Meme Culture Shapes Rules Design in Games

Yigang Liu
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Yigang Liu
Shanghai Academy of Fine Art
Shanghai University
W5 Building, Yanchang Road,
Shanghai University Yanchang Campus
+86-18351514053
nealliu@shu.edu.cn

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Under the theory construction of the digital game design, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman summarized the game as a system. A game as a formal system is always embedded within an experiential system, and a game as a cultural system contains formal and experiential systems. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) Beneath the system, one of the fundamental elements is the rules of the game. The rules of games have to be sufficiently well defined that they can be either programmed on a computer or that players do not have to argue about them every time they play. (Juul, 2005) The rules of a digital game are related to the program code, but they are not the same thing as the program code. Rules are abstract tools for thinking about the formal structure of a game and are not necessarily literally manifest in code. (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) Digital Game rules are usually designed by either programmers or designers. Exceptions exist in some games, which the rules of digital games are against the ultimate goals and they are formed during the gameplay, heavily affected by the Internet culture in these days. In this case, this article will pick the PlayerUnknown’s Battleground’s (Bulehole 2017) communication rule design as example. The short video media application alters its' communication rule design. The dancing video becomes meme culture, increasingly spreading by the streamers. Turning the game to paratext as a performing platform rather a digital competition game as maintext for a win.

PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds is an online multiplayer battle royale game, published by South Korean game company Bluehole. (Wikipedia, 2017) Since Bluehole launched PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds on the game platform Steam, it remains overwhelming popularity in the last two years globally. In the year 2018, the whole revenue of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds reached $1028 million, and the game earned 19% more in 2018 than in 2017. As SuperData pointed out, PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds was the year’s highest-earning premium title despite competition from other entries in the battle royal genre in 2018. (SuperData Research Holdings, 2019) This game’s mechanism is based on the battle royale genre and First Person Shooting Game, which requires a player to control the character in first person perspective or third person perspective to shoot the enemy and collect the resources until last one or team standing. However, the game genre is not fixed but continuously transformed as it undergoes a process of change. (Choi & Kim, 2018) So that we cannot rule other genres out of this discussion, but narrow down to the example of PUBG, also known as PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds. It will provide a vivid example to enlighten the designer how
to adjust the rule design to match the expectation of players, viewers and streamers.

Douyin is a media application for creating and sharing short videos, developed by ByteDance in September 2016, has been raised in recent years internationally. Short video is a new manifestation form integrating text and image records, and it has become a new way of information record, transmission and sharing through tens of seconds or several mins' videos. (Li, 2018) Douyin short video has shown a tendency of music courses, dance course and other micro-merchant subdivision. (Li, 2018) Streamers are using PUBG game as a paratext on media platform of Douyin. Paratexts have been posited as offering gaming capital to players, who then have knowledge about a game to display to others as well as to use within games during actual play. (Consalvo, 2017) On the social platform Douyin, the playing video of PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds usually present with these forms, the dancing of the character, the skill of the player, and the communication between players. According to categorical of the rules of games, goal rules are battle rules which are a premise to attack other players in order to survive as a final one, which is the final goal of the gameplay. The general setting of battle rules is distinguished by game mode (single or group battle). (Choi & Kim, 2018) However, these three forms are fundamentally paradox to the game rules that the performance is meant to entertain the viewers, it is totally against the ultimate goal rules of the game. The term ‘meme’ refers to small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread by copying or imitation. (Shifman, 2012) The meme culture also immersive into the three forms of playing video. At first, there was no dancing function in the gameplay. Then with the popularity increase of the dancing in Douyin, the gameplay started to add the dancing and the gesturing function into the game. The meme also influences the language that streamers using while they were recording the video. Fans and players are manipulating the game rules to service for their purpose. Eventually as Consalvo pointed out, removing or de-centering games from what we might think of as their more central position in a game studies analysis demonstrates their contingent nature in the realm of meaning making—and the contingent placement of any such text. (Consalvo, 2017)

In a broader perspective, Henry Jenkins sees video games as part of a bigger complex of transmedia storytelling, where content can move between different media. (Juul, 2005) Either E-sports broadcasters or the streamers, they offer the entertainment and education video content for viewers on the short video sharing platform. The following research will take a close look at the design process on how to balance the game’s goal and the purpose service as paratext function.

Bibliography
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