

Research of the Influences of Doujin Culture in Game Operation

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Abstract

Known as “The Ninth Form of Art”, video game is a form of hypermedia art rising in response to the rapid development of modern technology, with millions of fans worldwide. From the perspective of the game market, those games that have high stickiness and a long operating cycle usually have abundant doujin works. As a spontaneous behavior of the players, doujin culture reflects the players’ feelings towards and perception of the games, and it reacts upon the original game while relying on it, exerting a far-reaching influence on the operation of game products. We try to analyze the influences of doujin culture on game operation performance, hoping to provide game operators with some useful ideas.

Keywords: Doujin Culture, Game Stickiness, Game Operation

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of mobile Internet industry, players have more and more games to choices and the marketing costs of video game products in the market continue to rise. But Opportunities go with challenges, the network era has broken through the restrictions of traditional paper media and enables diverse original contents (players’ doujin works) generated by players on their own to be freely spread in the internet through various channels, which objectively increases the exposure of the game and reduces the operating costs of game promotion and marketing.

2. Current Situation and Development of Doujin Culture

Doujin culture is an online subculture popular among teenagers. Doujin, a new type of literary and artistic form, is a re-creation of the archetypal characters which come from comics, novels, films, video games and real lives [1]. The word “doujin” was derived from Japanese term “どうじん”(doujin), which means a group of people who share an interest.

Those who share the same hobby are creators of doujin culture. Doujin creation activity is autonomous that doujin creators create doujin works out of their love for the original work and the characters in it. Such act of creation is spontaneous and is generated for meeting emotional appeals and psychological needs of the players

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themselves. In essence, doujin culture is a kind of autonomous culture. Compared with commercial creation, doujin creation has a greater degree of freedom. In a broad sense, doujin refers to an autonomous creation free of business influence, while in a narrow sense, doujin means re-creating activity conducted by the like-minded and its products made on the basis of the original work. This article mainly focuses on studying the latter.

Early doujin works featured original literature, while the recreated “derived” doujin based on the original works gradually sprang up in the 1980s. With the development of network technology, the types of doujin works are no longer limited to literature and present more diverse contents. There are diverse types of doujin works, including but not limited to doujin novel, doujin illustration, doujin cartoon, doujin animation, doujin music, doujin movie, doujin game, and doujin video, etc. As shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Classification of doujin works

Participants and fans of doujin activities are numerous. According to the statistics, Japan’s largest doujin fair Comic Market, which has a history of 47 years, can attract over 500,000 participants each year since 2007. Shanghai’s COMICUP (CP for short), mainland China’s biggest doujin fair has a history of 13 years so far. Since CP12 held in June 2013, the number of visitors to the CP has grown by 15% in average for five consecutive years, and the number of visitors to CP28 held in June 2021 exceeded 100,000. The numbers of visitors show that doujin culture is increasingly accepted by the masses. In light of age and occupation of participants, post-90s college students account for over 50%. This kind of people does not belong to high-income groups, but consumption per person in CP16 has reached 458 yuan (doujin booths alone). This figure shows us the consumption ability of the doujin community.

The development of doujin culture is closely bound up with the growth of social economy. In fact, doujin culture is a recreational culture generated in the context of economic growth. Participants of doujin culture mostly are post-90s and post-00s young groups, and a relatively superior overall economic environment allows them to fit deeper into the Internet era and the pursuit of individualism and diversity and readiness to share and express are their characteristics. Compared with material consumption, they attach more importance to spiritual consumption which can highlight personality and realize self-worth, and they are happy to communicate and propagate.

The core of doujin culture is interaction and sharing. As people are more and more open-minded and material standard of living improves, more ACGN(abbreviation of Animation, Comic, Game and Novel) fans spontaneously get involved in the doujin wave of “nationwide creation”. The rise of ACG economy gives the growth of doujin culture enormous potential.

3. Operation of Game Products

Starting from official operation, a video game generally can be divided into four stages-introduction, growth, maturity, and decline [2]. The goal of game operation is to keep the game at the maturity stage for as long as possible, to postpone the advent of the decline stage with various marketing tools and help the game company to obtain corresponding economic returns. Game operation effects are mainly reflected in four aspects, namely marketing of game products, game stickiness, game operating cycle and payments which is shown in Figure 2.

