



"For the Horde": Players' Collaborative Actions in Massively Multiplayer Online Games

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The game mechanics of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) are inclined to afford team collaboration and social interaction, which implies that online games are more than attractive visual effects. In the online game world, players not merely interact with game mechanics, but also interact with other players. Therefore, various social networks are emerging. Based on literature reviews and discussions, this article explores how do Chinese players collaborate in MMOGs, and possible social meanings they obtained in game communities. The research questions are: 1) in MMOGs, what factors will influence players mutual trust and community identifications in their collaborative actions? 2) what are the social meanings for players collaborating in game world? 3) how will the players appropriate their experience of collaboration in game world to other collective actions?

In order to discuss those questions, 10 participants were recruited in our interview, and the collected data from their interpretations of game experiences suggest that players trust each other on the basis of building reputation via symbols, discourses and behaviors in online game world. And, it becomes a routine to get help from “strangers” or offer resources to “strangers”, remixing the sociality in and beyond the game worlds. This social interaction based on game mechanic could be viewed as “a combination of economic rational cooperation and youth culture” (Lin & Cheng, 2004). The affordances of game allow players to know each other’s avatar capitals, like rankings, medals, honors, popularity, and levels etc.... Besides, players will judge one’s reputation by observing his or her conversations and behaviors in game world. Most interviewees agreed that “common interests” is the deciding factor for taking a stranger player into his or her community. Meanwhile, players’ avatar and

id are social cues as well, helping reducing potential risks like cheating and verbal violence. Those three dimensions suggest that when players try to accomplish missions together they are actually performing, like an insider accords with the social routines in game community in order to gain others' trust and continuous interactions.

Secondly, digital game worlds are believed to be promising new modes of association, like teaching enlightened self-interest, creating feelings of efficacy, protecting individuality, and establishing meritocratic norms (Schulzke, 2011). When an individual gains positive self-reflection, and feel his or her action will make some effects, then a best connection between personal interests and community interests may be found. The interviewees suggest that players could achieve collaborative action when the mutual benefits are gained by sharing sources, skills and information. Moreover, the gaming experience unites players who don't share any common in offline life, and provides them a space to communicate. In game community, an individual who's merely good at gaming won't be the core for the community; the core in a community is always the informers who transmitting various information. Indeed, players continuously devote all of the times and efforts to support social interaction, hoping their game community will be persistent but not intending to raise the meaning of it. Their efforts could be sorted as body actions and language actions. Accomplishing game missions requires body actions. It may appears as clicking mouse or controlling avatars in the screens, yet they are embodied. Players are co-acting in game world, and this kind of co-acting is a communal sharing, arousing participants' common essence by connecting bodies in actions. Compared with body actions, language actions better satisfied peoples' social needs, for language actions are keeping actions accompany, and can groom more than one community member. Both body actions and language actions in game world could be viewed as a social boding.

For the third research question, this study finds out that the magic circle of game world cannot be sealed completely, while collaborative experience gained in game playing could be appropriated under certain conditions. Like Consalvo (2009) suggested, magic circle fails in capturing the complexities of MMO gameplay, and a game is better be viewed as a contextual, dynamic activity. When the "magic circle" can be penetrated, could players appropriate their experience of collaborative actions in game worlds to other online movements? In fact, in the

collective action of “Diba Expedition”^{*} in 2016, the whole process is just like a strategy game that the younger generation are familiar with. Thus, this study devotes to further discuss how will the players “bringing their collective value judgments and behavior attitude, travel between the real world and game world.” (Castronova, 2005) In China, there’s a gap between the players’ friendship and citizens’ identification. Most interviewees admit that they will intentionally avoid talking about public issues or serious topics in game communities. This becomes a tacit agreement for them. If we hope to further dissolve the bounded circle between game world and real world, transmitting social issues and motivating players, the necessary and sufficient conditions are that those issues are interesting, and participating processes are playful. This may further result in “player politics” in real world: connecting social issues via entertaining channels, and forming connective actions based on personal network, personalized performances and expression frameworks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). What MMOGs really are should be a frontier to explore networked society, and provide an opportunity to reexamine the dichotomized choices of individual/collective and online/offline in understanding social formations.

KEYWORDS

collective action, game mechanics, online community, social interaction

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^{*} In January 20, 2016, Baidu Diba, a discussion form formed in 2004 with more than 20 million registered users, mobilized its participants to bypass the firewall and occupy the Facebook pages of the Apple Daily, Sanlih TV, and Taiwanese presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen by expressing patriotism with posting the slogan “When Diba goes for battle, no grass will grow”. Participants posted more than 26,000 entries on Tsai’s Facebook page in three hours. “Diba Expedition” immediately became trendy on Weibo, QQ, Baidu discussion forums, and other social media platform.

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