

China's Adaptation of Transmedia Fictions and Online Games

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Abstract: As a new cultural form, transmedia fictions have gradually become one of the leisure and entertainment methods that young people like. Online games are also one of the favorite forms of entertainment for young people today. With the development of Internet and the prosperity of transmedia fictions in China, online games adapted from transmedia fictions began to appear, and gradually becoming a new trend. The fusion of these two cultures with different forms and different media conforms to Jenkins' viewpoint in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, and he believes that “*convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others*” [1]. Taking China's transmedia fictions as an example, this paper briefly describes the adaptation between transmedia fictions and online games, based on the current economic benefits and development trends of cooperation between the two, and discusses the future cooperation prospects between them.

Keywords: transmedia fictions, online games, adaptation

1. Introduction

In China, “*online novels (most of which can be regarded as transmedia fictions) have been developed for more than twenty years*” [2]. Transmedia fictions are original online novels written and disseminated with the help of the special platform of the Internet, and stories are usually disseminated on at least two different media platforms. At present, in China, transmedia fictions are one of the favorite forms of entertainment for young people in China.

In the book *Understanding Media*, Mike Luhan believes that “*the game is also a medium.*” [3] With the development of network technology and digital technology, online games have integrated multimedia arts such as literature, art, film and television, music, etc., and become an important contemporary mass cultural medium in terms of cultural value.

Young people like to play online games, which occupy a large part of popular entertainment activities at present. Especially in China, many young people have heard of and played large-scale online games such as *Zhuxian*, *Candle in the Tomb*, and *DoulaContinent*. Many of these games are adapted from online literature (especially transmedia fictions). When these transmedia fictions have not been adapted, they already have a large number of readers on the Internet. When these novels are adapted into games, they have a large number of players and can make huge profits. Take *Zhuxian* series games as an example. In 2007, Perfect World Games Company spent RMB 1 million to get authorization from Xiao Ding to adapt the transmedia fiction *Zhuxian* into a 3D online game. In 2009

alone, the game Zhuxian earned nearly 1 billion RMB. This huge profit has made many people salivate at the online game market adapted from transmedia fictions. *“In August 2014, the first domestic online literary works game copyright auction was held in Shanghai, and a total of six popular transmedia fictions were adapted from mobile games, with a total auction price of 28 million yuan. Among them, Fang Xiang’s right to edit the ‘Unbeaten Throne’ mobile game was 8.1 million yuan, which became the highest price of the special show.”* [4] The huge economic profit makes the online game adaptation of transmedia fictions show a spurt development.

This paper attempts to briefly describe the simple situation of online games adapted from transmedia fictions, and answers the following questions: What influence does online games adapted from transmedia fictions have on the relationship between players and readers of original novels? How do online games and transmedia fictions cooperate?

2. The Influence of Online Games Adapted from Transmedia Fictions on Players and Readers

Adaptation can be defined as a derivative work from the original text. *“Since the birth of adapted works, adaptation has been interpreted as a form of intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966”* [5]. However, the online games adapted from online literature go beyond the simple imitation of the original novel and are a deeper interaction. They *“might produce an increase in user activity on the book adapted and possibly some other changes in user behaviour, such as, for instance, a different perception of the book.”* [6].

After the transmedia fiction is adapted into an online game, some plots in the book are often changed. Whether these changes are reasonable and acceptable to the original readers is an important criterion to measure whether the online game is successfully adapted.

However, this change is often more attractive to online gamers. For readers of the original novel, these changes may be very unacceptable. In the process of playing the game, readers of the original novel have a high probability of giving up the experience game because of the unreasonable changes in the plot, and labeling the game with various bad reviews, because the game has not perfectly restored the original in their minds. However, players who have never read the original and just experience the game will be disgusted with this behavior. They think that the game is a game, and the restoration of the plot of the novel is not the most important. What matters is the experience of the game itself. As long as the experience of the game is good, even if the plot is completely different from the original novel, it has nothing to do. These different ideas can easily lead to conflicts between players and readers. They will attack and argue with each other on social media just to prove that their views are correct. Once there is a particularly large-scale debate, the sales of this game will encounter difficulties, and it is difficult to achieve the desired effect of the operating company.

But if this change is reasonable and can satisfy the readers of the original novel, then this game is likely to become a very popular game at that time, and even a classic game that has been popular for many years. Because this game not only has a simple group of gamers, but also a large number of gamers transformed from readers of original novels, the relationship between these two groups is very harmonious and even transformed into each other. In this case, this game will gain more market share.

Therefore, online games adapted from transmedia fictions can easily affect the relationship between gamers and novel readers, and in most cases, it will make their relationship tense. But in a few cases, it is also possible to make the relationship between the two groups closer.

