

# The Sense of Community in the Era of Online Socials A Case Study of Werewolf Killing Among Chinese Youth

Sidi Zhang<sup>1,\*†</sup>, Bowen Jiang<sup>2,\*†</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Providence University, Taiwan China

<sup>2</sup> University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

\*Corresponding author. Email: <sup>1</sup>s1071788@pu.edu.tw, <sup>2</sup>ml19bj2@leeds.ac.uk

<sup>†</sup>These authors contributed equally.

## ABSTRACT

This article describes different views and social needs expressed by the Chinese younger generation who are familiar with online or offline board games. The study targets werewolf killing, which is favoured by Chinese largest game publishers, as the main board game. It contains multiple dimensions to show the social goals and sense of achievement from the relatively young players. The main research methods are parallel designed semi-structured interviews. The main content comes from the interviewees' actual activities and behavioural habits, which talks about the experience or the imagined experiences of their games. It is argued that the online board game, like Werewolf Killing, plays an important role in defining the social identity of the younger Chinese generation.

**Keywords:** *Werewolf killing, Social needs*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Children or younger generations have always favored the game mode with predator and prey. Perspective-shifting is the key characteristic of the human predator-prey schema [1]. The actions of game participants change depending on whether their role is prey or a predator. Children who play the chaser will construct a mental representation that they are real monsters and act consistently with their imaginary identity [2]. This pretended action of children is related to personal memories and experiences. As a result, the chase game's content could be enriched with collaborative use of mental imagery derived from personal experience or frequently from culturally transmitted sources such as mass media [2]. Moreover, this transmission is highly connected with game participants' individual and self-constructions [3-8].

With the development of science and technology, the traditional game has changed a lot and been enriched. Games on digital platforms are more popular and are considered the same function as mainstream media [9]. Werewolf killing, the mobile social game this article primarily focuses on, could be regarded as the chasing game enriched by new media. Compared to traditional chasing game mode, both two games have the roles of chaser and flier, the latter of which could be hunted by

the chaser in the game. Additionally, these two roles could be frequently reversed during play [2]. In werewolf killing, the roles would also be changed by re-drawing the role card after every game round.

According to Steen, the chase game contributes to constructing children's identities in cognitive terms [10]. But all the players in the werewolf killing game have full cognition about themselves and participate in the game with different needs brought by their cognitions. As a mobile social game whose main audience is young people aged 18 to 25, the werewolf killing is more like a 'mirror' that reflects different social needs of diverse individuals. It accommodates no matter the executive identities or their actual identities in social interactions in the game. Participants enhance their sense of identity in the game instead of shaping. This study would be more concerned about participants' identities reflected by their game orientation and how they acquire the sense of achievement in this game.

In the term of gameplay, the role play in chase game generates a behavioral and mental simulation of a predator-prey interaction [10]. It means that chaser and flier have different goals in the chase game, hunting and evading, respectively. But in the werewolf killing, although the roles are different, all the participants have an additional goal to be eloquent and persuade others to

believe in their opinions. Competing through words conforms to the game style of adult individuals better.

This study draws attention to players' game tendency in a popular mobile social game named Werewolf, killing and exploring individuals' social identity reflected by the game. The study interviews people's specific social needs and self-reflection on their social identities through the interview method. Participants' social identities are analyzed in typology based on their preference for the characters in the game. Judgment, the controller of game progress, is also discussed in this study.

## **2. METHOD**

The board game Werewolf killing and its online version, which has been popular since 2017 in China, is the investigation's main focus. This article used the interview as the method to collect the opinions from the young generation of Chinese. It had collected twenty interviewee's opinions and summarized as a report about the differences between the offline and online game in the field of werewolf killing. The article had three interviews to collect data from interviewees, but not every interviewee asked all the questions. Some of the interviews are selective to show various social needs and self-construction by answering different questions.

Through these interviews, the interviewees supplied much valuable information, such as their attitude about online games and offline games, the willingness between human's God and system's God, and the part that they prefer to play. Under this information, the article concludes the werewolf killing and the young generation's characters in China.

