A Study of Marketing Strategies Applicable to the Chinese Game Market

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Abstract. As the Internet becomes commonplace in the world, games have come to grab some form of attention of the people. The gaming market in China has taken an upslope trajectory to evolve compared to most of the foreign markets, and the studies in this field are not adequate. As such, there is need to determine the right development approaches to the Chinese gaming market. Based on an extensive stock of analytical reports relating to the transmedia and IP derivative strategies of Pokémon and God of War which are flagship IPs by Nintendo and Sony respectively, the current study identified differences and similarities between the two types of games to provide suitable marketing strategies as well as understanding the logic behind successful game marketing processes and this was applied to provide guidance information on the optimization of marketing strategies to be used in the Chinese gaming landscape. The results showed that in case of games where the barriers of entry are low and the popularity wide-spread, the focus should be on growing the user-base and generally improving the extent of touchpoints. In terms of niche, high quality games the emphasis needs to be on attaining outstanding narrative depth and complexity. In any type of game, successful IPs are usually of high quality, create strong emotional appeal to the players, and increase player loyalty.

Keywords: Chinese Gaming Market, Development Strategies, IP Derivatives, Transmedia Storytelling.

1 Introduction

It is important to identify appropriate strategies to development of the gaming market. Games, the ninth form of art, are being provided via the Internet and the concept is gaining increased popularity since it is becoming a part of life. This projection model of Niko Partners has been built based on historical data of the Chinese gaming market [1]. The number of players spending on the Chinese market of gamers was forecasted in 2024, with an approximate value of 49.2 billion, then 50.7 billion in 2025 and 54.8 billion by the year 2029, corresponding to the growth rate (3.6) over the next 5 years. These numbers suggest that the Chinese gaming industry is keeping a stable moderate growth rate but the rate of development is still much slower compared to the overseas markets. Although such good games like Black Myth: Wukong, Dyson Sphere

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Program, and Wuthering Waves have become part of the Chinese gaming industry, most of the games remain of low-quality products that are created on the basis of AI. In the meantime, the studies of developmental strategies that are specific to the Chinese gaming market have not been that much advanced, and a local enterprise has a limited number of well-defined marketing approaches [2]. That being the case, it is important to find marketing strategies to combat issues like creation of active gaming communities and recruitment of more players outside the game environment to expand the market and guide future strategic decision-making.

The current work is a research on two flagship IPs of two global gaming giants as research objects, which are Pokémon and God of war, to identify the marketing strategies of a successful game IP. Assessing the backgrounds of various research studies into the marketing aspects and features of transmedia and IP derivative of these two games, the present research study compares these games in terms of their marketing strategies in different gaming settings, community settings, and game modes to end up attaining specific marketing approaches that can be applied to certain types of IPs and provide viable development recommendations within the same approach as the said games. In addition, through pinpointing similarities in the promotional practices of these two types of games, this paper isolates the reasoned logic that can still be attributed to various gaming settings and modes and thus offers a potentially informative understanding into the new directions of developing the Chinese gaming market in the future.

2 Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

Over the modern period in the game marketing world, there has scarcely been a possibility to sustain long-term market impact to a particular product. In this way, as a means of maintaining a game IP in the eyes of players in the long term, an industry differentiation says that companies ought to strive towards a long-term maintenance of the IP and ecosystem development. These have the effect of updating IP content on a regular basis, creating a healthy discussion environment in the community and arranging massive offline exhibitions among others. It is interesting to note that by promoting the IP derivatives and transmedia storytelling, not only can the IP develop more revenue but it can also strengthen its brand value. These efforts constantly bring new players on board, build on fans and brand IP recognition by creating more and more touchpoints. Hence, IP derivatives and transmedia storytelling promotion are the essential facets of the game marketing and brand-building strategies.

First, IP derivatives identify different peripheral commodities and derivative media created based on the core game content. Those are mostly physical merchandise, clothing, models, music, trading cards, artwork, and the art books, among other things completely related to the IP. Good-quality and innovative IP derivatives material does not only create a direct commercial impact on the game IP but also enhances the emotional attachment among the consumers and the brand. This is a process that will turn consumers who are passionate players of the game into highly loyal brand customers gradually [3]. Such transition is especially visible in the game market:

buying derivatives, engaging in community conversational, attending physical exhibition allow a player to become a user of the IP community environment rather than a game user, and eventually become a representative of that large community.