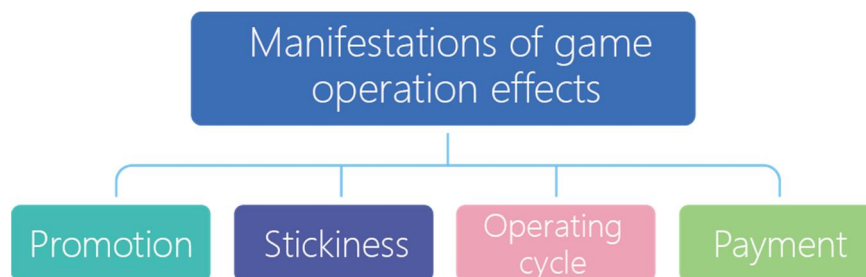


Figure 2. Manifestations of game operation effects

3.1 Promotion of game products

Game promotion refers to the process of launching a video game in the market and promoting and publicizing the product to make potential game users learn about the game content and acquire their recognition and thus transforming them into loyal users on the part of a game operation team. Game promotion runs through the entire operating cycle of game products.

Game operators improve game exposure and hype the game with promotion. High exposure means more users will know and understand this game, which constitutes the basis for expanding the player base. Out of the herd mentality, high exposure of the game can better attract players.

3.2 Game stickiness

Game stickiness refers to a game's ability to attract and retain players and bases on players' feelings towards and recognition of the game. Game's retention is game stickiness. Game stickiness is reflected in player's loyalty, dependence on game and frequency of repeated playing.

The life cycle of game user is a manifestation of player's loyalty and is an essential standard to measure game stickiness. From the perspective of players, the attractiveness of a game for them is not changeless, and stickiness changes with playtime, player's mentality and other factors. Such changes depend on player's game experience. Whether game content can bring immersion is the core of player experience, as good game experience is an important reason why a high-level game stickiness is formed and maintained and a sense of immersion has a positive influence on continued playing behavior of game players. The nature of game operation is actually the operation of user psychology. Excellent game operation needs to learn about the general environment of the game market and player needs through various data and enhance game experience for players in an effort to attract potential players while retaining existing players.

3.3 Operating cycle

The operating cycle of a game product is the life cycle of the game and is a period of time from official operation to halt. Game operating cycle is made of user life cycles of different players, while game stickiness determines the operating cycle of a game product.

For game operators, keeping the game at the maturity stage for as long as possible is undoubtedly the optimal choice, but lower attractiveness of the game possibly caused by slackened popularity and unsatisfactory game experience, new substitutes in the market and other factors make a game go from glory to decline, while the goal of game operation is to put off this process. This requires an accurate analysis of the game market and player data on the part of operators, which is achieved through the adjustments of operating model and game content.

3.4 Payment of game products

Video games is always a kind of entertainment product, and profiting from payments made by players is its ultimate goal. The modes of payment of the games can be mainly divided into two types- time-based pay games and prop pay games. In light of the current game market, prop pay games are the mainstream of the game market. The key to increasing the expenditure of the players is using players' psychology to guide their consumption, but high pay rate inevitably leads to the loss of players. So how to control the relationship between the two has been being a major aspect that game operation needs to discuss.

4. Analysis of the Influences of Doujin Culture on Operation Effects

4.1 The influences of doujin culture on game promotion

Doujin works have a diversity of forms, but the form that has the greatest communication advantage is doujin pictures. Here we conduct analysis by taking doujin paintings as the example. Painters draw doujin comics and illustrations out of their love for the games, and they not only have the ability to continuously generate content but also are skilled in different styles, which can attract groups with different tastes. There are intense interaction and spirit of sharing among doujin fans, and propelled by painter fans and game players, a painting often can be forwarded for hundreds of times. And its transmissional and interlocking spreading effects can be maximized. Taking JX3(Sword Heroes' Fate Online 3) as an example, famous illustrator Yichuiwuyue is also the doujin painter of the JX3 and the game's doujin illustrations and comics that she published on Sina Weibo were extensively forwarded and shared which is shown in Figure 3, Sina Weibo topic #JX3 doujin images# had 2.51 billion views and 2.24 million comments.

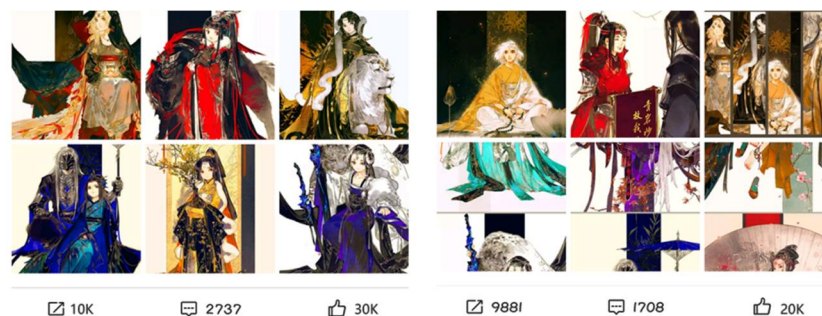


Figure 3. Forwards and interactions of doujin works of Yichui on Sina Weibo

Once a game has formed a doujin culture circle of a certain size, it can not only maintain its players' activeness in discussing the game, but also effectively keep the vitality of the game and even attract new players through various forms of doujin works, injecting new blood for the game and further expanding player base.