## **3. THE CHANGES OF WEREWOLF GAME FROM OFFLINE TO ONLINE**

First of all, it is worthy to notice the vigor inputted by game participants. Generally speaking, the offline game has the limited capacity of the participants. For example, if one goes to play board games with friends in a house, but the house just has 30 square metres, it just can accommodate 10 people to play, so you can only with these 10 people and all of them are the gamer, rather than audiences. But the online games are different. The network platform offers infinite space for everyone. Everyone can watch every game. China has many video life streaming content and many network anchor broadcast on these platforms. If a platform holds a program about the werewolf game, many people will participate in this game by live broadcast and express their views about this game on the platform. In this way, the number of participants will be increased, and the number of participants is more than the offline game, obviously.

On the other hand, the offline game has another shortcoming. If one game has many participants, the game's time must be long, and some of the participants may be out of the game too early, while the game continues, although those who are out will feel boring, they have to wait for the finishing of the game. This is a very serious shortcoming of the offline game. The fresh man couldn't have a good experience of the game to lose interest in it. It is not good for the promotion of the game. But the online game will solve this problem. In the online game, if someone is voted for out of the game, he doesn't need to wait to finish the game. He can leave the room and do anything he wants. For example, if a YouTuber plays a werewolf game online, he is the villager but he voted as the criminal, and he died. Generally, in the offline game, he has to wait about 20 minutes for the next game. During this time, he can't do anything and just observe others players. But in the online game, after he died, he can interact with the audience on the Internet and quit this game to take part in the next game. It is the advantage of the online game.

The game environment between offline game and the online game also have differences. Nowadays, the live broadcast industry increases very rapidly, and many YouTubers have obtained fame on the Internet. Some of the live broadcast platforms will invite them to their program to play werewolf games, and their fans will observe the game on the live broadcast platform, and all of them will talk about the competition of the game.

In China, <Lyingman> is a very famous program during 2016-2018. It's a program held by "Zhanqi live broadcast platform". This program invited many famous E-sports players to play werewolf offline and live broadcast on the Internet. Those players' fans all followed their steps to watch the program and talk about it on every social media. According to the stats, the first season of <Lyingman> attracted more than one million viewers to watch on the "Zhanqi platform". This program total has eight seasons, and every season gets great success. This program inspires with a problem which is the way of distinguishing the offline game and online game. This kind of mode transfers lives offline games to online. Its participants are much more than the offline game. But, one must ask that, is it an offline game or an online game? If it is an offline game then, why are the participants more than the usual offline game? If it is an online game, why the players all sit in a room and face to face to play the board game? It is an issue worthy of discussion. In the following article, we will research the nature of the younger generation's social identity by connecting these vague characteristics of online and offline game modes.

The sense of distance is a difference between the offline game and the online game. In the offline game, the participant's range is limited, and almost every participant is friends with each other. Generally, only

acquaintances are willing to play board games face to face. The stranger will play together after deep communication. It spends too much time and still has a sense of embarrassment. But the online game will solve this problem. Every online game is random, and you don't know everything about other players. Maybe they're from a different country and speak different languages. The online game eliminates the distance of each other. Everyone in the world could play a game on the Internet. Maybe they can become a good friend through the online game. The online game will reduce the sense of embarrassment because the online game participants don't need to face to face. They can concentrate on the game instead of the others participants. They don't need to worry about others participants' action because when the game is over, they may never be seen again. So there is no need to worry about whether or not they leave a bad impression on others.

The social relationships between online and offline players also have differences. First of all, we will know a basic conception--extend the game friends group, in Chinese named expand one's friend list. It's a new conception that emerged in recent years among the young generation Chinese. It means the extent of the social friends, not limited to the game. It can be used in every situation about social contact. It helps understand the ways of spread the game between offline and online.

