Exploration of Digital Game Players' Superpower Behavior from the Perspective of a Desirous Subject

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Abstract: Many factors lead to the expansion of the "stay-at-home economy." One of these is the capability of products to provide "spiritual force" to people. Motivated by need to explore "spiritual force," the author intends to probe into how digital games provide "spiritual force" to people by studying the contents and the charm of these games.

The virtuality of digital games allows players to generate superpower behaviors which are not possible in real life. These games have the power to sway perceptions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how this virtual superpower exerts influence on players and to explain the charm of digital games. The investigation would be made on three aspects, namely, games, players, and the desirous subject, as well as on the relations among the three aspects.

In this paper, the emphasis is on psychology, game phenomenon, media, and man-machine interface. In addition, a crossover analysis of games, players, and superpower desire is made based on the above perspectives in order to arrive at the answer to the research question, "how do players gain happiness from digital games?" This would be achieved through discussion and analysis of the fact that the traditional need satisfaction theory could not be used to explain the charm of games or be the reason why digital games could bring happiness to players. The author believed that the major reason is that the level of satisfaction with digital games is unlikely achieved, that is, the players are not probably satisfied so much so that they go on playing.

Keywords: Desire, Digital games, Superpower behavior, Happiness

1.Introduction

With the boom in computer technology and science, the market share of digital games has continuously increased. A survey conducted by Entertainment Soft Association (ESA) in 2008 shows that 65 percent of American families play digital games. In addition, the results of the *CESA Public Life Survey Report 2008 - On Japanese and Korean Game Users and Non-users* reveal that the number of game players in Japan increased significantly, accounting for 10.3 percent of its total population. Likewise, it is estimated that the number of game players may reach up to 37.89 million (Bahamut, 2008). A study on digital games in Korea in 2007, the *Korean Games White Paper 2008*, reveals that the number of game players increased from 16.2 percent in 2006 to 26 percent in 2007, with nearly a 10 percent increase of (FU, 2008).

According to the Survey of Online Game Player Entertainment Behavior made by MIC (2008), the number of online game players increased by 7 percent in 2008 over the previous year. It is clear from the statistical data that

digital games have grown rapidly. However, why are digital games so attractive? In this paper, the research question "How do players gain happiness from digital games?" will be addressed. The author will study the game content of superpower which could only be achieved in digital games. In addition, the author will explore how the games influence the players. The research will be conducted on three aspects, that is, games, players, and superpower desire, with the hope that the charm of digital games will be explained and so that a response to the current hot topic of how the "stay-at-home economy" concept has grown so fast can be made.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current Development of Domestic Digital Games

The survey made by Market Intelligence and Consulting Institute (MIC) (2008) on digital game players in Taiwan showed the following results: nearly 70% of those surveyed play one to two types of online games every week, they have played online games for an average period of 4.8 years, they would continue playing one game for 1.5 years or so, and they spend 2 hours on the average playing online games every time. The massive multiplayer online game (MMOG) is the most popular with players, accounting for 94%.

As Huang (2005) pointed out, the development of digital games in Taiwan mainly depends on the platform of personal computer. Generally speaking, digital games fall into two types: PC Game (PCG) and On Line Game (OLG). In connection with this observation, most game operators work as agents for foreign games. However, this situation has changed with the development of the game industry. Syu (2008) pointed out several Taiwanese designed games in the past. Wanting to make money quickly, they worked as agents for foreign bestsellers. However, Taiwan game companies at present find that working as agents for foreign games is not the most useful consideration anymore. Thus, they conducted market acceptance evaluation to know what directions to take. On the other hand, companies have realized the importance of investing in R&D to increase the proportion of self-designed games. All of these are designed to free themselves from the "destiny" of remaining as merely agents.

Commenting on the current operation mode and charging mode of the Taiwan game industry, Wu (2006) said that the Taiwan game industry has already transformed the charging mode of OLG into an operation mode free of charge since 2006. Syu (2008) pointed out that the increase of free games and the consequent decrease of the monthly or hourly pay-for-play games forced game operators to seek other ways to make profits. However, it is shown from He's (2006) study that the free game is merely a way to lure players to play the games. Whether players actually gain happiness from the games is what game operators are concerned with the most. Therefore, Lan (2007) proposed that the user experience design method should be applied to the game industry in order to meet players' demands and enable players to gain happiness. Moreover, Syu (2008) also pointed out that as free games have become prevalent, operators should figure out various marketing methods and advertising techniques to attract players.

