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The Dissemination and Marketing Strategies of Domestic Live-Action Drama-Oriented Interactive Video Games: Taking Road to Empress as an Example

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Abstract. In the context of the rapid development of the digital entertainment industry, live-action interactive video games have gradually become a hot direction in the field of video games integration. At present, most of the relevant studies in the academic community tend to analyze the industry as a whole, and there are few discussions on the communication and marketing strategies of a specific work in China. This paper takes the domestic live-action interactive video game Road to Empress as the research object, uses the methods of literature analysis and case study, and analyzes the internal and external factors that make it popular, points out the existing problems, and then puts forward improvement suggestions for the existing problems. The research shows that the key to the commercial success of the work is to meet the needs of the audience and build a cross media communication matrix, but the defects in content, playing methods and payment also limit its long-term development. Therefore, the domestic live-action interactive video game polish the narrative of works and standardize the operation mode. It should also give consideration to artistic expression and commercial benefits, so as to provide reference for works of the same type.

Keywords: Live-action interactive video, game cross-media communication, game marketing strategy

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the new direction of live-action interactive video games, which has attracted the attention of the market. Carrying out this research has practical significance for in-depth understanding of the communication and marketing path of domestic live-action interactive video games and promoting the sound development of the film and television industry. This paper focuses on the market performance, popularity reasons, existing defects and marketing strategy optimization of Road to Empress. In the research process, the literature analysis method is used to search and read the relevant data and literature. At the same time, combined with the case study method, the work can be deeply interpreted on the basis of theory. The ultimate goal of this study is to clarify the idea of communication and marketing of this work, and dialectically treat its advantages and disadvantages. In order to achieve this goal, the article combs its market performance, analyzes the internal content logic and external communication means behind the broken circle, summarizes the

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practical problems exposed in the content, playing methods and payment of the work, and gives the feasible optimization direction, so as to make up for the deficiency of the case study of domestic real person interactive video games.

2. Market performance of road to empress

Road to Empress is a 4K live-action interactive video game created by New One Studio. The work refers to the relevant historical settings of Empress Wu Zetian in ancient China. The overall content is divided into two parts: "Mei Niang chapter"(a story chapter centered on Meiniang) and "the empress chapter". The game has hundreds of plot branches and corresponding endings. With its grand narrative and exquisite service, it has received a large number of player recognition. The overall production level ranks among the top of the same type of interactive games. The first part of the work, "Mei Niang chapter", was officially launched on September 9, 2025. It has been stable at the top of Apple's IOS entertainment payment list for several consecutive days, and the discussion heat has also remained high. The topic views of rednote alone have exceeded 260million times, and the total sales volume in the 12 days of its launch has exceeded onemillion sets. If calculated according to the official selling price of 39 yuan in this chapter, its full platform sales exceeded 39million yuan [1]. The sequel "the empress chapter", which was launched in June 2026, performed even better in the market. At the end of the month, the global sales exceeded 5million sets, breaking the industry sales record. Users' praise rate was very high, and it also ranked first in the IOS payment list for a long time. In addition, the work also has Android layout, which widens the audience circle with the differentiated operation mode of free trial, and achieves stable user growth.

According to the relevant data of BiliBili marketing center, Road to Empress also quickly set off a wave of creation and communication within the platform after its launch: the cumulative exposure of the relevant label content of the work exceeded 80million, attracting nearly 5million users to browse the relevant content, giving birth to more than 2000 secondary creative manuscripts, and more than 1500 up masters have carried out content creation around the theme of Gong Dou. On the day the work went online, it produced 9 million hit videos, covering multiple content forms such as game live, customs clearance strategies, interesting integration, plot interpretation, and role play [2].

3. Reasons for the good market performance of road to empress

Good works can gain popularity and popularity in the market, which is essentially a high match between content supply and user demand. In the highly homogenized interactive video game track, Road to Empress has successfully broken the circle by combining high-quality content creation and mature creative thinking, accurately capturing the market gap and the audience's deep demands.