The ways of spreading the game between offline and online have considerable differences. The offline spread of the game is limited. You can only recommend to your friends and families, basically no more than 20 people. Perhaps they don't want to try to play this game. So the extent is small, and the effect of recommendation is not very well. But the online spread is more expansive than the offline spread. You can post in a forum or on social media about the game. It can be seen by more people and can attract many senior players to play with you. However, on the other hand, the offline spread can be used many times. For example, generally, you have a strong willingness to invite your friends to play a game with you, so you will recommend the game to them over and over again until they promise to play. Although it is a little effortless process, friends will get fun because the time that people play with friends is always very happy.

The attitude of the game of people may influence the social relationships of the game friends. Generally, people play a game to get more fun and relax. To increase the sense of fun, people are always more willing to play with friends, even if their friend not good at it. In their opinion, victory and defeat are not the most important. The fun with friends is the objective of the game. Some people have another opinion. They have a strong sense of victory and defeat. They think that they must win, except the victory; everything is meaningless. But their friends might not meet their requirement of the level of the game.

So when they find a game with friends, they might be more willing to find the hard-core player, even if it will be a stranger. When they start to cooperate, they can always win and get many achievements. Compared with play with friends and get fun, they are more interested in winning the games. We can't say which attitude is better, but we can know that these two attitudes about the game can stand for something about social relationships in this era's reality.

#### **4. THE ROLE-PLAYING OF WEREWOLF KILLING ONLINE**

Among all different social needs and participations, Werewolf killing is figured by its multiplayer strategy and driven mode by verbal description, contesting eloquence and analytical judgment. The usual version of the game requires 6-12 people to participate in the interaction. All the players will be divided into two opposite camps: the werewolf camp and the good guy camp. There are a large number of good guys, but they don't know the identity of others. The main methods of the good guy camp are exile voting and character skills. It is necessary to eliminate all the werewolf hidden in the crowd to obtain the final victory. Werewolf is few ,but they can distinguish between werewolf and good people, relying on hunting good people at night and inducing good people to vote incorrectly during the day to chase victory.

Every game of werewolf killing will be presided over by an outsider called 'judge' who doesn't participate in the game but dominate the whole process. Each werewolf killing game will start at night, and the 'judge' lets each player open their eyes, in turn, to determine the identity of each player to ensure the progress of the game. Every night the werewolf can open their eyes and hunt together with a player on the field while good guys can't. After the night, it will enter the day, and the day is where all players speak and vote. Each player surviving on the field during the day will speak to deduce the werewolf based on the loopholes of others' discourse. After all, players have spoken, the 'god' will organize an exile referendum. In the exile referendum, each player has the right to vote once. Players can vote for the werewolf in their minds. IN the end, the player with the most votes will be banished and leave a 'last word'. The 'last word' could be an analysis of the vote or comments on other people's utterances. After the "last words", the game will enter the next night, and the werewolf can once again open their eyes to select a player to hunt, so the "night-day-night" cycle, until a camp reaches the victory condition, the game is over.

Each camp has different requirements for victory. Good guys camp need vote out all werewolf hidden in the crowd. The werewolf camp has two ways to achieve victory. The first one is hunting all the gods with special skills. The second is hunting all the civilians.

The role of the good guy's camp in the Werewolf Killing is divided into two groups, civilian and gods. Civilians don't have any special skills, they have to keep their eyes closed at night, so they can't get any information. They could just express their opinions by analyzing the speeches of others to find out the hidden werewolf. Gods in the good guy camp have different special skills, which sometimes are the key to victory. There are mainly the following gods in the werewolf killing.

**Prophet:** Prophet can check whether a player is a good person or a werewolf every night and tell the result during the day.

**Witch:** Witch has two bottles of medicine. The antidote can save a player who was hunted by a werewolf at night, while the poison can poison a player. The witch could just use one bottle of medicine every night, and the witch cannot save herself.

**Hunter:** If and only if a hunter is killed by a werewolf or voted into exile, the hunter can show his identity card and designate a player to be shot, and he cannot activate the skill if a witch kills him.

**Idiot:** If the idiot is voted out, he could indicate his identity to be immune to this exile and speak normally afterward, but cannot vote. The werewolf still needs to hunt him to make him die. Nevertheless, if the idiot dies due to non-voting reasons, the skill cannot be activated, and the idiot will die immediately.