3. How to Cooperate Between Transmedia Fictions and Online Games

In the process of adaptation of online games, the role of online literature is obvious to all, and academic circles are also very interested in it. *“Some scholars pay special attention to the cross-media characteristics of online novels and their relationship with other media such as games”* [7].

With the rise and development of game-themed novels, the development and innovation of online games have entered a professional track, and even a novel creation group specializing in online games has emerged. Through the transmedia fictions created by this group to promote the development of corresponding online games, this is not only a new role given to transmedia fictions by the times and environment, but also shows China’s liberation of traditional culture and acceptance of post-modern culture, and social spiritual culture has begun to enter a new page. As a representative form of popular culture and entertainment in today’s society, online games have gradually established their own marketing methods while meeting the entertainment needs of the audience.

Some scholars believe: *“Online games are online forms that make entertaining interpretations of political, economic, military, cultural and historical events on the Internet and give people aesthetic enjoyment.”* [8] In this environment, literature and games began to cooperate. The content of this “literature” includes the traditional novel text after the adaptation, as well as the transmedia fiction text with great influence and marketing power. Traditional novels, with their rich cultural background and literary aesthetic value, show great cultural value in online games, bringing unique China characteristics to online games. With the rise and development of transmedia fictions, especially the vigorous development of game novels, online games began to use transmedia fictions as a new adaptation resource channel. Online games adapted from novels can make players have an alternative understanding and deep interpretation of novel culture while entertaining in the game, bringing a brand-new aesthetic enjoyment of online culture. Especially since 2008, there have been more and more transmedia fictions describing online games, and various literary elements have begun to occupy an important position in online games, making online games more emotional, symbolic and thought-provoking.

If the online game is a novel text, then players are also reading literary works while enjoying the game, which is also a process of symbol interpretation and symbol communication. The only difference is that the carrier of the novel text is text, while the carrier of the online game is multimedia. The visual sense and audio-visual effect created by multimedia carriers cannot be provided by text carriers, and the literary function of online games is mainly reflected in literary narration. Literary narrative elements such as story, plot, conflict and structure presented in the literary text system are indispensable narrative components of online games. At the same time, the game adaptation of transmedia fictions adds rich cultural value and powerful commercial benefits to the literary characteristics of online games, which not only gives readers a rich game experience, but also allows players to read transmedia fictions in the game, achieving a win-win situation for both. For example, in 2007, Perfect Technology Company launched the online game of the same name based on the famous oriental fantasy type transmedia fiction Zhuxian, with the aim of restoring the plot content in the novel to the greatest extent as a selling point, which made the game gain full praise and expectation before it was launched, and once became the most concerned online game in 2007. After the game was launched, it became the best online game in 2007-08 with the support of a large number of readers of the original novel. Shanda Company also responded quickly to the great effect of the combination of transmedia fictions and online games. At the 2012 online Expo, Shanda Technology Company announced that the online game of the same name “Candle in the Tomb” will be released soon, and adopted the latest digital technology to ensure the continuous update of online games, taking into account the needs of gamers and novel fans. Once the game was launched, it quickly received popularity in China.

According to the online game market report of China in 2021, there are some following datas: “In 2021, the number of game users in China maintained steady growth, with the number of users reaching 666 million, up by 0.22% year-on-year. At the same time, in 2021, the actual sales revenue of China’s game market was 296.513 billion yuan, an increase of 17.826 billion yuan over 2020 and a year-on-year increase of 6.4%. Although the actual sales revenue still maintained a growth trend, the growth rate was reduced by nearly 15% compared with last year. The main reasons are as follows: the stimulating effect of housing economy gradually weakened under the COVID-19 epidemic last year; The number of annual explosions decreased year-on-year; The cost of game development, operation and distribution continues to increase.” [9] From this report, the life cycle of the online game market in China has experienced explosive growth in 2002-2005 and game business model innovation in 2006-2008. Since 2009, the overall growth rate of the online game market has obviously slowed down and the competition has become increasingly fierce. Especially after the COVID-19 epidemic in 2019, the growth rate has been declining for three consecutive years. “The rate of return of online game market in China was 3-4 times in 2007. Since 2008, due to the global financial crisis, the rate of return of online games has dropped to 1-2 times in 2008-2012. However, with the popularity of smart phones, the return on investment of the game industry in the mobile market has been improved again, increasing year by year after 2013 and reaching an astonishing 11 times in 2014” [10]. After 2015, it gained greater profits through the trinity operation mode of the original transmedia fictions, film and television dramas adapted from transmedia fictions and online games adapted from transmedia fictions. Although the COVID-19 epidemic in 2019 led to a decline in overall profits, it still has a high return on investment.