Therefore, based on the above information on the Taiwan game industry, designing games has become the trend, and colleges and universities have responded by setting up relevant facilities to foster talents and further enhance Taiwan's strength in the R&D of games. Presently, Taiwan game designers have already designed several types of games such as Chinesegamer's *Legend of Six Saint-Knights*, Playcoo's *Stars*, FlyFish Digitals' Tale of *Fairies and Monsters,* and other games. All these designed games showcased Taiwan's ability in designing online games and enabled Taiwan game operators to get closer to their dream of getting rid of the destiny of being mere game agents.

2.2 Studies on Game Design

In Taiwan, most practical studies are completed by using interactive media. For example, Lin, S.G. (2007) created a table tennis virtual reality game by integrating triaxial accelerator and Bluetooth. Shih (2005) wrote a force feedback program for the force feedback wheel by using the Utcsetup support software for further use in 3D games and interface equipment. In such studies, educational and entertainment applications have also been taken into account. For example, Lin (2006) made a practical research on children's learning through an interactive design in the hope that children's efficiency in learning will be enhanced. Kao (2008) created a game on the restoration of Taiwan's ancient culture by using the Wii Remote on his PC. These efforts hope to preserve Taiwanese culture.

However, compared with practical research, theoretical studies on digital games are wider in scope and greater in number. Theoretical studies fall into two categories, technical and cultural. Technically oriented theoretical studies focus on solving the problems of digital games in the areas of execution efficiency, performance quality, interface, and other aspects by using better theoretical models or design methods. For example, Wu (2008) proposed better suggestions on the design of game scenes theoretically. Tsai (2006) offered advice about game interface by making an analysis of interview data and users' log. Wen (2007), on the other hand, made a study on design rules for better utility of the man-machine interface by taking the game machine of Nintendo as an example.

From the cultural perspective, most studies on digital games have laid their focus on players' behavior, degree of addiction, gratification, loyalty, and other aspects. For example, Cai et al. (2008), by using the quantitative method, explored the effect of online games on physical and psychological health and the attitude towards learning of college students who are likely to become addicted to digital games. Ferng et al. (2005), also adopted the quantitative method to probe into the potential factors that may cause the addictive behavior of middle school students to video games. Huang (2003) made an analysis of the key factors for the success of online game marketing by adopting the statistical method.

Furthermore, culture-oriented digital game research could also be made from the perspective of the arts, sociology, history, literature, and other sciences. For example, Wang (2004) explored the influence of high-technology digital games on the arts from the perspective of traditional arts. Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, Wu (2006) made a study on how to localize Japanese digital games and the cultural significance behind them by taking *Street Fighters* and *The King of Fighters* as examples.

It is clear from the above literature review that digital games involve multiple fields. In this research, the focus is set on the relationship between the superpower content of games and the players' desire. In addition to the discussion on Lacan's Theory of Desires, this paper also explores the relationship between players' feeling and desire from the angle of the hyperrealistic features of digital games. Moreover, the study probes into the charm of digital games themselves.

2.3 Studies on Desires

Tomasello et al. (2005) believed that the distinction between intention and desire is that the latter is featured with a certain purpose, while intension is featured by both purpose and plan. Wang (2007) grouped people's desires from the perspective of buying behavior into artificial buying desire and spontaneous buying desire. He likewise

emphasized that artificial buying desire is created by men, as opposed to spontaneous buying desire. Lacan (1981) intended to make certainty of what "desire" means from two aspects: "demand" and "need." He thinks that demand could be expressed with words, while need is biological, resulting from a certain lack. He further expressed that the other who listens to the demand is not under the full control of the Subject, and thus need and demand are not exactly equivalent, and the gap between both generates the desire (Wang, G.F., 1997). Lacan's theory is often used to explore topics about desire. For example, Lin (2003) borrowed Lacan's theory to discuss the desire of games, and Wu (2003) made an analysis of coffee advertisement according to Lacan's theory. Enlightened by Wang's research, the author not only discussed the topic about desire on the basis of Lacan's theory but also made an analysis of the media information concerning artificial buying desire with the hope of improving the analysis on desire.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Digital Games -- the Perspective of Digital Games' Functions