**Guard:** The can protect one player every night, but he cannot guard the same player for two consecutive nights. Players protected by the guard will not be killed by werewolves that night.

The content above is the roles of good guy camp that often appear in werewolf killings. There are likewise diverse roles in werewolf camp.

**Werewolf:** Werewolf is the basic character in the werewolf camp who could hunt a good person every night.

**Wolf beauty:** A wolf beauty can charm a person at night. After daybreak, if the wolf beauty is exiled or shot by a hunter, the charmed player will follow the wolf beauty and be out of the game with no skills.

**Wolf king:** After being exiled, the wolf king could use skills to kill a player.

Besides, the special camp is also an important part of the game.

**Cupid:** On the first night, Cupid could choose two players as a couple. Besides, Cupid can choose to be one of the lovers. If one of the lovers is unfortunately hunted, the other will die for him. If two of the lovers belong to different camps, their victory conditions will be changed

to the lovers just want to live peacefully, so they must get rid of all other players.

**Sheriff:** Sheriff is an additional identity card. There will be one player voted to be the sheriff by all players on the first day. The sheriff could speak in the end during the day and have 1.5 votes.

## 5. INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are currently three leading werewolf-killing mobile games on the market which are produced by NetEase Game, Tencent Game, and Langren World Network.

The Werewolf online Official produced by NetEase Game is the most popular game, Evaluated by about 460,000 people on the app store. In contrast, the other two games only have about 30000 evaluations on the app store. Werewolf at dinner is derived from a variety show about werewolf killing. Although it is operated by Tencent Game, the largest game producer in China, its popularity gradually decreases with the end of the show. Werewolf killing Classic is produced by Langren World Network, a much smaller game company than NetEase and Tencent. Hence, it couldn't have many views [11].

We collected five interviewees' opinions about the differences of "the god" in the offline game and online game. Through these interviews, three questions about the differences of "the god" in the offline game and online game were asked. The following are the three questions: 1. Are you aware that the system plays the "God" in online games? 2. The difference between the "God" played by offline people and the "God" of the online system. 3. Does it affect you when you play the game?

The first interviewee said that he aware of the first problem. He confirmed that people who can play God are somewhat familiar with the rules of the game. There is no difference between the system god and people god. The only difference is that offline games must have one player to stand up and be God, and one more person is needed. For example, a normal nine-player game, but because there is one person to be God, ten people are needed to start the game.

Theoretically, the fifth interviewee thinks that the system should be God because the system wouldn't make mistakes, and if people play God's part, there will be more or less make mistakes and some process problems. He doesn't like to be God himself. He said if he plays good, he doesn't have any game experience. Still, every time he plays an offline game, someone will come out to be God, which doesn't need him to worry. It's not his turn anyway, so he didn't think much about this problem as if there is no difference between a man playing God and system playing God, they are all playing the same game anyway.

The first interviewee said that he still prefers the system to play God because some players who are not familiar with the process will make mistakes more or less, especially some complicated things. After adding others new roles, they will make mistakes in the announcement, but this problem will not occur if it is a computer. However, when people gather offline, they are still willing to choose someone to be God face-to-face instead of taking out their mobile phones and opening a room online that everyone can come in and let the system help them be God.

Similarly, another interviewee has the same idea. This interviewee said that he played more online killing and was aware of this problem. In his view, God is not a player, and offline games must have a host. Offline hosts are “stupid” and often make mistakes, and the system will not make mistakes. From a rigorous point of view and pure gameplay, the system plays God better because, in an offline game, people often can’t figure out who is out of the game, but if it’s just for friends to have fun together. It’s more interesting that let one person play God. To conclude, God played by man, and God played by the system do not influence him; only one person is missing. This interviewee said that although being God will not be boring, he can be God, but he will not be willing to be God. God can open his eyes and look at the whole situation and see how people act, which is equivalent to watching the game. Play God is equal to not participating in this game, and he watches others play all the time. So once in a while, he can play one or two games to be the God. When he plays more games, he will feel that he has no game experience, and God can do nothing but announce and watch.

