The Research on the Marketing Strategies and Influence of the WeChat Mini Program Game

——Taking the Game "Sheep a Sheep" for Example

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Abstract: With the popularity of the WeChat mini program game "Sheep a Sheep", the successful marketing strategies behind it have brought reference to the game development industry, but at the same time, Internet addiction has also brought a significant negative impact on people's daily life, for example, people often immerse themselves in the Internet and thus affect their own lives, such as vision loss and other consequences. Therefore, through the literature reading, this paper aims to discuss and analyze the marketing strategies and replicability of the game, and finally discuss the methods to prevent Internet addiction. This paper concludes that game developers can create complaining points to capture people's psychology and strengthen the sense of game experience to expand the potential user base, and finally select the right communication platform to maximize the communication benefit. To prevent Internet addiction, people can start from four aspects: psychological cognition, individual behavior, game development company, and social sector.

Keywords: Sheep a sheep, Marketing strategy, Influence, Prevention, Internet addiction

1. Introduction

Recently, a WeChat mini program game, "Sheep a Sheep" with a "clearance rate of less than 0.1%" of the devil difficulty on the hot search, which is very rare in the game circle. This outrageous game has the most basic gameplay, the most difficult levels, and the most unexpected hot searches. Within days of its release, the little game had already generated billions of traffic.

Its successful marketing strategies brought a huge profit to the game company. At the same time, the negative effects of the game are growing. In addition to the negative news about the game itself, the negative impact of Internet addiction should not be underestimated, and the health of many addicted game players is flashing red.

In previous years, the research on game strategies mainly focused on MOBA games, and the analysis and research on WeChat mini program game strategies are less. The last one so popular WeChat small game "jump and jump" has been as early as 6 years ago. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to take the game "Sheep a Sheep" as an example to discuss the replicability of marketing and the methods of preventing Internet addiction by using the literature. The first chapter

of this study introduces the basic concept and characteristics of the WeChat mini program game "Sheep a Sheep". The second part makes a comprehensive study of its marketing strategies. The last section introduces the impact and countermeasures of the game from two perspectives. From the perspective of game developers, the reproducibility of marketing based on the game's marketing strategies is discussed. From the point of view of the game audience, this paper analyzes and studies the methods of preventing Internet addiction.

2. Basic Introduction of WeChat Mini Program Game "Sheep a Sheep"

2.1. Introduction of "Sheep a Sheep"

"Sheep a Sheep" was released by Beijing Jianyou Network Technology Co., Ltd. in September 2022. This is an online elimination game on a cartoon background. The game uses a variety of props and prompts to remove obstacles and traps from each level. The game went viral on Weibo overnight on Sept 13, 2022. In just one week, more than 6 billion people read about the topic, with more than 5.4 million interactions. As the game's popularity continues to rise, some players have pointed out that the gameplay is not innovative, suspected of plagiarism and other problems. However, the negative news has not stopped gamers from playing the game, and the heat is still rising.

2.2. The Characteristics and Influence of "Sheep a Sheep"

The game belongs to the WeChat mini program game. It is easy to operate and can be played immediately without downloading. Therefore, the threshold of the game is low, and it has a wide audience and potential user base. In terms of gameplay, the first level of the game is very easy, while the second level is incredibly difficult compared to the first level. Compared with the gradual difficulty design of ordinary games, the counter-intuitive difficulty curve of "Sheep a Sheep" has left a deep impression on many players who play this small game, so lots of people have posted jokes online. In terms of the pace of the game, the simple match-three brings direct feedback, which many players are strongly obsessed with. At the same time, there is a player ranking on the home page of "Sheep a Sheep", which ranks players in different regions, so that the score between players is directly reflected in the total score obtained by the region. In order to pass games or to improve their ranking, people are glued to their phones even while eating. Often someone plays to indulge in the game, accidentally can even play until 4 a.m.

