**What the Social Influence has Mobile Social Games had on People’s Friends’ Zone: King Glory as an Example**

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**Introduction**

In this technology- dominated world, social network services have gained wide popularity (E. Park at al., 2014). We aim to investigate the connection between mobile-social network games(M-SNGs) and social relationships. We take King Glory which is a popular mobile game in China, as our example. According to the report of Jiguang Big Data, it has owned 200 million players until May 2017. Besides, it is estimated that the number of daily new players equals to population of a county in China. It is reported that 54% players are girls. Other than some big cities, like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, 90.5% users are distributed in second-tire and third-tire cities.

On social media, King glory has become a hot topic to discuss, and professional game players have attracted millions of fans through live competition broadcast, so that a new kind of occupation has been emerged which is so called game host. We can presume that a huge profit has been created within this field.

King Glory is a kind of MOBA (massive online battle arena) game which based on the social network services. Users need to log in with your social media account QQ or Wechat(Chinese version of What’s Up), which both belong to a social network services producer Tencent.

In this essay, we mainly divided three parts to try to explain clearly the social influence of King Glory. We will begin by describing how does the social games influence the world in general briefly and present some literature related to our project. This section will be followed by a description of how we choose the method for investigating and the corresponding reason for this. The remainder of this paper is to show our findings from our three interviews which have done before and we will try to analyse it in detail.

**Literature review**

Bryman (2016, p, 6) explained that people are possibly not able to read all kind of articles related to the field that they are interested in. In order to get deep findings in our project, we pay attention to address some articles posted on mobile game magazines, such as IT and society and Telematics and Informatics, to help us understand how people keep and develop their social relationships by playing these mobile games and then we try to link these existing literatures with our project.

Nie and Erbring states that:

The revolution in information technology (IT) has resulted in innovations that are having increasingly visible affects on the life of the average American. These developments are shaping social lives and behaviors, but there has been no systematic, representative study tracking the sociological impact of information technology. (2002)

Top social game companies have gained a massive user pool over the past three years: Zynga has a user base with 242 million monthly active users; Five Minutes has 73 million; and Playfish has 50 million. (Caoili, 2010).

These probably show that the developing with IT influence a great number of people all over the world and the social games owns a lot of users. It could be said that most people are using or potentially influenced by these.

Global Times reports that over 15 million players in China spend more than five hours a day on Happy Farm, one of the most popular games running on social networking sites (SNS). According to an annual report published by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2014), by the end of 2013, the number of online mobile game users in China had reached 215 million (as cited by Chen and Leung, 2015).

It could be seen from these that most current theories discussing and analysing mobile games are focusing more on marketing and how many people they can influence with ignoring exploring the social bond between the game and individuals. The mobile social game has changed the landscape of the game business. Mobile social games are defined as casual games that are created to play on portable devices, and they are integrated in social networking platforms to facilitate the user’s interactions (Erturkoglu et al., 2015; Hou, 2011; Wei and Lu, 2014). Over 90 % of smartphone owners played a mobile game at least once a week (Jung and Kim,2016).

Persumably, the development of the information technology has effects on people’s normal life and action and the gap is still existing. Therefore, we particularly pay attention to show the social influences towards individuals who play mobile games in contemporary society.

Internet makes people lonelier, encroaching on time that could otherwise be spent with family and friends (Kraut, et al., 1998; Nie and Erbring, 2002). Internet, unlike traditional passive media such as television, is capable of connecting people across time and space and thus facilitates social interaction and communicative activities (Williams, 2006; Wellman, 2001; Boase, et al., 2006).

Everyone is living in a network society, no one can ignore the difference brought by mobile techniques. We are trying to understand what the difference technologies has made to our life through this micro analysis.

**Methodology**

In our project, the method of investigating the how does the mobile game- King of Glory influence the social life for international students are mainly three: the first one is the literature review of current mobile games so that helps us to learn a scope of the general and current phenomenon in not only the mobile games themselves but also the specific one-King of Glory. Secondly, we did a survey posed on social internet or by asking oral questions to enable us to select the particular interviewees who we reckon would be much valuable and we can acquire more information from them. After finishing both the section above, we did the data collection- semi-structured interviews for three interviewees to learn their experience and opinions of how this game influence their social life.

Based on all the team members in our group had or have the experience of playing King of Glory and we all believe that kind of games influence our social activities and it likes a bridge between individuals and strangers.

We choose qualitative research method, like semi-structured interview, to investigate. Due to the reason that we play this game so we are more familiar with this game and we can arouse the same feeling with the participants. We could be aware of the situation that they experienced so that we possibly have more ability to listen to them and understand them deeply.