As shown in Figure 4, we counted the number of ACG doujin works of NetEase phenomenal mobile game Onmyoji on Pixiv (a famous website sharing doujin paintings and illustrations) and its trends in game best-seller list in the App Store from public beta in September 2016 to April 2017. By comparison, it is found that two peak values of the Onmyoji on the best-seller list happened in October to November 2016 and January 2017 respectively, which coincide with the peak times of their ACG doujin works.



Figure 4. The number of doujin works for the Onmyoji on Pixiv (red)

Trends on the game best-seller list in the App Store of the corresponding period (blue)

Fragmented reading of doujin works fits more in the lifestyle of contemporary people and makes it more convenient for social communication. UGC (User Generated Content) including doujin culture makes cultural impression of game products further reinforced by autonomic behaviors conducted by the community and eventually makes game players and even potential players get emotionally involved and recognize the products. By sharing doujin works, game operators skip traditional promotional channels and increase game's exposure with fans marketing. And game operators can realize this efficient promoting process by encouraging and developing doujin culture without paying high promoting costs.

4.2 The influences of doujin culture on game stickiness

Players' passion for games will gradually change over time. Doujin culture forms doujin circles by gathering game players with hobbies and interests, and resonates with other players by creating and disseminating doujin works. This process not only can make original players stick together closely with the help of socializing but also can attract new players through diverse forms of doujin works. Such attachment of players generated in community interaction can effectively delay a sense of fatigue generated among players and the loss of players over playtime. Interaction and sharing are the core part of doujin culture, and doujin activity is a social activity in nature. Furthermore, offline doujin creating and sharing behaviors are an extension of online game interaction between players in reality.

Doujin products give back to game products while relying on game contents, and provide game operation

with aspirations in operation strategy. UGC not only expands game content, but also makes players identify with the game emotionally and enhances their loyalty. The image of yellow chicken of in Cangjian Sect the JX3 was derived from a doujin song called The Song of Small Yellow Chicken, then official game operator absorbed a part of doujin culture, proposed the marketing idea of animalizing the sects and designed related derivatives which is shown in Figure 5. Doujin culture can effectively get official game operator and players closer to each other, make the game closer to players and players have a stronger sense of belonging to the game. It means players' stickiness to the game is improved.

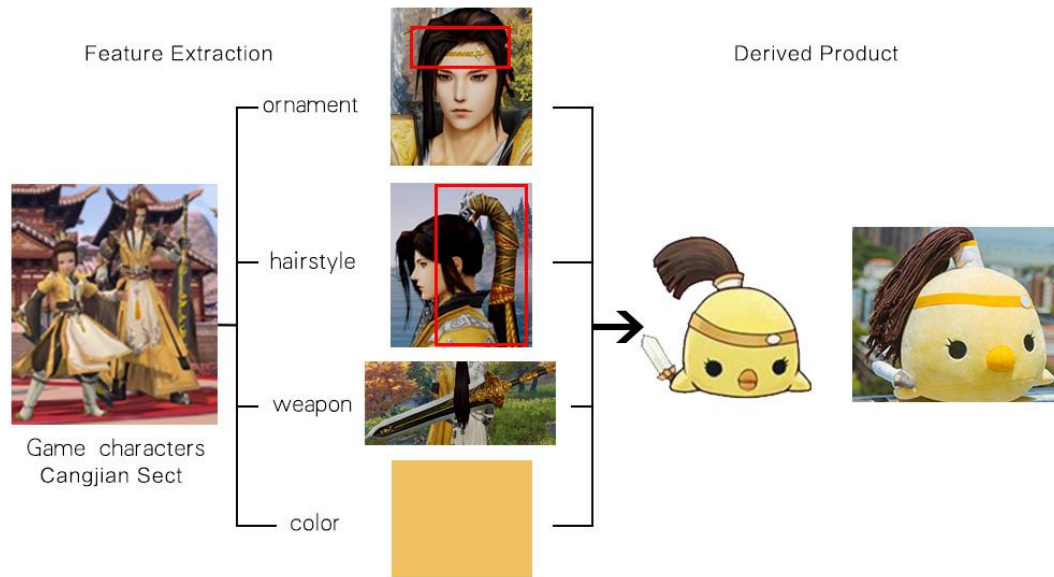


Figure 5. JX3 official released derived product of the Cangjian sect

Doujin works allow players to become a witness to game story and a producer of game content. The game world presented in doujin works is built by players according to their ideal game world, and it gives players some psychological hints and makes players believe the game world in their understanding is “a reality”, thus generating a sense of belonging to and dependence on the game both psychologically and behaviorally. Because endowment effect makes players find it hard to leave the game after getting emotionally involved in it. This is how a game generates stickiness among players through doujin culture.