Transmedia storytelling, conversely, focuses on the amplification and distribution of a game narrative amongst other media formats, either by providing different ways of looking at the story, or additional material to it. It is not, however, just a mere duplication of in-game content but a reflection of the game story in other perspectives in various media, which gives players information that would be valuable to construct the main story line through derivative content. This is a technique that builds a unified worldview to players in various platforms [4]. Although this will increase the new user base of other services, this approach also enhances the immersion of players not in the game itself and increases the time they will remain involved in the IP. This approach significantly increases the level of emotional connection of users, which increases their loyalty to the brand by prolonging the period of interaction, expanding touchpoints, and making them more immersive.

Marketing-wise, the IP derivatives integrated with transmedia storytelling may create a self-perpetuating brand community ecosystem in the long run:

To start with, a game in itself offers a fundamental narrative direction and a general worldview. The content of cross-platform derivatives thereafter constantly breaks down and refines the core narrative through other lenses, sewing unknown gaps to the central narrative with sub-plots to come up with a more comprehensive worldview. A holistic worldview thus becomes the foundation of interest and drive in players to participate and their constant deliberation and interactivity in the society increases its effects. Community participation and content co-creation, therefore, becomes central to attaining gamification and mutual brand value creation. It can also be seen that transmedia storytelling and IP derivatives are no longer a marketing tool but rather a necessary infrastructure of creating brand value and community culture [5]. The two components of IP derivatives and transmedia storytelling compose the building blocks of the community ecosystem model, which encourages players to collaborate in co-creating community works, discussions on game content, and a high degree of community activity.

But, as various kinds of game IPs tend to take different development paths when adopting these strategies because they differ in the stories behind them, the mechanics of the gameplay, etc. An example would be mass-market, low entry threshold, open minds, and mass audience which is more fitted to the development of a diffuse ecological community based upon multi media touchpoints and multi media. On the contrary, the ecological community centered on refinement and artistic excellence is best built with high-barrier, narrative-oriented niche games with concentrated target audiences.

The Pokemon and God of War series become the classic examples of these two models of games being the flagship IPs of the videogame giants Nintendo and Sony.

3 Implementation and Effects of IP Derivative and Transmedia Storytelling Strategies in the Pokémon IP

Having been the most successful game IP in the world, the fundamental marketing strategy, used by Nintendo in relation to Pokémon, is based on the establishment of a broad-spectrum and ecological IP community. When utilized through various media platforms, such as the exclusive version of Nintendo of Switch, mobile pocket edition (PE) companion application, animation, comics, etc., Pokémon has experienced a tremendous spread, including those of various age groups.

3.1 Multi-Platform Game Product Lines and User Coverage

To start with, the decision of Nintendo to create the Pokemon world is not limited to the standard console games on the Nintendo Switch. In order to reach wider coverage, they have developed many mobile games to fit the smart phone, which is more utilized in the everyday routine of the users. Pocket PTCG, Pokémon Sleep and Pokémon GO and other similar derivative game applications are notable examples.

As an example, one of the most popular in this category, Pokémon GO, makes use of location-based technology to ensure that at any given time one or another Pokémon is generated on the real-life map so that the player can capture it or her. It combines augmented reality (AR), which makes the kingdom of virtual creatures seem present in the physical world and means that Pokémon can be seen in Red London and played with, which allows players to play with the Pokémon of their choice. The design does go a long way in reducing the entry barrier of players into using the compounds of Pokémon IP in their everyday life, not only building a huge base of users, but also improving the overall immersion of players [6]. Besides, it contributes greatly to its integration with the everyday life of IP users, making a vibrant interaction and communication between users in the community of players about game contents. Players do not just play, they tell capturing stories, chat about updates, comment on how events are designed within the game, and feel the charm of community culture. This maintains the interest in the community and strengthens the presence of the IP.

3.2 Transmedia Content and Worldview Dissemination

This is based on the concept of transmedia storytelling, which incorporates numerous stories based on one significant worldview that spreads across media platforms and breaks down narrative bits to allow players to grow the worldview bit by bit [7]. This has followed a cyclical process since the release of Pokémon: The Original Series in 1997, Nintendo has followed a communication process releasing new Pokémon animated series with each new game generation. Moreover, Nintendo has added to these animations spin-off manga that merge both the games and animated series.

Being one of the most successful marketing approaches of Pokemon, transmedia storytelling has the peculiar features of the substantial duration, dense content, and multiple touch points. Pokemon has been spread decisively by animation and films. Specifically, Pokémon has had the effect of putting one of its main characters, Ash

Ketchum, in the ranks of the most iconic cultural symbols of the Pokémon community courtesy of the long-term broadcast of the animated series. Moreover, Nintendo uses the cumulative unit storytelling as the key narrative of the transmedia storytelling of Pokémon. This method enables each installment to have logical independence and at the same time be part of a single worldview system, which creates a multi-layered worldview that still does not limit much on the imagination of audiences. Also, by the long-range transmission of positive values and worldviews to children and their families through the animations of Pokémon, theatrical films, and manga the characters and the stories that contain them have become deeply rooted in the masses consciousness. This has both made this strategy appeal to children and converted parents into potential consumers, in addition to establishing a reliable cultural framework on which the IP would be founded.