Bryman (2016, p, 9) claimed that researchers almost have to sample because of the time and cost consuming. As well as, doing a wide range of survey and using more complex survey technique will be helpful to gain the information than the small and local survey (Walliman, 2001, p, 12). It could be said that using the internet as a tool to spread message and information of our project would be more effective and fast to recruit the volunteers with various background and experience. Therefore, before doing the interview, we did a brief survey with several simple questions posed on Wechat to help us select participants.

Qualitative approach is a way to learn the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of individuals (Bryman, 1988, p, 46) As consequence, we got 3 volunteers because of their brief introduce of the story of their experience of playing King of Glory and their culture background which we think will be more valuable for our project. Hence, this enables us to find out the interviewees who are particular and typical can be interviewed in order to make partial contribution to the current theories.

Bryman (2016, p, 10) argued that semi-structured interview will encourage the researcher keep an open mind. For deeply investigating the social circumstance in mobile games among international students, we choose the semi-structured interview with a set of guided questions as our dominant method based on literature and theories to acquire the deep thoughts and perspectives of individuals.

We carried out 3 interviews including 2 males and 1 female of the similar age (20s). Walliman(2001, p. 4) agrees that experience could help individuals or groups acquire knowledge and help people understand and be aware of the world. Hence, this is the reason why we choose the participants in similar age. This will help us minimize the influence of education difference, so it will be much easier to do comparison.

Each interview will be assumed to last 30 minutes to investigate about 15 questions related to their social relationships and all interviews were conducted in their home or by video call from long distance. However, we found that we could not maintain the interview for 30 minutes for everyone. Silverman(2005, p, 58) argues that researchers are unable to choose various finding and contents to analyse. Hence, we narrowed it down to 20 minutes for each person and pay more attention on their social perspectives. All interviews were finished in Chinese for encouraging interviewees to give us more information in their experience, and then we found that using native language could encourage people to talk more and in details. Native language makes them feel comfortable with.

For discussing these interviews clearly, all the interviewees are assigned a pseudonym and this will be used throughout the project when referring to them.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interviewee’s name | Gender | Age | Time of playing this game |
| Wenbo Tang | male | 23 | 2 years |
| Lexi Liu | female | 22 | 2 years |
| Tai Zhang | male | 22 | 3 years |

**Findings**

Hou (2011) proposed that the uses and gratifications approach can explain that user’s personal initiative to use certain media is to satisfy certain spiritual needs. This is instructive for our studies of social performance in mobile games which binding with SNS. Also, the main motivations are to relax oneself, to have fun and self–motivation. (Starkman, 2007) Combined with the feedback from Lexi and marketing reports (iiMedia, 2017), it can be concluded that the particular gaming choice users made is not only based on relaxibility, but also include a desire for status social connection and self-realization. People who do not have much contact in real life can get closer just because they play the same game. People can also establish virtual relationship (such as besties, couple and buddies) after they have a certain level of intimacy which can be gain through team game and virtual social behaviors like giving each other gaming currency and skin. Even on the basis of the established relationship, the level of which can be improved to a higher degree. Precisely for this reason, people will have a cherish attitude toward social relationships in the game and actively develop their social network at the beginning. The expected gratifications of such game players include both social motives and game motives.

The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975) has defied flow as a state of mind that the individual highly emerged in an activity that “one loses self-consciousness and fear of failure, feels action and awareness merge, and often loses track of time.” (Britton, 2008, pp.1) The game mechanics make players gain this mental state so quickly, including: Intrinsically rewarding, clear achievable goals, immediate feedback, which can be considered as essential conditions for flow experience. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) In essence, social games are still games. From the perspective of game attributes, its design is the successful application or practice of the flow theory to a certain extent. Unconsciously, the players have invested a lot of money and time on it as our interviewees has respond. With the addition of social elements, the player’s desire for victory is blurred and deflected during the game. It is reasonable to speculate that the combination of flow and social attempts provides greater playability and adhesiveness of users.

Gladwell (2000) has suggested that “The best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends….is to think of them as epidemics.” (Gladwell, 2000, pp.7) He introduced the law of the few which said that connectors, mavens and salesmen were the three key characters who caused the epidemic. (Gladwell, 2000) In this case, these are your friends, celebrities you adore and KOL (key opinion leaders) in the social network. By the interaction of those, the sudden social heat of this game was triggered.

Mobile games have different meanings to different people. To some people, SNG is a very useful way to socialize, like the interviewee Wenbo Tang who is a college student in Beijing at present, on the contrary, the communication function in SNGs has been always ignored by some people.

