

Analysis of Mobile Game Intellectual Property Marketing Strategy: A Case Study of *Honor of Kings*

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Abstract

The mobile game market is now gradually forming a unique ecological industry chain. Game parties are beginning to look beyond the game experience and focus on building mature game IPs. By creating specific IP to drive the game's peripheral revenue, strengthen the emotional connection with game users, and achieve the purpose of long-term development. Looking at the domestic market, *Honor of Kings*, as a phenomenal mobile game in China, its IP development and marketing are of reference learning significance. In this paper, we selected *Honor of Kings* as the research object, and we collected data through both questionnaire surveys and interviews, using SPSS for statistical analysis. The research analyzed its IP marketing strategy and effect and searched for the factors which affect its IP marketing effect. It finds that the impact of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing is influenced by the degree of perfection of *Honor of Kings* worldview, i.e., IP connotation and local cultural awareness. At the same time, we analyzed the IP development process and marketing strategy of *Honor of Kings* in combination, pointed out its advantages and shortcomings, and gave suggestions to provide new ideas for IP marketing of other game companies.

Keywords: mobile game marketing, IP development, IP crossover marketing, *Honor of Kings*

1. Introduction

With the development of computer technology and network devices, the global mobile game market has experienced explosive and extremely rapid growth. In terms of Chinese market trends, China's game industry has gradually entered a period of high-quality and diversified development (Liu, 2017). According to *the China Game Industry Report 2021* published by the China Game Industry Committee (GPC), the actual sales revenue of China's game market was RMB 296.513 billion, which the mobile game market accounted for 76.06%. The Chinese mobile game market is now entering a mature period of high quality and high revenue (Zhu & Xia, 2019).

However, with the deepening development of the industry, the competitive market environment of the online game industry presents the characteristics of supply exceeding demand and unreasonable market concentration (Sun, 2007). How to achieve high-quality long-term development and operation has become a development issue that game enterprises must think deeply about nowadays. Therefore, the importance of building game IP has gradually been highlighted. Before the domestic hype of the IP concept began, foreign game makers had started to explore the concept long before. In China, the concept was only known after Luo Xu, vice president of the famous game company 37 Games, put forward one of the strategic points, "IP customization." Therefore, 2014 was also called "the year of IP" by industry insiders (Sui, 2014).

Honor of Kings has gone through six years since its inception as a phenomenal domestic large-scale MOBA mobile game. It has been maintaining high-level popularity though it faces a series of problems, such as the entry of competing for mobile games into the market, the introduction and strengthening of anti-addiction policies, and the decrease of users, largely attributed to its IP marketing. In the past, scholars have mainly focused on successful examples of games, movies, and songs developed with literary IP as the center (Xue, 2015), while there is a lack of in-depth exploration of examples such as *Honor of Kings* that were not developed from literary IP. *Honor of Kings* did not have its IP foundation in the early stage. Its IP marketing activities differ from the traditional IP industry, which has in-depth research value and inspirational significance.

In addition, the other authors mainly focused on single-brand co-branding cooperation in the previous IP marketing studies of mobile games. They focused on analyzing the form of co-branding marketing and the analysis of marketing

effect. At the same time, relatively few of them conducted in-depth research on combining IP development and marketing for mobile games. To fill this gap, this paper first reviews the summary of the traditional marketing strategies of mobile games and IP crossover marketing by experts and scholars. Then we select the Chinese mobile game *Honor of Kings* as an example. We use questionnaire analysis and interview methods to study the IP development process, IP crossover marketing strategy, and effectiveness of *Honor of Kings*. Finally, we point out the factors affecting its IP marketing in combination with *Honor of Kings*' IP development process and put forward some suggestions on marketing shortcomings. In this way, the paper helps Internet mobile game companies optimize their marketing activities and realize the long-term development and operation of the game.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Development of Mobile Games in China

Based on the development of mobile game content and technology, China's mobile games have undergone four distinct phases: birth, growth, expansion, and high growth (Hu & Tai, 2017). The Chinese mobile game market is now entering a mature phase of high quality and high revenue, and more and more people are beginning to pay attention to and study this emerging industry.

In recent years in studies on the Chinese mobile game, most researchers have explored it from sports, economic or industrial perspectives. User analysis, as well as data analysis, is mainly used to analyze the hardware environment and software environment of the target market to conclude about the development of mobile games as an industry and the trends and to obtain the underlying causes that affect the popularity and revenue of mobile games (Guo & Jiang, 2017). The study found that along with further enhancement of the trend of universal mobile gaming, the goal of significant game companies after the launch of their mobile game products often translates into enhancing user stickiness and increasing user payment rates to expand the viability of their products. In terms of enhancing user stickiness, the major game companies actively launch various marketing tools to expand the board's profitability and deepen the impact of the mobile game products (Zou & Chen, 2020). It can be said that the marketing strategy of mobile games plays a vital role in the profitability of mobile games, as well as the overall development of the industry, and has a robust research value.