These two interviews show that some people prefer the system to play the part of God and prefer online games. Because they prefer to play the game more seriously, and they wouldn’t accept mistakes by human factor. It can easily show that this kind of people has a strong sense of win and defeat. They are more concerned about the process of the game. On the other hand, there are some different opinions about the differences of the play of the God between humans and the system.

The last interviewee had never played online werewolf killing, and she didn’t realize the first question. She thinks that the system is fair. When people play God1 and play the game process, they will have micro-expressions. Therefore, some players will especially observe the expression of the host, and then they can get some hints from the tone and expression of the host. Therefore, this uncertainty will be great and will interfere with the fairness of the game. But the system is a ruthless robot, so everyone only needs to speak to the microphone on the mobile phone, and there will be no external factors affecting the fairness of the game.

In offline games, because the host is the audience’s focus, all players will definitely focus on the host when

the game is going on. At this time, the host can’t laugh or have other expressions and can’t let others know from his expressions that he knows who is the murderer and who is the prophet. But the machine won’t give people any hints, and the players didn’t have to face each other online, and they didn’t know anything when they played with a mobile phone. So let her choose. She will feel that the system should be the host.

The third interviewee likes to be God very much. According to the original words she interviewed, ‘Because I don’t like playing games that require intrigue very much, I would like to be God very much if I were you, I am not very fond of playing games myself. However, if you don’t play in group games, everyone will think that you are very unsociable and feel destroying the atmosphere. Therefore, if I have to play, I am not very good at disguising myself. God is a very good role, for I can have a sense of participation without feeling out of place.’

Apart from the awareness of different speculative modes, players’ identities also matter. So another interview deal with the role imaginations. The five interviewees’ opinions can be roughly summarized into the following three points, which represent three diverse kinds of players.

The content of the first interviewer’s opinion is as follows: ‘I like play Prophet in the werewolf killing because I’m not very good at this game, and playing werewolf and lying to others is difficult for me. Prophet has a powerful special skill to check whether a player is a good person or a werewolf. I can directly show my identity and speak out the inspection result to contribute to the good guys’ camp. I don’t need to hide and think about how to find flaws from others. Playing prophet would give me a stronger sense of participation.’

The first interviewer’s view is with typical ‘novice’ characteristics, which shows that actually, they enjoy participating in this game and are eager to help their team. But they are constrained by insufficient gaming experience, so the prophet is the best choice to participate in this game. From the perspective of game playing itself, individuals who like to play prophet have many reasons. Compared to playing a werewolf, the prophet as a member of the good guys’ camp will make people more confident, have a stronger sense of participation, and make people get a better game experience. Compared with acting as a civilian, a prophet can check the identity in the dark and obtain more direct information, which is more helpful for the victory. Compared with witches and hunters, Prophet doesn’t have to make judgments to poison and shoot someone, making the player less likely to blame the wrong judgment.

Above all, players who like to play prophet are mostly newbies in the game, but they are eager to get rid of a novice’s identity and contribute to the team by using the

prophet's powerful inspection skills. Corresponding to the daily social circumstances, this kind of people are unwilling to be "transparent people" in social situations and magnify their advantages — prophet's inspection skill in the werewolf killing, to make themselves 'brightly'.

The second interviewee represents players who like to play civilians. His interview's content is as follows: 'I am favoured of playing civilian because it makes me loose in the process of the game. Other players call this kind of civilian like me a mob. I have no special skills and could question everyone in the game. I will even grab the position of the sheriff with other gods with special skills. I could also pretend to be a prophet to make time for the real prophet to test people or avoid the condition that all the gods are dead, and I have a sense of accomplishment whenever I make this successfully.' Players who like to play civilians generally have experienced players with strong game ability. The interviewee mentions in the interview that sometimes he would behave like a mob who could do almost everything he wants, and it also shows that this kind of senior player wants to be free and casual in the game-playing. But he also mentions many high-level gameplays related to the citizens, which sometimes is the key to victory. It shows that such players also tend to show themselves and help their team at critical moments, making them have a great sense of accomplishment. Most importantly, civilians' role will not burden the player, and players do not have to take the main responsibility for the loss, which is more conducive to the player's performance.

