

Other Me: A Visual Novel Accompanied by a Digital Comic on Breaking Down the Experiences and Stigma of Having Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

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Abstract: *This thesis paper studies how a certain disease called Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV can affect a person's way of living, relationships as well as their mental and emotional state. In cases like this, we tend to focus more on science and physical wellness. Certainly, that's not a bad thing, but the researchers wanted to show that a disease could destroy not just a person's physical body but also their minds, emotions and life in general. For them, it's necessary to give the same attention and care to these things. The researchers created a visual novel (interactive storytelling video) and a digital comic that tells two different stories of "Andres". For the visual novel, the story is about the blossoming relationship of Andres and an HIV positive person that he meets online. For the digital comic, the story tells more mature themes—Andres' relationship, deceit, depression and coping up. With this kind of project, the researchers believe that it can spread awareness and somehow can give viewers knowledge and idea that these things happen and it's important to recognize them. The project is very applicable and timely since it is in the form of digital media, and usually media and online resources are the most used outlet of people nowadays.*

Keywords: Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Interactive, Storytelling, Video, Digital, Comic, Media, Awareness

1. Introduction

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It weakens a person's immune system by destroying important cells that fight disease and infection. A cure for HIV is sure to be found in the future. Here in the Philippines, 6 out of 10 Filipinos only know what Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV is. However, the Philippines is one of Asia's countries facing the fastest-growing HIV epidemic. According to The Lancet Public Health (Gangcuangco, 2019), the increase started in 2010 and has continuously evolved. Men having sex with men are disproportionately affected, accounting for 84% of all new infections. Human Immunodeficiency Virus can be transmitted in several ways. According to WebMD (Pathak, 2021), HIV spreads when an infected person's blood, semen, rectal, or vaginal fluids enter the bloodstream. The most common ways are through unprotected anal or vaginal sex or sharing needles or syringes with an HIV-positive person. In this paper, the researchers made a visual novel and a digital comic that gives a better understanding of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

2. Background of the Study

In a study by the National Institute of Mental Health or NIMH, stress is one of the serious factors to consider by people who have HIV. It is important to know that they have a higher risk of developing mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. By showing empathy and understanding, a person with HIV can help live his/her life easier. The researchers' main goal is to spread awareness of the mental health of people living with HIV. They made a visual novel accompanied by a digital comic telling the story of "Andres," a young man infected by HIV because of his wrong decisions. Andres, the story's main character, represents the existence of an individual living with HIV. The main issues shown and tackled in their visual novel and digital comics are discrimination and hate. The researchers wanted to show that HIV is not only a physical disease but also affects the patient's mental and emotional state.

The visual novel is about a young man named Andres, a 3rd-year college student living a normal, almost perfect life, but because of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, his father, who is his source of support, loses his job. Andres decided to look for a part-time job to help his father but failed. Desperately in need of money, he finds the world of "alter" where he can have both pleasure and money. But being involved in this world will be his biggest regret.

With the continued growth of HIV cases in the Philippines, the project is very timely. It is an absolute timing to make something that tackles several issues connected to HIV, especially because it was not given special attention, unlike other diseases, which the researchers believe are not right. Many people misunderstand this disease and continue to believe in such assumptions that are mostly lies.

3. General Objectives

The study's main goal is to raise awareness about the mental health of a person living with HIV. The researchers conveyed this by producing a visual novel accompanied by a digital comic. The researchers made a partnership with the Love Yourself organisation. The organisation serves as a reliable source of facts and information to support the creation of a realistic visual novel. By conducting interviews with different people that are part of it, the project will be fictionalised but based on real-life experiences.

Specific Objectives

- Produce a script and storyboard that will sequentially present the scenes of the visual novel about the experiences of having HIV.
- Illustrate the characters, backgrounds, environment, and scenes of the visual novel.
- Put the scenes together based on the script and storyboard of the story.
- Produce the visual novel and;
- Publish and present the visual novel accompanied with illustrative digital comics to Love Yourself Organisation as one of the materials they can use for their HIV awareness campaign.

4. Methodology



Figure 1: Requirements Modelling Chart

The requirements modelling shows how the visual novel and digital comic are created.

The project Other Me is made by having these skills; Sketching/drawing, story writing, 2d illustrating, video editing, colouring, texturing and sound designing. The software requirements are; Adobe Premiere, Adobe After Effects, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Audition.

The pre-production consists of; Meeting/interviewing with the LoveYourself Organization, character design sketching, environment design sketching, outlining the plot, writing the story and storyboarding. The production consists of; Building the characters (full drawing, colouring, etc.), and illustrating. The post production consists of; Compiling and sequencing, editing, adding texts and questions, sound designing (background music) and finalising.