It is rather unfortunate that in the existing relevant studies, the previous authors mostly used the case study method, combining SWOT, PAR, 4PS and other theories to analyze the survival environment, business conditions, competitive advantages, and extensive marketing strategies of mobile game products. Some experts analyze League of Legends from five aspects of product strategy, price strategy, promotion strategy, game channel strategy, and cross-border enterprise cooperation strategy, then find the success of this game (Li & Tan, 2016). However, relatively few in-depth studies have been conducted on mobile games from the perspective of IP marketing. In order to fill the gap, this paper takes the game *Honor of Kings*, which has been hot in recent years, as the research object. We study how to continuously inject vitality into the development of mobile games through IP marketing and spread the influence to a broader group, while strengthening the stickiness of users. Finally, proposes innovative solutions to enrich the marketing strategy of the mobile game industries.

2.2 Marketing Strategies for Mobile Games

The traditional marketing model of Chinese game companies is mainly based on the B2C model, i.e., manufacturers indiscriminately put game promotional advertisements to users. However, with the rapid development of big data and the Internet of Things, the traditional game marketing model of user reach is less efficient, and user stickiness is relatively low (Zou & Chen, 2020). Some previous related studies show that mobile game companies can predict users' potential behaviors while making more effective updates to the game to improve retention rates, promote activity.

Most of the previous mobile game marketing research have utilized the 4PS theory for analysis. It was found that on the product side, unique game design and a rich product line, as well as timely updates of game characters and modes, can keep players' anticipation and freshness of the game. In terms of pricing strategy, most game providers adopt a prop fee model, meaning that players experience the game first and then spend money. Players need to buy in-game props if they want to gain further gaming experience. This charging model is more conducive to game's promotion and has a high level of acceptance by gamers (Li & Wen, 2010). However, the charging model must be carried out without affecting the fairness and stability of the game to increase the loyalty of game players, prolong the life cycle of the game and gain long-term development.

Another point worth noting is that mobile games have a shorter life cycle than traditional PC games, and game makers need to continue increasing attention and extending the games' life. Developing game IP and engaging in crossover collaboration is one of the key strategies to solve this problem (Zou & Chen, 2020). Different forms of products form a vast industry chain around games. While generating lucrative profits for companies outside of games, it also ties games together with traditional industries such as manufacturing, driving the entire industry forward. However, the mobile

gaming industry is currently under-explored by academics in terms of crossover collaborative marketing, and much more can be done.

2.3 IP Development

The concept of IP has multiple attributes and can refer to both intellectual property in the general sense, as well as the property rights of all works by publishing companies and film companies. For example, with the development of the IP industry, the concept of IP has become increasingly broad. The concept of IP mentioned in the industry today generally refers to elements with content value and fan base (Zhang & Da, 2018). IP has a huge commercial value as an intangible asset. Previous authors have conducted a series of studies on pan-entertainment strategy and come to the following conclusion: pan-entertainment strategy is commonly found in the IP industry, and its essence is a cross-domain and multi-platform business expansion by Internet companies with game operations and online platforms. (Zhan & Hu, 2018). Additionally, the essence of pan-entertainment is to strive to create and develop quality IP to attract fans and eventually realize cash with the fan economy (Jiang & Wang, 2016).

In 2011, Cheng Wu, Vice President and CEO of Tencent Pictures, first proposed the concept of pan-entertainment. He cultivated and exported IP resources through the three major physical platforms of Tencent Games, Tencent Literature and Tencent Animation (Mi & Zhao, 2017). As the phenomenal mobile game of Tencent in recent years, Tencent has put a lot of effort into its IP marketing. On the one mobile, players can quickly become familiar with and adapt to the product through IP, reducing the difficulty of getting started with the game (Yang, 최철영 & Zilu, 2019). On the other mobile, the establishment of IP can make players inject more emotions into the game, which is ultimately beneficial to enhance user loyalty. Users attracted through quality IPs tend to be more loyal and more conducive to achieving subsequent consumption of the product by the users, allowing the company to gain greater benefits (Zhang & Da, 2018).

In this field of IP development, most of the previous authors have focused on the phenomenon of literary IP adaptations of mobile games and TV series. For example, the success of the mobile game adaptation of Hua Qiang has attracted scholars to study the phenomenon of literary IP adaptation and to analyze the user experience and market analysis (Xue, 2015). And this paper focuses on the mobile game product *Honor of Kings* which has no IP foundation in the initial stage. *Honor of Kings*, which lacks an IP foundation, mainly uses local cultural content to connect the emotion between IP and users, and then enters the growth period after several years of exploration. In addition to online and offline co-branded products, the future blueprint of *Honor of Kings* includes game IP film and television, theme park and so on. This study explains how *Honor of Kings* builds its IP brand and opens up its IP marketing path in the growth period.

2.4 IP Marketing: Co-branding

In the IP industry, co-branding is a common marketing strategy. A common definition of co-branding is the combination of two existing brands to launch a new product on the market. Xu (2018) defines brand association as a medium-term or long-term association of two or more independent brands. Li & Wen (2010) consider two brands that jointly launch new products as partnership brands. The first level refers to the diversified presentation of products through media in the new media context, while the second level is crossover marketing, which combines the IP of both partners based on the similarity of their target consumers to achieve complementary effects and expand the market (Ni, 2020). It can be seen that the premise of brand association is the fit of brand image, the similarity of the target market and the complementary user market.