Wenbo is a loyal customer of the King Glory. He has played this game for 2 years. Besides this game, he also plays other SNGs, for example, LOL and DOTA. When I asked why he began the King Glory, he answered directly, ‘my friend invite me to play, and because I am good at playing LOL, the King Glory is very easy to me’. According to the Yee (2006), the components for people of playing online games include achievement components, social components and immersion components. We can assume that achievement and social components are the main power to encourage him to spend his time and money in playing this game. He frankly told us that he makes closer connection with some friends who also play this game, besides he persuaded some friends to play together. When he is playing games, he is the leading character, but in daily life, he is just an average person. When it comes to games, he can always speak a lot. To some degree, he feels more confident in playing games. That is, the achievement and the function of socialization consist of his main motivations to play games. As he can gain a sense of achievement and more confidence, he has become more capable of making friends. We consider that the advantage of him in games can extend to his daily life.

Analysising from the discourse with Wenbo, mobile-social network games are effective way to expand stronger ties of interpersonal networks, and meanwhile improve the weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). People can strengthen the relationships with people around them, and there are chances that people can produce new strong ties through weak ties. For this interviewee, King glory plays a key role in expanding his friends zone. During his gaming experience, he has been given a chance to get to know new friends online, enhance the relations with his friends in real life. Similar in the real life, he was able to enhance the weak ties with some potential friends through the strong ties. He explained that he has maintained a long-term friendship with several game players, outside the game, they add each other as friends on social media. In addition, he honestly has turned one distant relationship into an intimidate friendship with one person who is a girl. In the beginning, the girl had never played this kind of game until Wenbo taught her. Because of this game, they found so much in common, they can enjoy the gaming fun during the free time, also they found other same interests.

In a word, mobile social network game has great impact on his social network, helping him to improve the social skills, and opening one more way to make friends.

It is noteworthy that we withdraw one of our interviews at the beginning because the people called Tai Zhang we interviewed is unwilling to explain his experience in detail. During our conversation, he said we recalled his painful memory about this game because he built relationships with a female and then they broke up all in a sudden. The reason for this is very simple, the female was taking advantage of him because he topped up her account as a bond to keep their relationship. When he said he would not pump more money into this game. The relationship was broke up. The result suggest that the relationship built on internet are much simple and easier to break up due to some reasons. They are more vulnerable comparing with relationship in real.

**Conclusion**

Our research indicates that people tend to play social mobile games for the purpose of entertainment. Compared to fierce win-or-lose confrontation, social games are more focused on the fitness and flexibility of various playing styles. This optimistic and worry-free gameplay may be able to provide users with an ideal safe haven when they want to take a break from real life for a while, avoiding, forgetting about, and getting rid of stress and dilemma. Some players can gain a sense of self-achievement, which may be impossible for them in real life. However, they are the minority. By achieving these goals, they can expand their social networks to some extent. And they feel more confident and secure in that virtual world. This kind of psychological construction will in return have a positive effect on the real-life experience outside of his gaming world, reflected in his social action power caused by his affirmation of himself. Most importantly and distinctly, social games enable players interact with friends and to keep up social connections regardless of their current social relationship status. People’s pursuit of a broader socialization and efforts are the driving forces behind the popularity of such games.

Although we have found theories and comments from gamers to prove how attractive mobile social games are. There is market report (iiMedia, 2017) shows that the popularity of this particular game is on decreasing. Relationship can be easily established and also destroyed in the game. Gamers can get the real feeling of social experience but the relationship they built is weak. This might not be suitable for those who want to keep stable social network. Playing hours influence the flexibility of turning back to reality. This means they may get more lonely and disappointed when put down their phones.

Most of today's so-called social games are just games built on social platforms. It creates this illusion to the individuals that countless partners will play with them during the game, not for the purpose of producing truly valuable social activities. Since the primary subject of a social game is socialization, the game help gathering the people with the same interests at the initial stages of the game. Once the social system is formed, it will activate a hidden attribute -"emotionality" in the game. That is, people will have different emotional experiences and needs for friends or rivals in the game, and will give feedback from them. After a certain period of time, the entertainment property of the game is what they pay less attention gradually. What they want is to get a sense of presence or identity from others. For game companies, it is priority to make money through the games, and the design of social function is a means to win over users; For users, some value the game, some value social networking. Taking the example of the king's glory, the frequent loss of current users shows that even game with the largest user group at the moment has not do a good job of social communication among gamers. However, our investigation shows that players will still choose it as one of their activities when they meet with friends in their lives, which indicates that the players still want to play this social game with more realistic friends who are touchable. That is to say, players want to play social games in their current existing social circles, thus social games can hardly increase the viscosity of social circles. In other words, social games like King’s Glory are now more like a game that is rooted in the interaction of player’s existing stable relationships. In essence, it does not bring about qualitative changes to the player's real social life.

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