5. Results and Discussions

The researchers conducted a survey among 30 respondents. Fifteen respondents are students from Far Eastern University, and the other 15 are outsiders. Each respondent was given a questionnaire and a preview demo of the visual novel and digital comic entitled Other Me to review. The method used for the sampling technique was the quantitative method to get a more general opinion of the results.

The respondents used online surveys to conduct the research. It was presented on Google Forms to ensure that the respondents could answer it at their own pace after viewing the visual novel and digital comic.

Figure 2: Survey Score Chart

Score	Equivalent
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

A short survey about the overall quality of the visual novel and digital comic. Questions regarding if various elements of the visuals were interesting and enjoyable, such as the story, the content, the characters, etc. Below are the results of each question where the question is indicated on the top left side of the graph illustration.

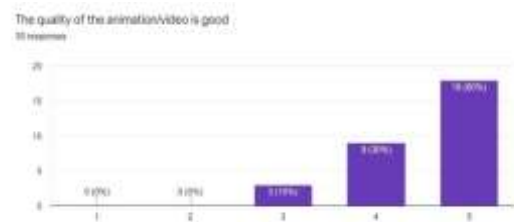


Figure 3: The quality of the animation is good

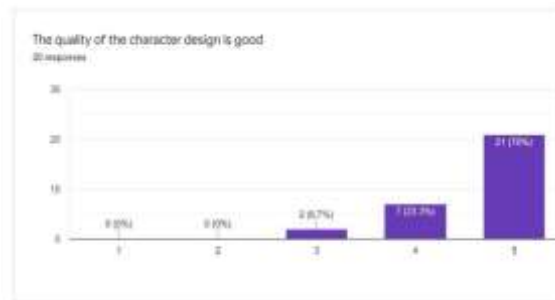


Figure 4: The quality of the character design is good

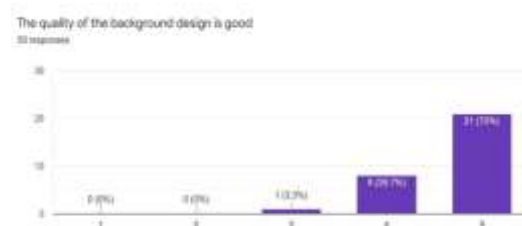


Figure 5: The quality of the background design is good

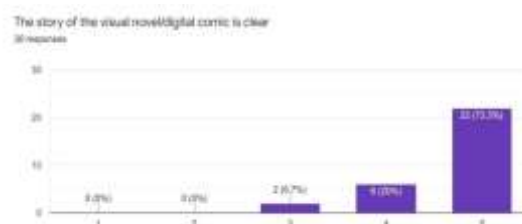


Figure 6: The story of the visual novel/digital comic is clear

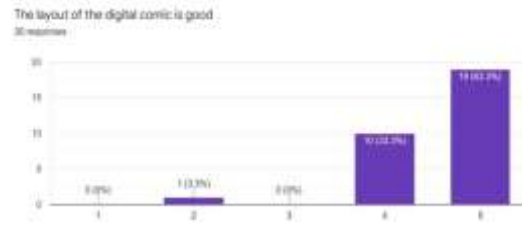


Figure 7: The layout of the digital comic is good

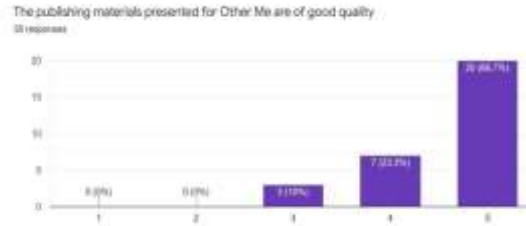


Figure 8: The publishing materials presented are good quality

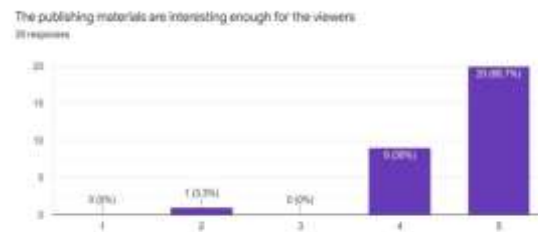


Figure 9: The publishing materials are interesting

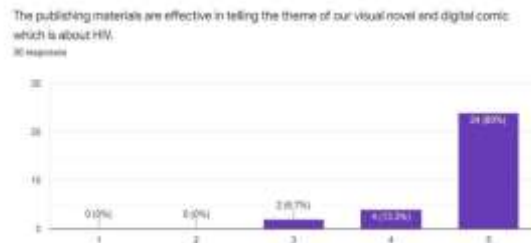


Figure 10: The publishing materials are effective

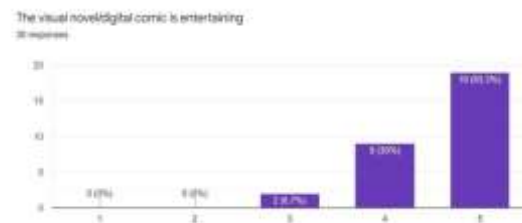


Figure 11: The visual novel/digital comic are entertaining

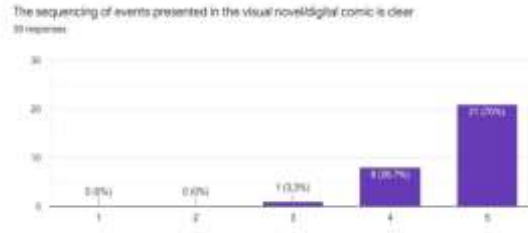


Figure 12: The sequencing of events are clear

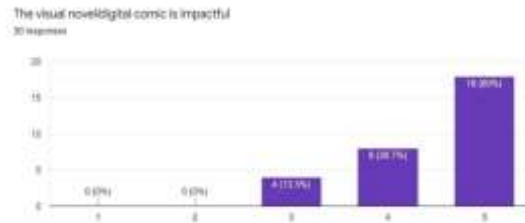


Figure 13: The visual novel/digital comic are impactful

Likert Scale Value

Figure 14: Likert Scale Value Chart

Score	Verbal Equivalent
1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree
1.81-2.60	Disagree
2.61-3.40	Neutral
3.41-4.20	Agree
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree

Figure 15: Likert Scale Results

Statement	Mean
1. The quality of the animation/video is good.	4.5
2. The quality of the character design is good.	4.6
3. The quality of the background design is good	4.7
5. The quality of the voice-over (narration) is clear	4.5
6. The quality of the sound design (including background music, sound effects) is good	4.6
8. The story of the visual novel/digital comic is clear	4.7
9. The layout of the digital comic is good	4.6
10. The publishing materials presented for Other Me are of good quality	4.6
11. The publishing materials are interesting enough for the viewers	4.6
12. The publishing materials are effective in telling the theme of our visual novel	4.7