Developing derivative products through hot IP is one of the effective marketing strategies. Online game consumption is a typical cultural experience consumption. *Honor of Kings* develops related goods and conducts cross-industry cooperation through market authorization and brand association. The development of its derivative products can not only effectively extend the game experience and expand the market influence of the game products, but also extend the life cycle of the game products (Ouyang, 2014).

In the past few years, Tencent has seized the transformation of consumer demand, carried out multi-brand alliances and vigorously developed the pan-entertainment industry (Mi & Zhao, 2017). This brand association strategy of *Honor of Kings* has greatly attracted the attention of academia and provided many new ideas for other Internet companies' IP industry development. Ni (2020) studied the IP cross-marketing case of *Honor of Kings* and MAC, and concluded that the success of this cross-marketing is the achievement of multiple coverages based on the insight of consumer behavior preferences. However, there is not much research on the effect of brand co-marketing combined with the degree of perfection of *Honor of Kings*' IP. This paper intends to use the questionnaire method and in-depth interview method to combine the *Honor of Kings* IP development process and its brand association strategy to explore the relationship between *Honor of Kings* mobile game IP development and brand association as well as the reasons for the success or failure of brand association.

3. Method

3.1 Research Hypothesis

This questionnaire explores the main factors affecting mobile game IP marketing by comparing traditional mobile game marketing strategies with innovative IP marketing strategies. In the past, common mobile game marketing strategies focused on establishing the content advantages of game products and building corporate brands. They attracted the public and deepened impressions by continuously launching activities (Hu, 2022). Meanwhile, the 4PS marketing theory is commonly used by previous authors to study the traditional mobile game marketing strategies. They are product, price, promotion, and channel. The IP crossover marketing focuses more on spanning different brands, meaning that the elements between the original unconnected brands are fused and extended. Therefore, co-branding can jointly create consumer value and bring new experiences to consumers (Cheng & Yuan, 2022). Cheng & Yuan (2022) believe that the influencing factors of crossover marketing include the brand image and concept fit, the degree of market match, and the degree of strategy match. Based on these papers, we proposed that in the IP crossover marketing of *Honor of Kings*, the popularity of co-branded products is influenced by these factors: the degree of IP maturity of *Honor of Kings* on the IP marketing effect, and users' perceptions of the local culture in the game. Accordingly, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis.

H1: The effect of crossover marketing of *Honor of Kings* IP is influenced by the degree of IP maturity.

H2: The crossover marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* IP is influenced by the perception of local culture.

This paper assumes that the mature IP of *Honor of Kings* can positively impact IP crossover marketing. IPs that are relatively complete and supported by high-quality content are more interactive with consumers and more likely to pry people's desire to consume. In addition, IP realizes text value through the combination with local culture and creates a new link with local consumers, further generating market value, stimulating consumers' consumption desire, and promoting the development of IP crossover marketing.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection of the Questionnaire

This paper is a questionnaire survey for individuals who have experience in *Honor of Kings* game. Since the leading group of players of *Honor of Kings* is young people and also the primary audience group of IP marketing, this paper mainly takes young people as the sample source. This survey is made and distributed through questionnaire star, targeting people under 30 years old to conduct questionnaire survey, to understand the effect and influence factors of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing strategy. The questionnaire was distributed online through WeChat, QQ, and moment. The questionnaire survey was collected on March 20, 2022, and ended on April 15, 2022. Three hundred four questionnaires were collected, excluding 34 invalid questionnaires with less than one minute response time, incomplete answers, and illogical answers, and 270 valid questionnaires were obtained. The effective rate of questionnaire recovery was 89%, which met the requirements for further analysis and ensured the reliability of the sampling. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the author used SPSS software to conduct the reliability and validity test of the questionnaire, measured the overall Cronbach coefficient of the questionnaire, and conducted a validation factor analysis on each variable.

3.3 Interviewing Method

The questionnaire was supplemented by semi-structured interviews, and the questions that the author tried to answer were as follows.

- (1) What is the scope and extent of the impact of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing strategy?
- (2) Whether IP marketing has had a positive impact on building a positive image for the company?
- (3) How does *Honor of Kings*' worldview affects the effectiveness of its IP marketing?

The interviews were conducted by two interviewers in a semi-structured question-and-answer format, divided into an interviewer responsible for the interview and an interviewer responsible for taking notes and asking additional questions. We screened the interviewees and numbered the interviewees. by (1) being over 18 years old (2) being a *Honor of Kings* player (3) having a preliminary understanding of IP marketing. In this interview, in order to make the interviewer's narrative easier to understand, we standardised the text by removing verbal, ambiguous and meaningless statements from the interview narrative. The total number of words transformed into text was 4847 and took approximately 2 hours.

