

The Dilemma in Open-World Gacha Games: A Case Study of "Genshin Impact"

1 Introduction

Is it better to grind endlessly, forging strength at the cost of challenge, or to embrace the struggle, only to falter at the final test and forfeit the rewards? This is the dilemma that every current and future open-world gacha game is bound to face.

This paper presents a research study on open-world games that use gacha as a monetization method. The study is based on a case study of "Genshin Impact", analyzing 99,479 hours of content, review videos, and 100,000 comments and reviews accumulated over a period of four years.

2 Traditional Gacha Games

Traditional gacha games have typically been menu hub-based, where story and events are easier and more welcoming to all players in terms of difficulty, requiring minimal character growth investment. The repeatable game modes (i.e., endgame modes) are challenging and require significant character growth investment. These modes offer gacha currency as a core reward, making participation a necessity for players.

3 Open-World Gacha Games

In open-world gacha games, the vast open world replaces the menu hub. In this context, all mobs and bosses present in the open world can be considered akin to the story mode of a traditional gacha game, sharing its core principle: they are easily accessible to all players, old and new, in terms of difficulty. Repeatable game modes are present here as well, requiring similar benefits and difficulty to those in traditional gacha games.

4 Case Study: "Genshin Impact"

Using "Genshin Impact" as an example, the entire open world and its quests can be completed with level 1 characters. However, the endgame modes require considerable investment. This disparity in challenge creates the following dilemma:

- Should one grind the game to make their character stronger for endgame modes, thereby sacrificing any sense of challenge in the open world?

- Or should one forego the grind to maintain a sense of challenge in the open world, sacrificing strength needed to clear endgame modes and losing a significant amount of gacha currency?

5 Player Sentiment

Players generally don't mind this in traditional gacha games, as the menu-based hub creates an illusion of balance between easy and hard content. The majority consensus is to grind, grow strong, and not mind the lack of challenge in the story mode.

However, open-world gacha games magnify this disparity. The open world appears vast and rich in content, placing players in a dilemma and forcing them to choose between embracing open-world content or focusing on endgame modes. This leads to:

- Those who choose the open world tend to avoid challenging content, viewing it as a hassle rather than enjoyable content.
- Those who focus on endgame modes often view the open world and its additions as "not content," undermining the effort invested in making the game truly open world, resulting in dissatisfaction.

6 The Problem

From a traditional gacha game developer's perspective, the solution might seem simple: add more of both types of content. However, this approach is not ideal for an open-world gacha game, as it risks alienating and dividing both factions. Players who do not want to interact with the core feature (open world) of the game would be counterintuitive.

7 Solution

To ensure all players enjoy interacting with all aspects of the game, the game must bridge the gap between the floor and ceiling in terms of difficulty.

Let's apply this principle to *Genshin Impact*:

7.1 For Those Who Want Challenging Content

- Increase the difficulty of collective mobs and bosses present in the open world, including during the story, to raise the baseline challenge.
- Implement combat events in the open world, such as city defenses or monster hunts, to help players associate the open world with worthwhile content.

7.2 For Those Who Forsake Endgame Modes

- Ensure that participation rewards are significant while clearing rewards are minor in endgame modes.

- Once the open world is made challenging, establish a baseline of character strength that is easy and fast for all players to reach. Provide universal artifact sets and weapons that are sufficient to reach this baseline, and make leveling up to a certain level easy and unavoidable.
- For those who still find the difficulty overwhelming, introduce a special solution: if a player loses to the same group of enemies in the open world or story mode twice, they should be given the option to ask Paimon for help on the third attempt. Paimon would enable a "true elemental burst mode," allowing players to spam elemental bursts faster and deal more damage, with enhanced healing and a bit of damage reduction for survival.

This solution aims to balance all types of players and bridge the gap between floor and ceiling. Those who can clear everything will be satisfied, those who reach the baseline will find the difficulty appropriate, and those who struggle can seek Paimon's help when stuck.

8 Conclusion

With this, I conclude my research report. The solutions offered are among many possibilities; these are just a few examples. I hope this paper sheds light on the unique phenomena that occur in gacha games and how they are maximized in open-world settings.