3.1. Internal reason: fit the diverse needs of the audience

The market segmentation theory proposed by Wendell R. Smith, an American Marketing scientist, emphasizes that marketers should divide the overall market into clusters of different types of users based on the differences in consumer characteristics, needs, desires, behaviors, habits and scenarios, supported by the data from previous Market Research [3]. At present, most of the works in the industry lack a clear sense of user stratification in the planning stage, and generally aim at the pan entertainment audience. In particular, the domestic mainstream interactive video games focus on male audiences, such as Love is All Around and other works focus on the emotional choice of male protagonists. On the contrary, Road to Empress has precisely targeted the "first and second tier

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urban female groups" with strong consumption ability and high willingness to pay. At the same time, it aims at the digital aborigines who are familiar with digital media. When these digital aborigines become the main consumer groups, the audience's concept of media consumption also changes. They no longer blindly accept the content transmitted by the media, but hope to take the initiative in the process of cultural experience and realize the generation of personalized meaning from their own perspective [4]. Different from the mainstream love oriented interactive works in the market, the work focuses on "court strategy+the growth of big girls". It takes women's self awakening and power growth as the core, abandons the instrumental narrative of women's roles, and fills the gap in the market segment by virtue of the clear positioning of women to the track, accurately hitting the needs of user identity.

In addition, high-quality content creation is also an important way for works to be long-term out of the circle. The work attaches great importance to the visual texture and detail restoration. In addition to 4K live-action shooting, it also reproduces the scenes and costumes with reference to the historical data of the Tang Dynasty and unearthed cultural relics of Shaanxi History Museum. It highly restores the style and features of the Tang Dynasty, and is far superior to similar works in terms of visual texture and detail. In terms of narration, the 1200 minute plot of the whole play contains more than 400 interactive nodes and more than 100 plot branches. The strong and weak narrative nodes are intertwined to achieve a deep combination of interaction and narration. By setting up game mechanisms such as the highly difficult failure ending, such as the plot "the Imperial concubine asks who left the peony and mother of Pearl", two of the three options point to the death ending. The introduction of this "failure mechanism" will transform the traditional drama viewing mode into a game mode of customs clearance upgrading. The audience changed from the spectator of the story to the witness of fate. Through the perceptual immersion experience brought by the interactive narration, the work allows the audience to form a judgment on the perceived value of the work, which serves as an intermediary to further affect the audience's media consumption behavior [5].

Finally, from the perspective of use and satisfaction theory, audience members are regarded as individuals with specific "needs", and their media contact activities are based on specific needs motivation to "use" the media, so that these needs can be "met" [6]. Road to Empress accurately responds to the deep psychological needs of female audiences. The work takes Wu Zetian as the prototype to create the narrative of power growth, which meets the female audience's psychological fantasy of self realization and power growth. At the same time, the tragic plot and "BE aesthetics" ("BE" refers to bad ending) in the play provide users with a unique aesthetic experience. The rough experience of the protagonist growing from the bottom to the power reflects the Realistic Plight of contemporary women. The players completed their own emotional projection when they substituted the role through the interactive mechanism, and finally formed a wide range of female collective emotional identity.

3.2. External reasons: building a cross media communication system

It is difficult for high-quality products to achieve large-scale dissemination only by relying on their own content. Road to Empress relies on this mature layered communication matrix to provide external assistance for the popularity of works.

The work adopts a differentiated layered publicity mode, relying on the rapid circle breaking drainage of head anchors and film and television bloggers. For example, the live broadcast of billibili's head anchor taoheihei successfully connects the double circle of the game and film and television audience, and helps the audience sort out the complete narrative context with the help of

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the vertical creators' production of in-depth content such as plot interpretation and customs clearance strategies; Then, through the real word-of-mouth of ordinary players, we can realize the diffusion of the public circle; It is linked with the game Honor of Kings to launch a limited voice package to build a second innovation communication ecology. Relying on many interesting sections with hot topics set by the government in advance, such as "sweet scented osmanthus soup" and "opened a longan", many users have derived and created a series of online expression packs of "dragon brain" and "dragon ear" based on this inspiration. With the help of the second interpretation of real-time interaction and banter, the original content has evolved into a communication meme that is convenient for network diffusion, breaking through the original audience circle and achieving a wider dissemination [7].