Before cutting to the questions, we conducted a preliminary background check with the interviewees, who were all gamers of one year or more and had some understanding of the game mode and story background of *Honor of Kings*. In the interviews, we asked them about their level of knowledge and attitude towards co-branded products and *Honor of Kings* IP marketing, and asked about the impact and extent of *Honor of Kings*' worldview on the IP marketing

campaign.

Through in-depth interviews, we were able to obtain direct feedback by cutting directly into players’ attitudes towards IP marketing campaigns, but the shortcomings were that the interview material obtained was somewhat professionally deficient due to the limited professionalism of the interviewers and the different levels of understanding of the IP marketing concept among the interviewees. In addition, due to limited time and contacts, we were unable to interview influential figures in this field, so we proposed to supplement the interview results with information from interviews available from influential professional figures on the internet.

4. Results

4.1 Scale Reliability and Validity Tests

To verify the reliability and validity of this questionnaire and the reliable accuracy of the responses, the author used SPSSAU software to analyze the reliability and validity of the collected data.

Table 1. Cronbach reliability analysis

Number of items	Size of sample	Cronbach’s a coefficient
41	270	0.876

The results are shown in Table 1, and the overall Cronbach’s α of the questionnaire was 0.876, which is greater than 0.8, indicating that this questionnaire has high reliability and reliable accuracy of responses.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

In order to analyze the correlation between the IP marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* and IP maturity and cultural awareness, the author used correlation analysis to initially analyze the correlation and strength of the relationship between the variables. To facilitate the subsequent analysis, the author first coded the questionnaire questions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Options code

Code	Subject
Q1	Do you usually pay attention to <i>Honor of Kings</i> related output: such as watching Bilibili video, hero stories and pictures, animation, etc?
Q2	You think <i>Honor of Kings</i> ’ worldview is good for the gameplay?
Q3	Do you think <i>Honor of Kings</i> players co-create the “Source Dream Project” to enhance the sense of participation of players?
Q4	You believe that the association of <i>Honor of Kings</i> can arouse your interest in actively understanding and protecting traditional culture?
Q5	In your opinion, what role does <i>Honor of Kings</i> play in protecting and inheriting traditional Chinese culture?

Table 3. Regression analysis I

Question	Average	Standard deviation	Q1	Q2	Q3
Q1	1.74	0.59	1		
Q2	0.15	1.94	-0.03	1	
Q3	0.59	2.31	0.02	0.93**	1

Note: * stands for $P < 0.05$, ** represents $P < 0.01$, the same below.

Table 4. Regression analysis II

Question	Average	Standard deviation	Q4	Q5
Q4	1.47	0.63	1	
Q5	5.84	2.13	-0.18**	1

The correlation coefficient results are shown in Table 3 and Table 4: The maturity degree of *Honor of Kings* world view and player co-creation plan ($r=0.93, p<0.01$) positive correlation, traditional culture co-naming of *Honor of Kings* and traditional culture protection ($r=-0.18, p<0.01$) negative correlation. It shows that the maturity of the world view of *Honor of Kings* is related to the co-creation plan of players, and the traditional culture co-name of *Honor of Kings* is also related to the inheritance and protection of traditional culture.

As can be seen from Table 3 and Table 4, the IP maturity of *Honor of Kings* has a significant impact on the IP marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* ($P<0.01$), the cognition of local culture has a significant influence on the IP marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* ($P<0.01$). Therefore, hypothesis H1: Crossover marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* IP is tested by the influence of IP maturity. Hypothesis H2: crossover marketing effect of *Honor of Kings* IP is also tested by the influence of local cultural cognition.

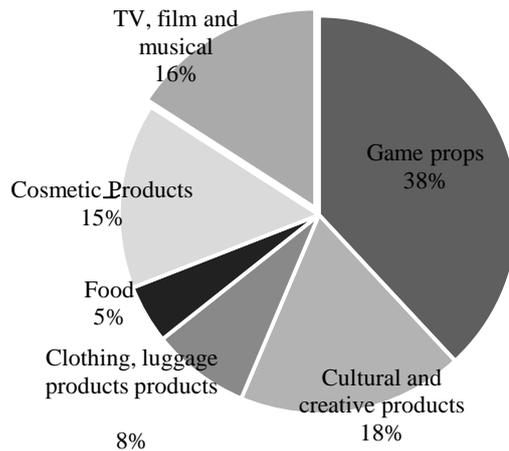
4.3 Sample Analysis of Questionnaire

According to the statistics (see pie chart 1), game skin still accounts for 73.5% of the consumer preferences for *Honor of Kings*’ peripheral products. In contrast, the demand for beauty, film, television, and other co-branded products

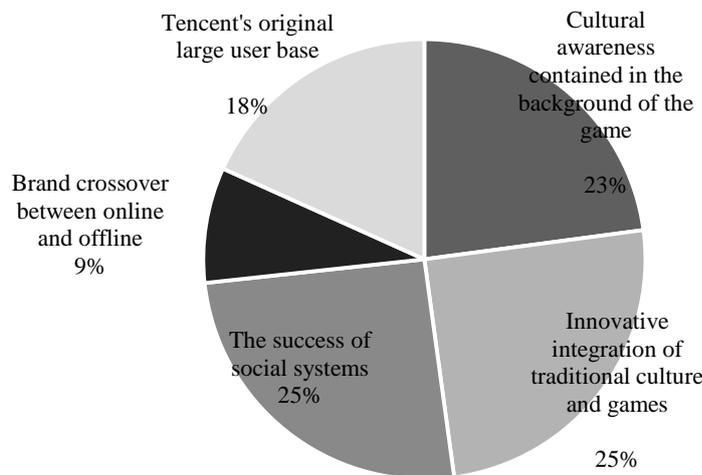
accounts for 32.31%, which is lower than the proportion of game skin. It can be seen that the most popular IP-derived products of *Honor of Kings* are still the game props themselves, followed by products from other industries.