3.3 Physical Derivatives and Real-world Connections

Another important element of the Pokémon ecosystem is the physical derivatives. In order to continuously widen the scope of the IP influence, it becomes extremely important to shape derivatives that are bound to be perceived and incorporated into the everyday life. Using the Pokémon IP, Nintendo has produced many types of merchandise such as figurines, other everyday electronic devices, and lifestyle clothes, all of which serve the purpose of ensuring that Pokémon is always with the people.

The most exemplar type of derivatives is a Pokémon Trading card game (TCG). There have been numerous tournaments, local, international, at the Pokémon TCG. These physical derivatives frequently go beyond being entertainment products. As an example, the Pokémon trading cards may be converted into a cross-media learning tool in learning through adding specific cognitive elements of training through rules-based gameplay. The favorite medium and literacy platform, which overcame cultural and gender boundaries, was the usage of Pokémon TCG as part of the study with 11 to 12-year-old Italian students of various linguistic and cultural groups. Two common activities, learning Greco-Roman mythology, and summarizing, were assigned to the students. To this effect, the teacher took the Pokémon TCG cards as a guide and asked the students to make illustrations and fill in details regarding the powers of deities and personal stories as though they were making Pokémon cards with the deities. The findings established that the workshop awakened the humor of the students and made them engaged participants of the classroom lectures and reading resources, leading them to the analysis of the given readings. Moreover, this technique, too, managed to encourage further thinking about construction of creative scaffolding during writing exercises [8]. This goes to show how derivatives tend to outgrow their simple consumer role and move into the wider scope of cultural distribution.

4 Implementation and Effects of IP Derivative and Transmedia Storytelling Strategies in the God of War IP

In contrast to Pokémon, God of War becomes one of the classic examples of the quality niche game. One approach Sony uses in God of War is a narrow focus, which focuses on further narrative development and providing users with a more emotional experience, enhancing the effect of every touchpoint, unlike the diversification of worldview and characters that Pokémon focuses on.

4.1 Deepening of the Core Narrative

The cultural meaning of many modern video games is built by a focus on narration, and the storytelling approach used in the series God of War is said to be cinematic. Most of the story is told through the game, which serves as an effective interpretation of the story that is based on cultural background. Outside the game, Sony has published more material aimed at core fans including art books, documentaries, and original soundtrack albums.

These additional materials do not aim to add additional side narratives to the story but to enhance the knowledge that the players already have in the story and the characters. By using the God of War franchise, Sony integrates Nordic mythology with the personal developmental stories, which provides players with an opportunity to engage with the narrative format that is closer to the epic literature during the process of playing the games [9]. As an example, the dynamic father-son relationships between the main character, Kratos, and his son, Atreus, are tremendously represented in the game as they travel together across the game. This small but very deep emotional connection of the game easily appeals to players, allowing them to recognize the aspects of the real life in the game. This attention not only strengthens the impressions of the players towards the game plot but creates more loyal brands.

4.2 Focused Approach to Transmedia Storytelling

Based on telling the story with clarity and meticulousness, God of War does not attempt to construct a vast worldview as a transmedia storytelling does.

Thus, transmedia content of God of war frequently centers on the central figure, Kratos, like the comics and documentary about the game that the God of War official team published. These storytelling platforms out of the game are not aimed at broadening the fiction universe but at developing a more outward character journey. Through the use of the other platforms to explore deeper into the characters, God of war exposes parts of the characters that cannot be whole fully through the game itself. The game enhances impressions of the story and characters left on the players by filling the gaps in the story and giving more interpretations of the plot on the various platforms, which serves to strengthen its image as a high-end brand. The merit of the emotional focus is that the players attach themselves with much strength to the characters, which increases the possibility of spreading the word of the work through word of the mouth.

4.3 High-End Physical Derivatives and Identity Affirmation

As opposed to the context of the products of day-to-day life or entertainment products, the tangible merchandise of God of war is more about appreciation and collectability, like statues of the protagonists of the movie, or the weapon-models played in the game. Such collectable objects are usually very expensive.

Yet in the consumer market, people will tend to assert their identity, values, by buying pertinent high-value products [10], which is also true in the majority of collectable market. In that way, in the case of core fan groups, buying statues of limited editions or other high-end products might cease being an act of consumerism but instead a means of expressing their support of the game and marking their identities. These costly derivatives make them feel belonging to the IP and show their position of being part of the community. Despite the smaller audience that this strategy is aimed at, it has a great impact on the consumption attitudes and loyalty of each of the devoted users. The direct effect of high-value purchases is both creating a significant IP income for God of War and increasing the loyalty of core players to the game and, consequently, creating more consumption and identity among fans.