4. Existing issues and optimization suggestions for road to empress

4.1. Existing problems

Although Road to Empress has achieved excellent market results, combined with social media word-of-mouth and user feedback, the works still have obvious shortcomings in content, playing methods and payment mechanism, which restrict its long-term word-of-mouth and industry development potential.

Road to Empress used the mode of split selling by chapters. In the early stage, it only launched "Mei Niang chapter", which led to an abrupt end to the key plot, and was therefore criticized as "semi-finished products" by players. Compared with the sales mode of The Invisible Guardian, an early work of the same team, which was completely updated at one time, the piecemeal update of this work reduced the threshold for the audience to get started, but it brought hidden dangers such as narrative fragmentation, uncertainty of update, and incomplete plot. The complete and coherent narrative rhythm is the core advantage of interactive video games. Fragmented updates seriously undermine the immersion experience and consume users' trust in the production team. Especially from the perspective of product life cycle, products in the growth period need to accumulate user trust, stabilize user expectations and cultivate user habits. Fragmented content updates will only cause user cognitive bias, greatly reduce user stickiness, and lead to core problems such as user loss after the product enters the mature period. Therefore, when the content supply is uncertain, it will cause the audience's sense of psychological loss, which will weaken the willingness of users to continue to participate and is not conducive to maintaining long-term user stickiness [8].

"How many episodes can you live?" is the core slogan of the game. The production team focuses on the high mortality scenario to attract the audience, but the actual design has obvious defects. On the one hand, a large number of death endings lack reasonable plot preparation, adding invalid death options to deliberately increase the difficulty of the game, which violates the logic of character and historical narration; On the other hand, most of the interactive options are mere formality and cannot have a substantial impact on the main plot and the fate of the characters. After a player makes a mistake, he can only try again and again to clear the pass. The narrative space that the player can control independently is severely compressed. Compared with similar high-quality works, the interaction mechanism of Road to Empress lacks reasonable difficulty gradient and game interest. When players find that the options are only formal design, or "there seems to be a choice, but in fact there is only one correct answer", the interaction will have the opposite effect [9]. Relying on the interactive narrative theory, it can be found that high-quality game interactive design is that every choice of the player will have an impact on the narrative trend, characterization, and plot outcome. Only in this way can the two-way linkage between the player and the story be achieved. When most

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interactions in the game are limited to the shallow cycle of "death retry" and "continue the plot", it will destroy the immersion experience of the player, resulting in a strong psychological gap, and ultimately reduce the recognition of the game content and narrative design.

In addition, the dispute caused by the payment method of Road to Empress is essentially the user's subjective perception bias caused by the imbalance of multi-dimensional payment rule design. The first is the issue of information transparency of the charging rules. Different application ends adopt differentiated charging, and there are differences between the actual payment conditions of the external publicity caliber and the plot unlocking. The asymmetry of information can easily lead to users' feeling of being misled and weaken the sense of fairness in the transaction process. Second, cross platform payment assets are not interconnected, which means that the same user cannot obtain the same content rights and interests after paying at different terminals. This difference in treatment further magnifies the unfair experience of users. There are also potential risks such as payment unlocking failure and subsequent content interruption, which will also make users doubt whether they can obtain complete and stable content output after payment. Under the superposition of multiple factors, some users' willingness to pay is restrained, and they choose to experience content through informal channels such as renting numbers and looking for exchange codes. Therefore, in the commercial design of interactive media products, users' payment decisions are not simply determined by the content quality. Equity equivalence and transparency at the level of business rules will also significantly affect users' subjective judgment and the conversion effect of short-term payment for works, and also relate to the construction of a long-term trust relationship between brands and audiences [10].

