

# PLAYER AGENCY, DECISION-MAKING, AND MORALITY IN CINEMATIC CHOICE-BASED ADVENTURE GAMES

**Department:**

Systems Design Engineering

**Program:**

PhD

**Project type:**

Dissertation

**Project co-researchers:**

Dr. Lennart Nacke, Stratford School  
of Interaction Design and Business,  
Faculty Supervisor

## KARINA ARRAMBIDE

Cinematic choice-based adventure games (CCAGs) offer examples of complex decision-making through player choices. These games are a perfect opportunity to understand player agency through the decision-making processes of players.

Do players feel a sense of control over their decisions in CCAGs? Do they feel differently when watching someone else's gameplay instead of playing the games themselves? Do players translate their real-life morality to their gameplay, or are they driven by experimentation?

Arrambide's dissertation provides an in-depth investigation into agency and decision-making terminology to improve CCAGs and player experience. While we can learn a lot about agency and morality from game design theory, it is essential to understand that players and theorists often have entirely different definitions of terms like "agency," "decision-making," and "morality."

Arrambide also conducted multiple studies focusing on player agency and morality in CCAGs. She found that while feelings of agency were increased when participants made decisions, they often felt like they did not receive meaningful feedback to indicate that their decision mattered. She also found that players enjoy experiences where they can personalize their character based on their morality.

This work provides an understanding of the perceived agency and moral dilemmas of games, which can help game developers optimise the mechanics behind player choices.

**Interesting fact:** Participants in Arrambide's studies played popular story-driven video games such as *Until Dawn*, *Life is Strange* and *Detroit: Become Human*, in which the player makes many high-stakes decisions.