Pillari (2006) mentioned that from the viewpoint of anthroposociology, psychologists believe games are a tool for people to learn social skills and give vent to their overloaded excitement. Salen et al. (2004) insisted that game should be defined starting from the linguistic perspective and discussed based on two relevant concepts in English, "play" and "game." They further concluded that as compared to "play," "game" has a set of formalized rules which players should abide by, while "play" is a main constituent of "game." However, Huizinga (1938) thought that game is a cultural phenomenon which has nothing to do with biology (Chen, 2005). Chen (2005), on the basis of Huizinga's viewpoints, pointed out that the major trait of game is "fun," and game is featured by freedom and anomy.

In view of this, the author believed that it is meaningless to give a formal definition to "game." Thus, only its nature is discussed from the angle of players' feeling about games. Therefore, in this paper, the author will begin the study from the perspective of psychology, in light of Seligman's (2007) viewpoint that happiness has two layers. One is pleasure. He mentions that pleasure is strongly related to the sense and emotion, and sensory satisfaction and happiness are spontaneous. The other is gratification. He believes that gratification could not be obtained from physical pleasure, and only after an elegant and unselfish act is done could gratification be generated naturally. As long as we have the capacity to cope with challenges and make some achievements, we could have such feeling.

Seligman (2007) further mentioned that pleasure is easy to obtain. Gratification, on the other hand, is difficult to have. Most people prefer pleasure over gratification. In view of this, game should not be so popular with people if it is purely a source of gratification. Why are digital games so popular that they might likely replace the TV to become a tool for entertainment of the new generation? Based on the above-mentioned different viewpoints, the author thinks that in essence, game is a kind of behavior that enables players to feel gratified and pleased in different degrees, and digital games could also enable players to generate both feelings.

Jenkins (2007) believed that computer game might be an inevitable trend in a changeable world. In this paper, the author believes that people have the curiosity and desire which impel them to make some explorations. The more and more compression of living space enables digital games to become a tool for people to fulfill their desire to explore. This tool, being a digital media and due to its creative content, helps players generate a stronger feeling than the physical game, so it leads players to feel more pleased and gratified. Consequently, in

addition to environment change as a passive factor, digital games could generate a strong power proactively to make people wiling to accept and enjoy them.

3.2 Digital Game Players - the Perspective of What Players Want from Games

Novak (2 007) summarized th e motivations of p layers t o play games in to sev en points: so cial i nteraction, isolation from the world, competition, knowledge, domination, escape from reality, and addiction. Many studies have been conducted by researchers in Taiwan on the motivation of players to play games. For example, Lin, J.J. (2007) studied the motivations to engage in online games from the perspective of communalism combined with critical mass an d en tertainment cogn ition. In th e stud y, he po inted out that self-esteem is th e m ost i mportant factor t hat u rges players t o pl ay gam es, fol lowed by flow e xperience, i nfluence, s ense of belonging, a nd entertainment cognition. The author considers that the above research findings might be significant to theoretical studies on players' behavior, but wonders whether these research findings are helpful in designing games from the perspective of application.

Lan (2007) interviewed game designers and attempted to understand their opinions on "applying user experience to game d esign" using th e data sh e obtained. She fou nd t hat in terviewees af firm t he con tribution of users' experience to game development, but on the other hand, they also think it is in feasible or risky in some aspects when they develop games by borrowing users' experience. Many designers hesitate to discuss the topic.

As w hat I ron (2002) p ointed out, users' ex perience i s a ki nd o f c oncept an d m ethod fi rst ap plied t o p roduct development in the field of computer design, especially in the relationship between functionality and usability. It becomes a m ethod t o understand u sers' de mands an d ex pectation i n l atter ser vice periods. La n (2007) further stressed that the discussion on users' experience is no longer confined to the concept of usability but is extended to the level of psychology, on such perspectives as pleasure and esthetics. For example, as what Houde and Hill (1997) stated, experience is s omething that users could see and feel, and stress is placed on users' real sensory experience in using the products, including the feeling resulting from seeing, hearing, and feeling.