In summary, individuals who prefer to play civilians are mostly senior players with the idea of both showing and getting carried by teammates. They pay more attention to their personal feelings in this kind of social interaction. Like in the Werewolf killing, they like to play at will without limitations, get a stronger sense of satisfaction, and are unwilling to take responsibility for failure. In daily social interactions, such people prefer to be free. They do not take the initiative to pursue their sense of presence on ordinary occasions, but they are still willing to show themselves on certain key occasions.

The third interviewee prefers to play werewolf in the game. The interview content is as follows: 'I prefer to play the werewolf camp because I enjoy the process of 'killing', it will give me a sense of control. What's more, I think I am good at cheating others, and it is amusing to analyse calmly to dispel other people's suspicion of me. Most interestingly, I like killing my good friend on the first night in the game. It makes me laugh in my heart when I see his surprised look after he finds that he is out of the game.'

Players who like to play werewolves tend to pursue the excitement in the game, and the gameplay of werewolves could meet this demand to the greatest extend. The interviewee is a very popular and social

person in daily life, and this can also explain why he can play the role of werewolf very well. The most important thing to be a good werewolf is to have confidence in what you say and make others trust you. For instance, when the werewolf debate with the real prophet for the identity of the prophet, it is a very important feature that the speech is more convincing. What's more, some werewolf players will regard the game process as the extension of people's daily communication, such as hunting their good friends as a joke on the first night in the game. This kind of thing will be discussed after the game is over, and it will eventually become a funny thing that is reminded every time they play the game.

In conclusion, werewolves are preferred by individuals who are good at logical thinking, hiding, expressing, and are confident about themselves. The werewolf is one of the characters that can best demonstrate the player's game skills, so it is favoured by many confident players and want to show themselves in the game. Such kinds of people are usually very popular in daily social life because a person with the characteristics of a good werewolf player can usually accomplish a task with ease in social situations.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The interaction of different factors causes the prevalence of werewolf killing. It is a product of advanced technology in the new media era and meets the social needs of the younger generation in China. According to the interview, the awareness of offline and online modes and different participation modes are put into the investigation. The young Chinese generation has developed a way of making peace with contrast social needs and requirements by playing their comfortable roles in the game of werewolf killing online. They show some positive in defining self-identity by cooperating to win the game on the one hand, on the other, they compromise to join some less comfortable social environment. The online role-playing game is a predator-prey game for the younger generation and a self-construction process with the frame of modern media-motivated social communication.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Barrett, H.C. Human cognitive adaptations to predators and prey. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1999
- [2] Francis F. Steen, Stephanie A. Owens, Evolution's pedagogy: an adaptationist model of pretense and entertainment, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 2001
- [3] Corsaro, W.A. 1985 Friendship and peer culture in the early years. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

- [4] Fagen, R. 1981 *Animal play behavior*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Piaget, J. 1962 *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. Trans. C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson. New York, NY: Norton.
- [6] Symons, D. 1978 *Play and aggression: A study of rhesus monkeys*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- [7] Vygotsky, L. *Play and its role in the mental development of the child*. *Soviet Psychology* 5(3): 6-18. Reprinted in J. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva (Eds) (1976),
- [8] Bruner, J.S. 1972 *Nature and uses of immaturity*. In J.S. Bruner, A. Jolly & K. Sylva (Eds), *Play: Its role in development and evolution*. New York: Penguin.
- [9] Williams, G.C. 1966 *Adaptation and natural selection: a critique of some current evolutionary thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- [10] Owens, S.A., Steen, F., Hargrave, J., Flores, N. & Hall, P. (Under submission) *Chase play: The structure of a neglected type of physical activity play*.
- [11] *An industrial report on the development of Chinese Werewolf killing game*, retrieved from <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/8a0adf0758eef8c75fbfc77da26925c52cc591d4.html>