3. Marketing Strategies of "Sheep a Sheep"

3.1. The Traps of Human Nature

What makes "Sheep a Sheep" so compelling is that it captures human psychological frailties in three aspects: human play instinct, cognitive outcome bias, and hard fun. The combination of the human play instinct and the impact of the pandemic makes people tend to play casual games; the contrast of the great difficulty between the two levels of the game causes people's cognitive outcome bias to attract people's attention; the hard fun of the game makes people so addicted that they can't stop playing.

3.1.1. Human Play Instinct

According to Schiller, man is born to play, and he plays only when he is fully human; a man is a complete man only when he is playing. In addition, Schiller also proposed that games are the product of excess energy, and is the activity of individuals with surplus energy [1].

The COVID-19 epidemic in China has been nearly three years since the end of 2019, and it rebounded rapidly in 2022. Under the epidemic, large factories laid off workers, all walks of life fell into a growth bottleneck, and people's mood was relatively low and depressed. At the same time, spare time was on the rise for students locked in schools and workers forced to stay home, thanks to coronavirus containment measures such as lockdowns. Then, the remaining energy and pent-up emotions stimulated people's need to play and relieve stress. As a casual game, "Sheep a Sheep" that has the characteristics of a small capacity, simple rules and the purpose of leisure and entertainment, can use the scattered time to play, and the game terminal configuration requirements are not high [2]. These characteristics make the game a wide audience, a low threshold, to meet the needs of people to play and decompress the need to relax.

3.1.2. Cognitive Outcome Bias

Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias that favors information that confirms people's previously existing beliefs or biases. When people play the first teaching level of "Sheep a Sheep", they tend to think of it as a simple match-3 game. Therefore, people can't help but put this game in the same category as ordinary entertainment, resulting in a dismissive idea leading people's psychology of "availability bias". Availability bias refers to the tendency for people to judge the likelihood of an event based on cognitive availability. When people try the first level and find it so easy, they expect the next level to be gradually harder based on past experience. However, the reality is that the second level is directly upgraded to Hell-level difficulty, with a clearance rate of less than 0.1%, and very few people can pass it. This sharp contrast of hedging thinking directly subverts people's cognition, which attracts people's attention, and arouses players' pain points. The resulting bias, through confirmation and availability, is one of the most important factors that makes the game attractive to users in the first place.

3.1.3. Hard Fun

Xuhua Liao, a senior analyst, attributed the game's popularity mainly to the fact that it uses the idea of "Hard Fun" to design a traditional match-three game, which is both casual and challenging [3]. In games, people have to face challenges, solve problems, turn situations around and overcome difficulties to complete tasks, and there's fun in the process. People enjoy it because it also represents a sense of accomplishment and a state of overcoming some difficulty. At the same time, the game's sharing words, such as "If you're not smart enough, don't challenge the game!" stimulate people's desire to challenge.

3.2. User Stickiness Increased by Social Attributes

Enter the mini program, the first thing that catches people's eyes is the geographical ranking. The game will be ranked according to the progress of each region of the country, which is a good geographical comparison. Players can choose to join different teams, and after trying to beat the level, they can gain points for their team, and finally, the winning team will get some rewards. Operation strategies of "Sheep a Sheep", directly lock the user in the "sheep pen"! Regarding gameplay design, "Sheep a Sheep" takes provinces as the "circle" to stimulate players' geographical comparison. The game attracts players of the same circle to participate by stimulating the desire for self-protection of the region. Although there is no material reward, the player's competitive heart, self-achievement, and regional identity have a strong stimulus.

When the players open the game, they may struggle to finish the game because the number one region is not their hometown. At the same time, people will unknowingly use items to watch advertisements or share them to finish the game. This investment of time and social connections

starts to get to people. "Sheep a Sheep" keeps the player playing by pulling the player back and forth between the hopeless and the hopeful.

3.3. Fission Propagation by Using WeChat Ecology

"Sheep a Sheep", this popular small game, is built on WeChat, so the huge active user group of WeChat is bound to become an important way of transmission of this game, which is laying the foundation of fission transmission. There are no expensive sessions throughout the game, and the first level is so easy that it doesn't leave a particularly offensive impression. In addition, it is based on WeChat mini program to run, without additional download of the APP; just click on the link shared by friends can directly start, so its threshold is also very low.