13. and digital comic which is about HIV.	
14. The visual novel/digital comic is entertaining	4.6
15. The content of the visual novel/digital comic is interesting	4.7
16. The idea of the visual novel/digital comic is new	4.6
17. The visual novel/digital comic is impactful	4.4
18. The sequencing of events presented in the visual novel/digital comic is clear	4.6

The survey was given to a total of 30 respondents. Fifteen students from Far Eastern University and 15 outsiders could evaluate the effectiveness of the visual novel and its accompanying minor project, which is the digital comic. The survey consisted of mixed questions regarding the technical and non-technical aspects of the visual novel, such as the character design,

background design, video quality, sound design, and story. As for the 59 technical and non-technical elements of the digital comic such as the story, character design, background design, and layout design. Based on the average weighted mean of each question in the table. A majority of the respondents answered positively to the survey.

Summary of Findings

Based on the results interpreted from the survey. Most of the respondents gave positive responses in regard to both the major and minor project survey questions. Some important findings the researchers collected were the effectiveness and quality of the information presented to the audience in the visual novel and digital comic. The chosen theme to present to the viewers was received well, and most respondents gave positive feedback. Where the respondents gave a praising response commending the effectiveness of the theme in showcasing the visual novel and digital comic entitled Other Me. The respondents also gave a praising response to several aspects of the visual novel and digital comic. This includes the following outputs; story, character design, and sound design. However, there are also a few aspects in the output where it gets fair responses. But, that does not affect the overall performance of the presentation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on those surveys, the project was able to produce an interesting and informative visual novel that could educate its viewers on Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and keep them engaged during the entire show. The promotional drive's publishing materials, on the other hand, were a success. It was mentioned that the quality of these publishing materials was both good in quality and variety. And that the digital comic was a good extension of the visual novel. It has adequate content for further sources of information and additional details regarding the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). In addition, viewers were given a choice to watch the animated visual novel or read the digital comic.

The researchers recommend that future researchers choose a different topic they want to address and give special attention. It is also important to consider if your topic will stand out among all the studies presented throughout the years.

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