With the diversification and refinement of the content of Internet entertainment industry, users of online games are increasingly demanding products. Although online games have always been one of the pillar industries in China’s Internet economy, there has been fierce competition within the industry. Since 2009, the single boring game content and traditional game methods can no longer meet the needs of users. Online games have to be innovated in digital technology, game freedom, game plot and so on. The exquisiteness of game quality, the freedom of game mode and the novelty of game plot have become new standards.

If the picture quality and gameplay of the game can be improved through the continuous research and development of technology, the wonderful degree of the game plot must be improved through literary means, and the transmedia fictions with all kinds of imaginative ideas have just become an important tool to avoid the stereotype of the online game plot. The appeal of popular transmedia fictions in the plot has been tested by many readers. Games adapted from these novels can basically ensure the novelty of the plot, so as to attract more players. Here are some representative online games adapted from transmedia fictions (Table 1):

Table 1: Online Games Adapted from transmedia fictions.

Number	Novel name	Game name	Author	First website	Game platform	Operating company
1	Zhuxian (诛仙)	Zhuxian Zhuxian 2 The world of Zhuxian (诛仙 诛仙 2 诛仙世界)	Xiao Ding (萧鼎)	Hujianshumeng (幻剑书盟)	PC Android iPhone/iPad	Beijing Perfect Technology Co., Ltd

Table 1: (continued).

2	DoulaContinent (斗罗大陆)	DoulaContinent (斗罗大陆)	TangJiasanshao (唐家三少)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	Android iPhone/iPad	Beijing Perfect Technology Co., Ltd
3	Tomb of god (神墓)	Tomb of god OL (神墓 OL)	Chendong (辰东)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	PC	Beijing border city Ranger Network Technology Co., Ltd
4	Stars change (星辰变)	Stars change OL (星辰变 OL)	Wochixihongshi (我吃西红柿)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	PC	Shanghai Shanda Network Development Co., Ltd
5	Candle in the Tomb (鬼吹灯)	Candle in the Tomb OL (鬼吹灯 OL)	Tianxiabachang (天下霸唱)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	PC	Shanghai Shanda Network Development Co., Ltd
6	Fights Break Sphere (斗破苍穹)	Fights Break Sphere OL (斗破苍穹)	Tiancantudou (天蚕土豆)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	PC Android iPhone/iPad	Beijing Yiyou Network Technology Co., Ltd Sohu Travel
7	The Great Ruler (大主宰)	The Great Ruler The Great Ruler OL (大主宰 大主宰 OL)	Tiancantudou (天蚕土豆)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	PC Android iPhone/iPad	Beijing Quyou times Technology Co., Ltd
8	The Heroic Age (蛮荒记)	Searching for gods in the Heroic Age (蛮荒搜神记)	Shuxiayehu (树下野狐)	Chuangshi Chinese website (创世中文网)	PC Android iPhone/iPad	Sohu Travel
9	Joy of Life (庆余年)	Joy of Life (庆余年)	Maoni (猫腻)	Qidian Chinese website (起点中文网)	Android iPhone/iPad	Shanghai Shulong Technology Co., Ltd
10	Dragon Raja (龙族)	Dragon Raja fantasy (龙族幻想)	Jiangnan (江南)	Novel reading network (小说阅读网)	Android iPhone/iPad	Tencent game

These transmedia fictions adapted into games, without exception, have millions or even tens of millions of readers. After being adapted into games, these readers are the most solid player guarantee. The online games of “Zhuxian” series have been developing steadily since 2007, constantly upgrading and maintaining a high popularity, and have earned billions of RMB so far. In April 2014, the mobile game “The Heroic Age” was launched, and the flow of water in that month has exceeded 10 million yuan; Tencent’s “Dragon Raja” mobile game has also created a record of turnover of over 10 million RMB for several months, which are all successful transmedia fictions adapted into online games.

4. Conclusion

Transmedia fictions have great creativity and sense of participation, and online games have super-high marketing ability and audio-visual experience. When they cooperate and complement each other with their respective advantages, they will promote each other and make progress together. In the long run, it not only enriches the communication mode of transmedia fictions, enhances the influence of transmedia fictions, but also makes online games have new prospects in the development of script content. The adaptation of online novels into games has the advantages of large investment, high profit and high return rate. In the future, with the development of science and technology, the game industry has a good development prospect, in which adapting games will be an essential part. Therefore, the adaptation of the game will also have a good economic development prospect.

The original online games based on China’s history, culture and legends, coupled with popular transmedia fictions as the background, make the game content richer in connotation and cultural connotation, and add a “literary and artistic” color to the game value. It is not only attractive in the domestic entertainment market, but also competitive in grabbing overseas markets, especially in Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia in the surrounding Han culture areas.

Of course, there are also some limitations in the adaptation of transmedia fictions and online games. For example, the copyright issue of transmedia fictions has always been a difficult problem to solve properly. In the future cooperation between the two, more attention should be paid to copyright protection, so that the cooperation between the two can obtain greater benefits.

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