Among the factors affecting consumers' purchase of products, the demand for the product accounts for 70.36%, the price of the product is 51.43%, the quality of the product is 41.79%, the innovative design of the co-branded product is 36.43%, and the story background of the game accounts for 22.5%. It can be seen that consumer demand is still the most critical factor influencing the purchase. At the same time, innovative design and game worldview will also influence consumer behavior to a certain extent.

Among the factors that affect the IP marketing of *Honor of Kings* (see Figure 2), the game's social system accounts for the most significant proportion, accounting for 60.36%. The influence of the integration and innovation of traditional culture and the game is close to the former, accounting for 58.57%. Cultural cognition in the game background accounts for 53.93%, accounting for more than half of the factors.



Pie chart 1. Consumption preference of co-branded products



Pie chart 2. Factors affecting IP marketing

4.4 Interview Results

Respondents were sought through a random sampling process. Respondents were aged between 18-40, and all had been gamers for one year or more and had some knowledge of the game mode and the story background of *Honor of Kings*.

4.4.1 Attitudes and Views on *Honor of Kings* Co-branded Products

Buying co-branded products depend mainly on needs: All three respondents in this interview said that the worldview of *Honor of Kings* does not have much influence on their consumption behavior, and their buy decisions are mainly based on their personal needs.

N1 said: “There are other ways to pass on culture and stories. I don’t think it is wise to buy these products.”

This respondent believes it is unwise to purchase a product simply because of the game’s worldview and culture. The data from questionnaire shows the demand for the product accounted for 70.36% of the factors influencing consumers to purchase the product. In comparison, the story background of the game influenced 22.5%. It can be seen that consumer demand is still the essential purchase influencing factor.

N2 said: “Despite the co-branding, *Honor of Kings* is still a mobile game. Whether or not to buy other products depends on individual needs.”

This respondent believes that the co-branded design of *Honor of Kings* as a mobile game has little impact on their own needs for goods.

N3 said: “No, I don’t think so. I buy them if I like them.”

In contrast to the attitudes of the previous two respondents, this respondent indicated that he was very willing to pay for his own preferences and that quality and practical needs were not a primary consideration.

Consumer purchases are influenced by age, gender, occupation, income, and their needs vary greatly. We found that the three interviewees’ purchase behavior is highly subjective, showing that they do not readily believe in advertising, propaganda, promises and promotional methods. They mainly decide their purchase behavior according to their personal needs. Therefore, we suggest that before launching co-branded products, *Honor of Kings* should do excellent job of market research to understand users’ purchasing needs and preferences.

4.4.2 Attitudes and Views on IP Marketing

Honor of Kings has penetrated users’ lives through various licensed products, providing them with more comprehensive and long-lasting companionship and establishing a vital emotional link between IP and users. However, problems such as aesthetic fatigue among the public and declining product quality have also emerged.

N1 said: “Some game skin co-branding with traditional culture is more aesthetically pleasing, and to a certain extent it can enhance the impression of traditional culture in people’s minds, bringing them closer to traditional culture. However, it can be a bit visually and emotionally fatiguing. It’s just annoying to see too much.”

The interviewee suggested that the co-branded products of the game’s skins have done an excellent job and have helped people understand the traditional culture. Nevertheless, at the same time, there is also the problem of aesthetic fatigue.

N2 said: “At the very least, *Honor of Kings* has been able to promote itself in different areas, without limiting itself on the mobile phone. Especially for old players like me, when I see *Honor of Kings* outside, I also feel an inexplicable sense of belonging.”

This respondent believes that the *Honor of Kings* co-branded products broaden the scope of players’ engagement with the game and add a new way of doing so. Its IP marketing can also effectively inspire a sense of belonging as a game user.

N3 said: “There are also some problems with the current *King’s* marketing. The first is that the frequency of IP marketing game skins coming out is now too high, increasing the frequency of one skin from a month in previous years to every week. The second is that the quality of the game skins has become uneven, with some skins not matching the quality described.”

This interviewee presented her views on the shortcomings of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing, saying that the current skin marketing of *Honor of Kings* is advancing too fast and the quality is in question, affecting the user’s gaming experience.

