processed coffee (Africafe/Nescafe). Ironically, while coffee came to China from the West, Africa tells a different story: coffee as a beverage either originated in Ethiopia and then got transmitted to the Middle East, or was discovered in the Arabian Peninsula; in either case, it was traded throughout East Africa by Arabs under the Omani Empire – before being replaced by tea under Western (British) rule.

Contrary to the above, Safitri Dini and Anna Nada (2022) have argued that while coffee culture arrived in Indonesia recently, it has no clear relation to the Western consumerist microculture. This claim is backed up by the coffee shops and cafes offering specialty-quality coffee. It may also be noted that coffee-drinking, rare in Indonesia, did not begin with Western influence, but again can be traced centuries backwards to the large-scale Islamization of Indonesia spread by Arabic trade across the Indian Ocean.

Finally, there is a multitude of different rituals existing for one beverage among different cultures, like one symbol may carry different meanings. This is highlighted by Shichao Wang (2022), who argues Chinese tea lovers find tranquility, purity, and self-cultivation in their tea-related rituals, whereas the Western tea brings enthusiasm, boldness and convenience.

The present paper is only an initial, exploratory foray into the topic at hand. The authors recommend further research to examine, both more deeply and more broadly, the connection between coffee and cozy games, as well as perhaps an even broader look at what digital games in general have to say about coffee and coffee culture. Furthermore, it would be natural to expand this investigation to examine and/or compare to coffee other beverages like chai/tea, yerba mate, cocoa, etc. Finally, it may also be worthwhile to build a connection between the very rich field of alcohol studies and game studies; however, given that alcohol only rarely connects with coziness, this strand of research would inevitably lead beyond cozy games.

Coffee culture in the Global South is currently undergoing transformation and expansion, as indicated by scholars, media, and financial reports alike (e.g., Wiraseto, 2016). Indeed, coffee is forcing out other traditional drinks in their social

functions (see Erbay, 2002). When considering cozy games, a genre especially popular in East Asia – as indicated both by the geography of sales on Steam and the numerous Japanese and Korean indie studios developing such games – titles dealing with other beverages (chai/tea, yerba mate, etc.), are very poorly represented. This may suggest coffee symbolizes values more representative of the preferences of the videogame generation or is simply preferred by this generation. Such a hypothesis is beyond the current article, but worth examining. To consider a deeper examination of the values and symbolic meaning of coffee compared to other beverages in cozy games, one would need to examine the geographic and ethnic/cultural origins of both the players and the developers. This would be vital to establish what the values and preferences of the developers are and what audience they cater to. While this line of examination is not necessary in a study of the intensity of coffee representation in cozy games, it would be a prerequisite in any broader exploration of the cultural issues and causes of the depiction of coffee as described in this article.

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Authors' caffeine journal

The above text has been influenced by the following coffee types:

Authors' discussion – Kenya Zahabu, Burundi (manual drip, aeropress)

Game analysis – Colombia Bucaramanga, Ethiopia, Brasil Immaculada (espresso/ americano)

Literature review – Zambia, Colombia Potosi XO, Tanzania (manual drip)

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