In t his paper, the reason why d igital g ames en able players to feel pleased and gratified is t he ab ility to lead sensory si mulation to occ ur and impose a psy chological chal lenge on p layers. Furthermore, the reas ons why digital games have such features are operationability and the ability to tell sto ries. Therefore, in this paper, the author suggests that designers should take both points into consideration if they apply user experience to design games. Fro m t he p erspective o f t he m aneuverability o f digital g ames, t hese are inv olved i n th e design of the man-machine interface . As what Ho (2006) stated, a s players and game machines reach t he degree of "man-machine integration," players c ould feel pleased. There fore, on t he operational level, efforts sho uld be made to cente r on users in order to reac h "m an-machine in tegration." Ho wever, st ories in d igital g ames are involved i n t he desi gn o f game cont ent an d game rul es. If designers depend too m uch on user ex perience, it might render the message of the story redundant. It is found from Chang's (2001) studies that reducing the high redundancy o f adve rtisement by re ducing i ts cl arity enab les vi ewers t o fi nd n ovelty fr om sim ilarity and t o generate experience easi ly. In view of this, the stories in digital games should not depend on user experience; otherwise, the novelty may disappear.

Therefore, from what the author has discussed above, most game designers hesitate to apply user experience to game desi gn. Thus, not al l finished games cent er on use rs, a nd t he redundancy of game cont ent i s reduced; players are enabled to generate more experience. This experience is new t o players; that is why it is conside red

progress or improvement in terms of its significance.

3.3 Superpower Desirous Subject – the Superpower Game and the Relationship between Players' Demand and Desire

3.3.1 Discussion on Desire from the Perspectives of Psychology and Media

Lacan (1981) believed that objet-a is an expression of the insufficiency the subject suffers from when it separates itself from the mother. When the subject is established, it becomes the cause of desire and turns to be the object or the signifier of desire. The original meaning of objet-a has already disappeared because the object of desire changes ceaselessly; as a result, desire could never be satisfied. In view of this, the greatest desire of the subject is to satisfy the lack it suffers from upon separation from the mother. However, the subject's identification with the father intervenes and inhibits infants and mother from unifying, so the subject tries to seek his desire in the Other. Therefore, all desires are substitutes for the desires of returning to the mother, so these desires could never be satisfied. May shares the same opinion with Lacan. May (1990) stated that the target of lust is a kind of desire, wish, eternal exploration, and ceaseless expansion. He also considered that desire should have no rest and also believed that the empty feeling or feeling of unreality mainly originates from individuals' feeling of "impotence." If an individual feels that he/she is not able to become a useful entity, not able to alter others' attitudes toward him/her, or unable to exert an effective influence on the world around him, he/she would fall into despair or a sense of helplessness. From the social phenomenon of more and more men resorting to the gym to strengthen their muscles and shape their bodies, Pope et al (2001) discovered fault with media which adopt models with perfect figures. This may consequently lead the audience to feel inferior.

According to the above-mentioned viewpoints, the media seem to have the power to alter people's behavior. Baudrillard (1988) believed that advertising, with the aid of an arbitrary and systematic sign, respectively induces, mobilizes consciousness, and reconstitutes itself in the very process of the collective. Through advertising, mass society and consumer society continuously transform themselves. Therefore, in a consumer society, advertising brings changes to the motivation theory of demand and satisfaction. The times in which people consumed "objects" to fill the material gap has changed. People have begun to consume the "meaning" bestowed to objects by advertising from surplus products. The key for the change is that advertising enables people to generate an impulse to change the status quo and arouse a desire in their mind; otherwise, the so-called despair that May mentioned settles in. From the discussion on Lacan and May's viewpoints from the psychological perspective as well as the discussion on advertising and media, the author finds that desire, generated from the mind or imposed by the external, could never be satisfied.

3.3.2 Discussion on the Superpower of Digital Games in light of Baudrillard's Hyperreality

In the light of Baudrillard's (1993) simulacra, the whole system today is filled with uncertainty, and each kind of reality is encompassed by code, simulation, and hyperreality. With regard to the simulacra of advertising or movies, their entities exist in reality, but their simulacra is truer than the reality, such as the simulacrum of Mickey Mouse in cartoons; this is the so-called "self-referential sign" or "hyperreality." Song (2003) believed that in hyperreality, the model replaces reality and even makes real things subordinated to the models, and finally makes the real things disappear because real things become more and more hyperrealistic. As a result, the reality disappears, and only the hyperreality is left. In other words, if virtual things are spread through the media, their