We found that respondents expressed varying degrees of approval of the positive impact of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing on traditional culture. More importantly, we also learned from the interviews about the current problems with *Honor of Kings* IP marketing: aesthetic fatigue among the public and declining product quality. Overall, no matter what form of product, it is inseparable from the presentation of content, and only high-quality content can impress consumers. In response to the problems in the interview, we suggest that *Honor of Kings* use big data analysis tools to understand the information of users and consumers and find suitable promotion methods as well as promotion locations. To do effective and accurate publicity while not causing public aesthetic fatigue based on the role of deepening the impression of consumers.

4.4.3 Comparing the *Honor of Kings* IP with Mature Industrial IP

Honor of Kings IP is not very international, and its story and worldview are not complete: In the interviews, all three interviewees said that *Honor of Kings*' story and worldview are not complete and that there is still a long way to go.

N1 said: "Disney started as a movie maker, and its peripherals, theme parks, TV, and some retail goods are all connected to the movie. In contrast, *Honor of Kings*' 5V5 game mode lacks storytelling." This interviewee thinks that the game mode of *Honor of Kings* limited the story's development.

N2 said: "*Honor of Kings* co-branding is good, but there are limits to its potential development. The internationalization of *Honor of Kings* is still very low, so it doesn't have a broad market."

N3 said: "The advantage I think is that *King's* has the soft power of our culture, and to some extent, it can promote our traditional culture to enhance our cultural confidence. The disadvantage is that it is not so international. After all, it is a Chinese mobile game. Some people have previously reported that foreigners want to play but struggle to understand it. Although there is now an international service, it is not very relevant to *King's*." Both interviewees, N2 and N3, identified the story content of *Honor of Kings* as being based primarily on traditional Chinese culture, both a strength and a weakness. The disadvantage is the low level of internationalization of the story content and cultural outlook, which in turn limits. The disadvantage is the low level of internationalization of the story content and cultural outlook, which limits the IP development of *Honor of Kings*.

In the interview, we discussed the similarities and differences between the *Honor of Kings* IP and other mature industrial IPs from abroad. Three interviewees said that the *Honor of Kings* IP has the heritage of excellent Chinese traditional culture and has much potential for development, but is not strong enough for internationalization. The main factor hindering its internationalization is the IP content. To address this, *Honor of Kings* needs to continuously develop its worldview core, accumulate user emotions, and lay a solid value foundation for IP marketing.

5. Discussion

5.1.1 Open Up the Commercial Space and Promote the Growth of Sales

Through diversified IP licensing, *Honor of Kings* extends the value of its game products to different industries, extending a more complete IP ecology with broader coverage of content. With IP as its core, it has created substantial commercial value by integrating with other industries and maximizing the fan economy. IP intellectual property has become the key to reshaping the industry landscape (Wang, 2015). A vast industry chain has been formed around the game, bringing lucrative profits beyond the game.

IP marketing makes *Honor of Kings* gradually form a complete and comprehensive brand image display in the fragmented information environment. Through the continuous content output of the brand IP, the brand image becomes more apparent and profound in the public mind, which is conducive to the spread and penetration of the brand. At the same time, with the flow of popular IPs, brands can also form topics and buzz in the short term, thus attracting potential consumers from another circle, expanding brand awareness, and gaining access to a larger market. Using native cultural resources as a link to establish a pan-entertainment industry system that links games, literature, animation, film and television, peripheral goods and other sectors, thus providing audiences with multi-level and multi-dimensional entertainment and content experiences, and generating high-return, low-risk economic and brand value-added for enterprises (Mi & Zhao, 2017). For example, the limited edition gift box sold out in advance for the first time, setting a record for the fastest sell-out of Elvis Presley IP co-branded products.

5.1.2 Combine with Traditional Culture to Create Value for Contemporary Cultural Development

Regarding IP content, *Honor of Kings* is based on Chinese culture and Eastern aesthetics, constantly drawing inspiration from excellent traditional culture and infusing the game content with cultural and artistic elements. This cultural attribute gives *Honor of Kings* IP licensing cooperation a more connotative entry point and pulls various fields together to build a new ecology of IP+ traditional culture. The crossover dissemination of *Honor of Kings* is expanding and developing Chinese culture and deepening the influence of Eastern aesthetics while realizing its commercial value. At the same time, the story materials and artistic images provided by traditional cultural resources are more likely to be accepted and recognized by the general audience. In addition, the national cultural spirit embedded in ethnic cultural resources is culturally shared, which can better facilitate creative content products to break through market boundaries and thus go global (Mi & Zhao, 2017).

Honor of Kings launches related skins online and works with local communities to create related cultural tourism activities offline. We use digital plus cultural tourism to explore new ways of playing intelligent cultural tourism and integrate the IP of *Honor of Kings* into traditional cultural tourism projects. Take the Qingming Festival as an example, *Honor of Kings* started from the festive custom of "releasing wishes, eliminating disasters and avoiding calamities." On the one mobile, Li Yuanfang's Qingming Festival-themed skin was created, and on the other mobile, a kite message collection campaign was launched. Weifang, the "Kite Capital of the World," launched a *King's* theme event at the 38th

Weifang International Kite Festival, taking Li Yuanfang's kite as the core and linking up landmarks such as Weifang Kite Square and the Kite Museum to draw people to make wishes and send their blessings offline. This cooperation made the Weifang Kite Festival's Baidu index reach a historical peak and made more people more aware of the non-heritage culture Weifang Kite. *Honor of Kings* has played a very important and positive role in helping to protect the non-heritage and promote national historical interest.