Throughout the game, "Sheep a Sheep" allows 3 items to be used and resurrected after failure, for a total of 4 chances. To take advantage of these four opportunities, people can share the game link with their WeChat friends in addition to watching the ads. Shen and Chiou believe that social relationship strength positively moderates the effect of AD interactivity on sharing intention [4]. WeChat is a society of acquaintances, so when people share advertisements in exchange for game items, they will subconsciously share them with the people they are most familiar with. The recipient is more likely to click on the link when they see that it is shared by an acquaintance, further getting stuck in the sharing cycle. Meanwhile, online content with positive emotions is more likely to go viral than negative ones, according to Berger and Milkman's research [5]. The game's sharing words, such as "It is said that those who pass the game can reach the IQ of Einstein!" hit the spot. Moreover, people will post screenshots of clearance on WeChat Moments to show off. This kind of behavior, for the game, on the one hand, can play the role of promotion; on the other hand, it can also arouse the disobedience mentality and challenge the desire of viewers in the circle of friends, and further indulge in the game. Finally, "Sheep a Sheep" spread through virus fission in the whole WeChat ecosystem. As a result, more and more users will join the game.

3.4. Internet Marketing by Using Complaining Points of the Game

Most players first came into contact with "Sheep a Sheep" when it appeared on Weibo for three consecutive days as a hot search, launching a marketing campaign. As a result, hashtags such as # Dreams are full of "Sheep a Sheep" #, # The second level of "Sheep a Sheep" finally passed # was trending on short video platforms such as Douyin. In just a few days, the popularity of "Sheep a Sheep" continued to rise, and the game server even crashed 3 times in 2 days.

Through "the game producer made millions of dollars for one day" and others deliberately created the topic of marketing, "Sheep a Sheep" grabs people's eyes. In the process of network marketing, "Sheep a Sheep" quickly grasps the psychology tendency of user experience, and then guides users to participate in and share, deepening users' understanding of the game, and building a close relationship between users and the game [6]. As people continue to share, the game's popularity flows through the roof so that many media outlets even offer to advertise it. More and more people and media are actively or passively involved in the Internet communication.

Douyin, Weibo, and other platforms are full of "Sheep a Sheep". Due to nearly everyone using a few of these platforms, when one wants to spread the game, one usually does so on their primary platform. This has led to the phenomenon of playing games on one platform and spreading the game on multiple platforms. Finally, there appears the phenomenon promotion effect of online celebrities and ordinary people playing games to follow the trend. With above communication strategies, it is a great way for game developers to create and promote their games. However, this phenomenon of large-scale marketing, for many people, especially those with poor self-control, make it easy to indulge in fun and affect their own pace of life.

4. The Influence of the WeChat Mini Program Game "Sheep a Sheep" and Its Countermeasures

4.1. Game Developers —— Replicability of Marketing

4.1.1. Capture People's Psychology—— Create Complaining Points of the Game

Complaining points of a game can first make psychological or visual impact on the player. Once a person has emotional fluctuations on a product, the next step is to find a place to vent, such as asking friends to make fun of them, asking for help on Weibo, and so on. It is because of catharsis that there is dissemination. For example, in "Sheep a Sheep", the huge contrast between the difficulty of the first level and the second level leads to a nuke-grade complaining point. For every ten players, ten make fun of the game's difficulty. Overnight, jokes about the difficulty of the game exploded, creating a viral and phenomenal marketing scene. In addition to making the game more challenging, game developers can also incorporate online language into game design or game promotion.