5 Comparative Analysis of Strategy Implementation

5.1 Differences

When it comes to a comparative analysis of the strategic emphasis of Pokémon and God of War, two different models of ecology can be observed. Although both of them are flagship IPs in their respective game companies, they have devastatingly different qualities in aspects of creative direction, media storytelling, and user-brand relationship patterns.

In the case of Pokémon, the IP derivative and transmedia storytelling are the primary strategies that are sought to enlarge the number of users and enhance touchpoint reach. Based on open narrative, the franchise uses parallel storytelling through multiple platforms including games, animations, and comics which creates an open-ended format that allows interpretations with a high degree of roominess through several touchpoints. This strategy allows the game to develop a larger fictional universe across multiple media platforms, resulting in the illusion of companionship where the protagonists in the IP develop together with the players. God of War, conversely, is more focused on delivering the excellent narrative and emotional impact on the players and everything that appears within the game serves the purpose of the primary narrative. A closed loop narrative mode is created by integrating the primary narrative with the works of the cross-media derivatives. At the end, all the derivative material pulls towards the central plot, which strengthens and adds layers to its overall themes. The resulting world view might not be as massive, but its attention to detail and addictiveness makes the experience and ritual nature of players to new levels.

5.2 Similarities

Nevertheless, as different in terms of strategic focus within the same strategic approach, Pokémon and God of War have certain similarities in their overall operational strategy. A summary of these similarities can give us the basic logic of their marketing strategies.

To begin with, they both develop their transmedia content and derivatives on the basis of the foundations in their IPs and keep their quality extremely high all the time. Such quality transmedia content and merchandise have built high goodwill with the casual audiences on both games, resulting in a long-term interest in a community in both the game-based content and the game products. In the quest to sustain long term community action and convert casual audiences into a pool of devoted fans, a focus of high-quality production ensuring that players discover a certain reliability in the brand is an inevitable pre-requisite in brand establishment [5].

Second, both of them focus greatly on game material localization and adapting to the local culture. Pokemon uses a long term approach to localization including use of names of Pokemons that resonate with the culture of the selected region. These are minor details that bring a cultural identity of different players belonging to different regions, which gives the impression of something that resonates with the game [11]. In the same vein, a study conducted on the Arabic localization of God Of War: Ragnarok shows that the quality of localization may make a big difference in terms of the immersion of the players and their acceptance in the market [12]. Adjusting to local cultures, both franchises also make their appearance even more resonant, another pillar of brand building.

Thus, the ecological strategy of the broad spectrum by Pokémon and the depth-focused ecological strategy of God of war imply that the main principle of contributing to the evolution of the development of the game and its impact are to build emotional connections with the players, and cause a strong cultural resonance with the content of the game and make customers feel the reliability of the brand and that they are needed by the brand.

5.3 Limitations

Nevertheless, Nintendo and Sony are both global gaming giants and have conducted economic and resources support to make Pokémon and God of War great IPs. Many of the early or small-to-medium sized game developers can not achieve this, especially in the initial steps. Thus, the experiences of these two companies in marketing strategies might not be relevant to other game developers [13]. In the future, Chinese game developers should pay more attention to the potential of how new IPs may be innovated through the tools of derivatives and transmedia narrative, building up their IP communities and developing new and more interactive experiences.

6 Conclusion

This paper has found appropriate marketing approaches to various forms of games through a comparison and contrasting of Pokémon and God of War. Varied games are

supposed to have different marketing strategies utilized but they have some common grounds in their applications despite their differing emphases. In the case of mass-market IPs, such as Pokemon, the broad-spectrum ecological marketing model must be utilized, increasing the attachment to the daily lives of the players through highly varying touchpoints as well as attracting casual audiences. In the case of niche IPs, such as that of God of War, a more profound marketing approach needs to be adopted, one that entails providing ultimate gaming experience and intense stimulation through few touchpoints devices to increase the engagement and loyalty of gamers. Nevertheless, despite the different marketing strategies applied to diverse types of games, the most important aspect of improving the competitiveness and long-term development possibilities of any game is to create emotional bonds with the players and inspire them about the relevance of the game content and make customers feel the trustworthiness of the brand and their necessity to the brand. These principles and marketing strategies can act as a systematic source of reference among game developers and help the Chinese gaming market to choose the most appropriate marketing strategies and motivate future researchers to seek the directions of the Chinese gaming market development.

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