5.1.3 Break Through the Original Boundaries to Achieve Dual Empowerment of Brand and IP

IP marketing brings a richer and more effective form of brand promotion and communication, which greatly values to brand building and upgrading. In the past, due to the limitations of product characteristics and nature, as well as industry's barriers, it was difficult for brands to experiment more with marketing methods across circles and categories. In contrast, IP marketing breaks this barrier because IP conveys a spirit that crosses the boundaries of product categories and industries, bringing more possibilities for marketing methods and brand innovation.

With the increasing competition in the market and the rise of the Generation Z consumer group, the traditional boundaries between industries are gradually being broken down and 'crossover' has become a keyword in brand marketing in recent years. A successful crossover marketing campaign not only enhances brand exposure and awareness through the strong combination of both parties, but also provides consumers with a better and more personalized product experience. Thus achieving a win-win situation for both the brand and the IP, and truly achieving a win-win situation for both user experience and brand marketing. As the head of Tencent's game IP, the user loyalty and viscosity of *Honor of Kings* are very high. With the cooperation of the two parties, Gillette can precisely reach game players and deepen its brand influence in the game vertical, while *Honor of Kings* can also absorb more fan traffic brought by the brand.

5.1.4 Strengthen Consumers' Perception of the Brand and Bring More and Longer-term Consumer Economy to the Brand

From Chinese costumes to hipster games, from national cuisine to popular audio, *King's* online games accompany entertainment while also penetrating users' lives through various licensed products, providing them with more comprehensive and long-lasting companionship and establishing a stronger emotional link between IPs and users and the users can become the fans of IPs. Companies with IPs can gain a stable fan base, and having a quality and well-regarded IP can expand the fan base, allowing content products to reach a border market and reap more benefits (Jiang & Wang, 2016).

The core of the union of brand and game IP is to turn the passive transmission of brand marketing information into the elements of game experience that users actively acquire and remember, the brand core, product features and in-store experience are no longer isolated marketing information but a fun way for users to participate in the game. IP marketing can convey spirit and emotion through content, and through the personality of the image characteristics of the consumer to conclude a deeper emotional connection with the brand. IP marketing allows the brand to have a personality, through the embodiment of their own personality, consumers have empathy, love, sympathy, inspiration and other emotions, and through the content of the will to maintain a strong connection with them. It brings consumers a more varied experience on a spiritual level, allowing them to recognize and rely on the brand on an emotional level.

5.2 Factors Affecting *Honor of Kings* IP Marketing

5.2.1 *Honor of Kings* Worldview Maturity

Wang(2015) considered that the value of IP is reflected in the three levels of native content, IP interconnection, and IP derivation. Native content is the cornerstone. The questionnaire results show that the degree of perfection of *Honor of Kings*' worldview is related to the IP marketing effect of *Honor of Kings*. In the interview survey, we can also see that consumers are accustomed to paying for "mature" IP, while consumers do not have confidence in mineral IP such as *Honor of Kings* because they are unfamiliar with it. Based on the demand for products, the connotation and maturity of co-branded IP can easily affect customers' consumption intention. Consumers are reluctant to buy *Honor of Kings*' co-branded products, mainly because people think it is just an old product with a new logo, lacking emotional connotation and resonance, which naturally cannot generate consumer impulse.

Moreover, this is *Honor of Kings* development and rich IP connotation of the power source. *Honor of Kings* did not have an entire IP world when it went public, as officials focused on polishing the game's core experience. Due to the game's 5V5 competitive gameplay, it does not have a solid narrative IP content, and *Honor of Kings* can only position itself as a "mineral" IP. The official explanation: By mineral, It means the core gameplay and experience of the game, as well as the social relationships users have based on the game platform and the game's native roots in Chinese culture. Nowadays, they focus on enriching their IP content and enhancing the value of IP, involving users in the process of developing IP, thus attracting users and increasing customer stickiness. *Honor of Kings* hopes that when users get game experience, they can also get more IP-related experience, and derive more IP products based on this IP experience. It is

worth noting that the heroes in the game are primarily local heroes with historical or mythological archetypes. In the user's impression, they come with some familiar people, which is easy for local users to have emotional projection and resonance. As a growing and evolving mineral IP, *Honor of Kings* is trying to find emotional Bridges to connect with its users, such as local culture and the cultural resonance of the younger generation. Moreover, this kind of emotion accumulates layer by layer from each dimension, grows up unceasingly, and blends into the *Honor of Kings*' IP itself.

5.2.2 Local Culture and Other Cultural Influences

Most of the more successful foreign native culture brand development is taken chiefly from the localized characteristics of national cultural resources, which is because traditional national culture and artistic images can bring consumers a sense of intimacy. The story materials and artistic images provided by traditional cultural resources are more likely to be accepted and recognized by the general audience (Mi & Zhao, 2017).