4.1.2. Expand Potential User Base—— Enhance People's Experience

To be a phenomenon product, there must be a huge number of people spontaneously spreading it. While, to have a large user base, the threshold of first playing the game should be low, and the configuration of the game should not be very high, so that everyone can get started. The game's design should be simple and the game mechanics should follow Eyal's addiction model (which consists of four elements: trigger, action, motivation and engagement). The combination of a large gaming population and addictive game mechanics leads to the phenomenon of people playing games on one platform and spreading them across multiple platforms. When a game has a phenomenon effect, both online celebrities and ordinary people will take the initiative to promote it, which makes a breakthrough in marketing on one platform and the whole platform follows up.

4.1.3. Maximize Communication Benefits —— Choose the Right Platform

In the promotion period of mobile games, the traditional network mode can be used for centralized promotion first. This way can let the most users know it and improve its influence. When game developers have defined their target groups, they need to study which platforms are frequently used by users, and invest more advertising in these platforms to maximize the penetration rate of the platforms. They can also promote games through social media marketing. For example, they can promote games through anchors of relevant game types on live streaming platform apps to promote games in a targeted manner and improve user engagement. During the operation period of mobile games, social media marketing accounts for the main part. Online game manufacturers collect feedback and suggestions from players and users through major game forums, mobile application markets and other channels, and update game versions accordingly to improve user retention [7].

4.2. Game Audience —— Prevention of Internet Addiction

According to statistics, the passing rate of the second level of "Sheep a Sheep" is about one in 1,000. If a person plays 50 times and watch advertisements, it will take about 75 minutes. Therefore, people themselves, as well as relevant game development companies and society should take a series of measures to prevent people from indulging in games.

4.2.1. Psychology Cognition

There are only three things people need to think about to get out of the "Sheep a Sheep" game. First, understand that the probability of passing the game is extremely low, and most people are just wasting their time. There are a lot of articles on the Internet about how the game is designed so that people can't pass it. By knowing this fact, people can gain a small range of positive emotions. Second, people need to realize that the game needs to watch a video to get items, so they have to wait half a minute frequently. This undoubtedly increases the investment of time cost, but the game is likely to be a fruitless thing and will face a lot of interference, which leads to the first step to stop playing.

Next, people need to figure out whether it matters if they can get through the game and make the provincial ranks up. Does that make any difference to a person as a member of this province? Can people make their province feel superior to the people of other provinces? There doesn't seem to be. If people can figure out the relationship between themselves and their province's ranking in the game, they're going further.

In the end, given the above premise, there is no point in playing the game. What matters is for game makers, because they can make money from people watching ads. Ordinary people aren't playing games, and they're just making money for game developers by constantly watching videos. So, no matter how, they also won't produce the so-called real sense of accomplishment. If there's no point in knowing and no sense of accomplishment, people can almost stop wasting time on it.

4.2.2. Personal Behavior

In preventing Internet addiction, individual behavior is mainly divided into self-management and helping others. In terms of self-management, people need to be aware of the harm of online game addiction, such as spending a lot of useless time indulging in the virtual network. Based on the psychological cognitive aspects, people can then choose positive behaviors and turn those positive behaviors into habits. For example, people can choose appropriate fitness, running, reading, listening to music. It is important to remember that it is not these external behaviors that treat people's addictions, but their physiological mechanisms. People need to make use of this adjustment mechanism, let them have the habit of positive behavior, participate in more collective activities, explore the reasons for their addiction to online games, face up to themselves, and seek help and solutions. Also, they can actively participate in various school and social activities, communicate more with family and friends, and adjust themselves. In terms of helping others, people can pay more attention to their friends around them, observe the causes of their addiction to online games, communicate more, and try their best to help their classmates and friends.

4.2.3. Game Development Company

Although many mobile games and computer client network games have increased the "anti-addiction" system, which is aimed at children under 18 years old and is to prevent too long addiction to online games, there are still some loopholes. For example, minors let their parents swipe their faces to play games; people of limited age or who have been playing for a long time use the visitor access channel (originally intended for unregistered users to try it out) to continue playing games. Therefore, the game development company should limit the level or duration of the tourists' trial play to a certain extent, and add a system of compulsory rest beyond a certain time to prevent the online game addicts without self-control from exploiting the loopholes and play the game continuously. There should also be a reminder of healthy play on the screen when entering the game.