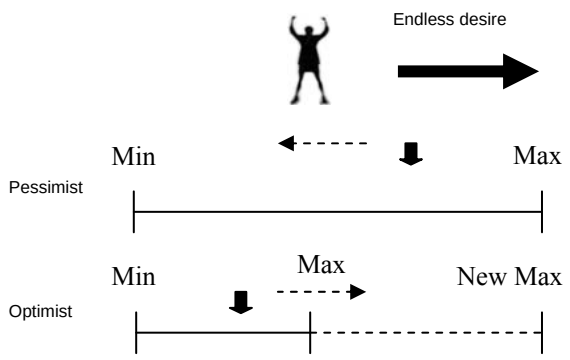
meanings will become part of the reality. If such virtual things increase, the reality may be replaced by virtuality. For these reasons, Ji (2002) believed that the functional element of Saussure's "Sign" has disappeared, and the structural element becomes the only element of the "Sign."

What is the significance of simulacra to digital games as a media? Digital games are characterized by intense interaction, and they can create an experience for players. Digital games as media differ from movies or advertising since these enable players to experience the hyperrealistic reality in a more rapid, more direct, cheaper, and more dynamic way. The simulacra of motives and advertising fail to interact with people, so they have to depend on reality to achieve a certain effect. However, the simulacra created by digital games do not need any interaction in reality because these have been designed in virtual space. As self-referential signs become popular all over the world with the globalization of the media, materialized virtual commodities or hyperrealistic real playgrounds such as Disneyland may cost more or achieve a worse effect when compared with the hyperrealistic space of digital games. The superpower content of digital games enables players not only to experience but also to control. Therefore, "power" also becomes a simulacrum. The various types of magic powers are not imaginary, but they become the power truer than reality. As a result, digital games break through the bandage of simulacra created by advertising and movies.

4.Conclusion

The topic of utmost concern in this paper is how players obtain happiness from digital games. After the discussion is made on the aspects of digital games, players, and desire, the author finds that digital games could replace a physical compressed space and enable players to obtain pleased and gratified. In addition, the author finds that players could gain experience and a fresh feeling from digital games. It is found from the exploration on desire and hyperreality that desire could never be satisfied, and digital games could turn power to superpower, enhancing the players' ability.

To summarize, when hyperreality replaces reality, the creativity of digital games becomes the priority rather than the players' experience and enables players to feel the futuristic features. People always have an impulse to satisfy their desire, so digital games, an artificial dream world, become a goal people would pursue ceaselessly. Based on such structural element, digital games enable players to obtain happiness. Based on the previous literature, the following diagram is presented:



How Digital Games Bring Happiness to Players

In this paper, the author believes that desire should be endless. In addition, the author does not adhere to the idea of happiness coming from gratification which is supported by the need satisfaction theory, because it will be the end if the desire could be satisfied. However, based on our previous studies, desire could never be satisfied. In addition, the desire of an individual is something related to "intentionality," that is to say, every conscious act is directed towards a thing. In other words, consciousness is always the consciousness about something. Simply speaking, different people may have different opinions on the same thing due to their

different inner consciousness. Therefore, the desire may be affected by "intentionality." Everything in the world is composed of Max and Min for different people as shown in the above diagram. Nevertheless, digital games affect people's opinions on the Max of the world because digital games are featured by hyperrealisic contents and creativity.

In this paper, the author supposes that the hyperrealistic content of digital games leads to a pessimist cognition of the Max to be "shrunk," yet leads to the optimist cognition of Max to be "expanded." However, people have endless desires, so digital games may provide more space for players and enable them to gain happiness whether players' cognition of Max shrinks or expands.

The reason why people feel unhappy has become clear, that is, "standing still." There are two reasons for people to stand still. On one hand, there is not enough space anymore. When people achieve the Max and have no space to move on, they will stop, and their spirit for adventure and enthusiasm will disappear. On the other hand, people may stop moving on if they feel impotent. As what May(1990) stated, the long-term impotent feeling may result in "indifference," that is, a sense of powerlessness and emptiness which cause people to be indifferent to everything. Both aspects may cause people to feel unhappy. These indirectly explain the reason why the "stay-at-home" economy grows rapidly when the general economy is in a slump; people have to get rid of unhappiness and have to break the state of "standing still." Digital games provide a goal for people to pursue. It is an "activity" that enables people to feel happy.

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