4.2. Suggestions on marketing strategy optimization of road to empress

At present, the competition in the interactive video game industry is fierce, and user payment and aesthetics are becoming more rational. The short-term operation mode of relying solely on social topics and online celebrity traffic is difficult to support the long-term development of the product. Therefore, in view of the existing problems in Road to Empress, it is necessary to optimize from the three dimensions of communication operation, product content and payment system to supplement the short board of product operation, and also provide reference for the long-term operation of similar interactive video games. Nowadays, Road to Empress relies on short-term topic drainage and online popularity promotion, and lacks a long-term user retention mechanism. Therefore, the product needs to change the flow thinking, pay attention to refined community operation, and build a stable user relationship system. On the one hand, we should implement hierarchical operation, and divide users into core, active and shallow groups according to the activity of players. For the core UGC creative players, we can open the rights and interests such as internal test preemptive experience and exclusive benefits, so as to stabilize the core fan circle; For active discussion players, interactive activities such as plot voting and egg collection can be carried out regularly to enhance users' sense of participation and belonging; Finally, for shallow trial players, we should accurately push the highlights of the plot, novice strategies, reduce the threshold of play, and attract users to achieve in-depth transformation; On the other hand, it is necessary to build a feedback channel for normalized users, timely collect players' demands on plot updates, game optimization, and payment rules, and regularly make public plans for question answering and version optimization, so as to eliminate the information gap between the official and users, and gradually repair users' trust.

The core competitiveness of interactive video game products is plot interaction, which is also the key to retain players. At present, the core reasons for the decline of Road to Empress' reputation focus on problems such as perfunctory interactive design and serious homogenization of plot

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selection. To effectively improve the core experience of the product, the official needs to comprehensively optimize the interactive narrative system and adhere to the core design principle of "choosing to affect the plot". In the follow-up content development, every decision made by players at key nodes can effectively change the direction of the branch line, the fate of the characters and the final outcome. At the same time, it is necessary to combine the theme characteristics of the court strategy, add the logic of "there must be trade-offs in the choice", so that each choice is accompanied by the corresponding pros and cons and costs, abandon the single switch plot trigger mode, enrich the sense of narrative hierarchy, fit the authenticity and heaviness of the Tang Dynasty palace theme, solve the problem of "pseudo interaction" from the root, and improve the players' plot experience.

In view of the controversial issues such as low payment transparency, inconsistency between publicity and practice, and single cash flow mode, the product needs to comprehensively optimize the payment system to balance user experience and business benefits. On the one hand, the payment rules should be fully transparent, and all payment nodes, charging standards, unlocking rights and interests should be clearly marked on the download page, novice guidance, chapter unlocking and other core scenarios, so as to eliminate vague publicity and invisible consumption, and eliminate the information gap of players; On the other hand, it is also necessary to enrich the payment mode, add the complete plot buyout option on the basis of retaining the sub chapter unlocking, and expand the content of off-site plot, original music, behind the scenes gags, etc., so as to create a multi-level cash system, so as to reduce payment disputes. In the commercial operation of digital cultural products, the essential transparency of payment information and the equal unity of payment rights and interests are the premise of maintaining consumers' fair perception. On this basis, providing multi-level payment solutions can take into account the consumption demands of different users, and maintain users' willingness to pay and users' long-term trust in the brand [11].

5. Conclusion

In the competitive interactive video game track, it is difficult to achieve long-term development only by short-term topic traffic. The problems exposed by Road to Empress, such as narrative fragmentation, formal interaction and payment mechanism disputes, are also the common dilemma of most similar products. The research result of this study is that the popularity of traffic can not make up for the defects of content and business mechanism, but will weaken the player experience and user trust. Thus, it is further concluded that the domestic live-action interactive video game needs to abandon the flow thinking, polish the narrative experience, and form a balance between artistic expression and commercial income. This study provides a lot of valuable reference for future research in this direction, which mainly affects the audience positioning, interaction design and commercial operation methods of live-action interactive video games. Future research should focus more on the interactive logic of live narrative, the construction of player immersion experience and the direction of sustainable business model of live-action interactive video games.

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