4.2.4. Society

First, the relevant departments can increase the supervision of online games, from the source and terminal two aspects of supervision. The source is to strengthen the supervision of game development companies, set up standards for online games, and at the same time, review the content of games. The departments should purify the network environment and remove harmful information, so prevent minors from accessing harmful information and reduce the risk of their Internet access to prevent the root cause of students addicted to games caused by the bad influence [8]. In the terminal, the departments should increase the management of Internet cafes and other related places. They should strengthen law enforcement and standardize the production and dissemination of online games-related requirements. For one thing, they should supervise online products and service providers to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations to prevent minors from becoming addicted to the Internet. They should also punish those who fail to fulfill their responsibilities and violate laws and regulations according to law. For the other thing, education, management, supervision and supervision should be carried out on minors' use of anti-Internet addiction products and services to promote the greater role of anti-Internet addiction products, services, management systems and social mechanisms [9].

Secondly, psychology counseling centers can be set up. Many online game addicts have certain psychological problems, and their parents do not know how to contact their children, so the establishment of the relevant psychology counseling center, can help the families of online game addicts to better adjust the state of their children from the inside out.

Finally, the relevant Esports training institute can be established. In the era of new media, with the popularity of e-sports, many online game addicts have an "e-sports dream", which is an excuse for mobile games and online games. For this reason, the society can open an official training institution, which seems to be training, but uses formal means to let these college students addicted to online games understand the difference between e-sports, online games and mobile games. With the way of keeping pace with The Times, high-intensity training consumes the enthusiasm of this kind of online game-addicted people. When love becomes something that has to be controlled, it will make these people shy away from difficulties to achieve the goal [10].

5. Conclusion

This paper studies the marketing strategies of the WeChat mini program game "Sheep a Sheep". Based on this, the replicability of the marketing strategies is analyzed. Finally, the method of preventing and quitting Internet addiction is proposed for people who are addicted to the game and it affect their normal life.

First of all, this paper gives a brief introduction to the game "Sheep a Sheep" and explains its characteristics and influence. The operation of the match-three game is simple, and the threshold is low, which makes the audience wide. The great contrast between the two levels of difficulty and the provincial ranking of the game makes people addicted to the game, and forget themselves. Based on the game mechanics and characteristics, this paper further studies the successful marketing strategies behind the game. The game sets up human traps to catch people's psychology and make them obsessed with the game. In addition, the game also uses social attributes such as provincial ranking and title to improve user stickiness, uses the ecology of WeChat and the characteristics of acquaintance society to spread virally, and finally uses complaining points to guide users to participate and share in carrying out Internet marketing, which finally causes phenomenon effect.

The above marketing strategies have implications for game developers. Firstly, game developers can make the game through the complaining points, such as improving the game difficulty or using the network language, to seize people's psychology and attract people's attention. Then by creating

an addictive game mechanism, they can strengthen the user experience to expand the potential user base. Finally, at different marketing stages, they can choose the appropriate platform according to the media habits of game players to obtain maximum benefits of transmission.

However, this phenomenon of large-scale marketing, for many people, especially those with poor self-control, make it easy to indulge in games and affect their own pace of life. To detox from Internet addiction, people can first realize that playing games is a meaningless thing from psychology cognition, then find a positive lifestyle from their physiological adjustment mechanism, and help friends with similar situations to get rid of Internet addiction. Game development companies need to fix bugs and promote the concept of healthy play. The whole of society has a big role to play in this, too. Relevant departments can strengthen the supervision of online games from the source and terminal, set up psychology counseling centers to help psychology counseling, and establish relevant training institutions for online competitive online games, so that the cruelty of e-sports can make people withdraw from difficulties and get rid of Internet addiction. If future scholars want to study this topic, they can pay more attention to qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews to obtain the impact of WeChat mini program games on the audience, and the author also hopes to make some contributions to future scholars through this research.

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