4.3 The influences of doujin culture on the cycle of game operation

Taking the Chinese game market as an example, a lot of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) with similar gameplay vary in final operating results. Besides differences in localization and mode of operation of operators, whether a doujin ecology of a game can be built is also a crucial part. This article analyzes the influences of doujin culture on game operation cycle based on the comparison of four games with similar gameplay.

The operating cycle of Rift in China is just six months, and this game has few doujin works; Allods has a slightly better performance, but its operating cycle is only three years, and this game has an extremely limited number of doujin works; the Aion and the JX3 are still in operation now, but the search volume of JX3's doujin works is higher than that of the Aion (Baidu search engine alone). At the beginning of the open beta of the two

games, the popularity of the Aion was obviously higher than that of the JX3, but starting in 2013, the JX3 successfully overtook, as shown in Figure 6, and this change was closely linked to the proposal of “Vigorously Building up Doujin Culture” made by the JX3 officially at the end of 2012. We may say the JX3 pioneered in the model linking ACG doujin culture with the game in China.

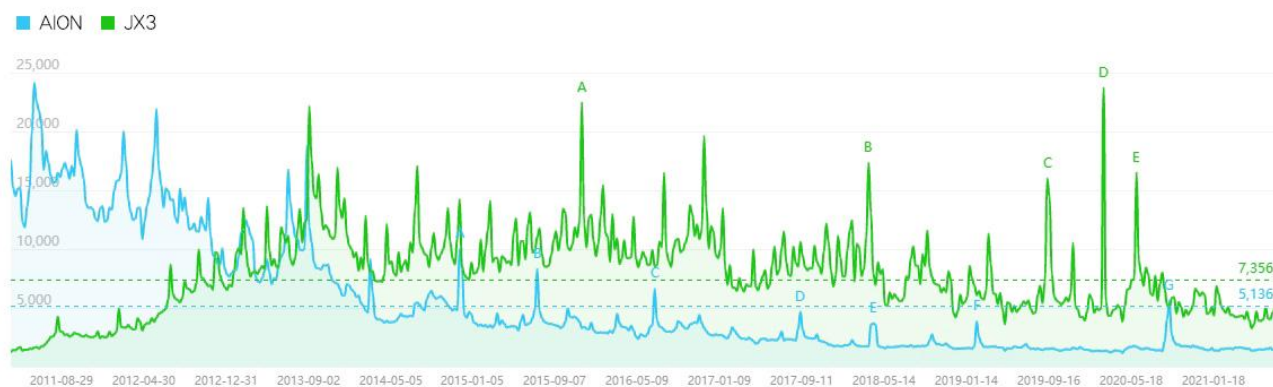


Figure 6. Baidu search index trends of the AION (blue) and the JX3 (green) from 2017 to now

4.4 The influences of doujin culture on in-game payments

Propagation characteristic is one of the main characteristics of doujin culture, but our understanding of doujin culture should not be limited to original works. It can also imperceptibly guide players to consume. Doujin culture connects and gets numerous fans together with contents resonating with players, thus stimulating the players' willingness to pay for game content. Compared with deliberate guide of official game operators, this kind of willingness to pay completely out of the true intention of players and has a positive influence on in-game payments.

At first, a group of young players gathered by doujin culture have considerable loyalty to and enthusiasm about the game itself, and these young players are well aware and has a habit of paying for content. Furthermore, buying game-related derivatives is a way for them to satisfy their needs for spiritual and recreational consumption. Secondly, the impact of doujin culture on paid appearance props cannot be ignored. Now free games become the mainstream of the game market, and pay prop becomes the primary profitable point of this kind of game. But for both paid game free game, appearance props are the most important part of paid props. When creating doujin works (such as doujin video, doujin cartoon, and game screenshot, etc.), doujin creators often will use the looks presented by pay props like dresses and appearances, which inevitably forms a latent aesthetic manipulation for viewers. Once this aesthetic manipulation is accepted by the viewers, the viewers are highly likely to buy this appearance prop. In addition, currently, many game companies are high on carrying out activities soliciting doujin appearances on the basis of the influences of doujin culture on in-game payments.

5. Conclusion

The process of a game gradually going from maturity stage to decline stage actually is the process of consuming game content and declining enthusiasm of players. Various kinds of doujin works other than the games not only expand game content with the involvement of players and hence enrich game contents, but also maintain the popularity and freshness of the games among game players through discussion and creation of various doujin communities online and offline. Up to now doujin culture has evolved into a major impetus

for game operation, doujin works give back to original games while being supported by high-quality game contents, forming strong promotion and cohesiveness among fans. Furthermore, a virtuous cycle has been generated between doujin culture and game products. But for recreational products like games, gameplay and game experience are always the core factors for its success, while doujin culture can only be a helper instead of determining the success of a game.

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