To be sure, *Honor of Kings* has struggled in the past to integrate local cultures. The Chinese factor in *Honor of Kings* can easily resonate with players, which is also reflected in its IP marketing. *Kings*' cooperation not only in Dunhuang, Shaoxing opera such traditional Chinese art, is also combined with a traditional cultural festivals like Tomb-sweeping Day, Dragon-boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival to let the players in the game participate in celebrating the traditional festival. Faced with *Honor of Kings*' IP marketing in combination with local culture, some users believe that Chinese elements enhance the aesthetic of the game and distance users from the traditional culture in the game. Some users believe that the ability to inherit local culture through IP marketing is limited and cannot bring more profound inspiration to players. Although co-branded products contain local cultural elements, they have little influence on their purchase decisions. That may be related to *Honor of Kings*' understanding and integration of local culture.

It can also be seen from the questionnaire results (see Figure 1) that the co-branded skin of traditional culture launched by Honor of Kings is popular among consumers, accounting for a significant part of the consumer preference for co-branded products. By deeply combining the culture of traditional festivals, Honor of Kings can renew the freshness and interactivity of festival folk customs in real life through games and drive young users to re-practice the ceremony of festivals. Second, it can establish a positive image of the enterprise, inject vitality into the IP industry, and bring more cultural innovation possibilities to the IP industry.

5.3 *Honor of Kings* IP Marketing Deficiencies

5.3.1 Serious Homogenization of IP Co-branding

Nowadays, the IP industry tends to be homogenized. In order to stand out in the market, maintain IP vitality and highlight IP differences, marketers need to pay attention to one point. According to the players' reaction, some IP co-branded products lack in-depth value fit, just in the form of product logo, which is challenging to attract customers. For co-branded products, customers will not only consider the quality and price of the products themselves but also consider the fit between co-branded brands and *Honor of Kings*. Co-branded products are precise because co-branded brands give particular IP connotations to bring emotional resonance, attract consumers to buy, and improve sales. Therefore, rich IP connotation, IP marketing can not be ignored. In order to avoid homogenization, *Honor of Kings* should find its advantages out of the unique IP marketing road. In this respect, they also see a variety of strategies, such as the local or regional culture into IP game, take years of long-term construction of the narrative world view, but has not been fully developed consumers' awareness of IP, can be seen from the interviews. Even if the *Honor of Kings* in every season and year joined the vivid CG animation to the narrative, some players will still not pay attention to this aspect.

5.3.2 Poorly Developed Background Prevents Deep Emotional Communication

From the questionnaire survey, we found that as people's consumption levels improve, consumers' consumption needs also begin to change, gradually expanding from functional product needs to emotional value needs. Because MOBA games have certain restrictions on narrative delivery, the worldview and narrative background of *Honor of Kings* has been challenging to perfect into a system. From the player's point of view, how to insert an attractive storyline narrative while playing competitively and increase users' emotional connection to the handicap is the problem to be solved. Breaking through this limitation becomes the biggest challenge facing IP promotion. Compared with the past, *Honor of Kings* now has a more apparent IP value, a more evident worldview structure, a richer forming story, and ample event support, providing a soil full of possibilities for a more diversified business ecology construction. However, the problem still exists because it is challenging to combine traditional cultures. Maintaining the original flavor of traditional culture while cleverly combining the game itself is a problem that needs to be considered. In the long run, the IP content accepted by consumers is mainly western IP culture. Although the national style IP has the advantage of sentiment, how to break into different circles and improve the acceptance of consumers to such national style IP of *Honor of Kings*, which is also a problem faced by the marketing staff of *Honor of Kings*.

6. Conclusion

It can be said that the IP development process of *Honor of Kings* is unique in China and even in the world. With the resonance based on local culture, *Honor of Kings* continues to grow its game story background through emotional bridges with users. They have adopted various ways to enrich their IP content. For example, the player co-creation “Source Dream” program allows players to participate more deeply in constructing the game’s background, increasing their sense of involvement in the game and integrating young circle culture in the game IP. That also lays a good foundation for its IP marketing. In addition, it has also taken advantage of its Chinese elements, combined with local cultural elements, and linked multiple industries to create the *Honor of Kings* Symphony, virtual idols, theme parks and so on.

In the questionnaire and interview, we found the current problems of *Honor of Kings* IP marketing: aesthetic fatigue of the public, declining product quality, and the story background and world view of *Honor of Kings* are not built entirely. In general, if *Honor of Kings* IP marketing wants to operate sustainably, it is necessary to study the emotional demands of consumers further while ensuring the quality of products and services to continuously develop the worldview core, enrich the content and value of IP, and lay a solid value foundation for IP marketing.

Finally, due to the limited space, this paper cannot choose the same type of game for the IP marketing case study, so it lacks in highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of IP marketing of *Honor of Kings*. Other scholars can try to conduct a comparative IP marketing analysis between *Honor of Kings* and handheld games of the same scale and explore other factors affecting its IP marketing more deeply. In addition, as the definition of IP marketing is expanding, the detailed study of individual cases of IP marketing in other industries can also be the focus of further research and exploration in the future.

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