

The Effects of Player-Avatar Identification and Empathy:

The Impact of *Honor of Kings* on Players' Attitude and Knowledge of Historical Figures

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From 2017, *Honor of Kings*(王者荣耀, *HoK*), one of the most popular game in China, has been sparking vigorous debate on whether playing the game can impact on player's historical cognition or not. However, there is not any empirical research on the specific issue yet. This study aims to fill the gap between the public debates and the academic research by examining the impact of *HoK* on players' attitude and knowledge of historical figures. Data were collected through questionnaire survey, observations and interviews. The nonrandom sampling survey was completed with combining both online and offline questionnaire, collecting 907 valid samples in total. Spearman Coefficient of Rank Correlation were used to find out related factors of historical cognitive difference. Results showed that game playing positively impacted player's attitude and willingness to know of historical figures; but there is no significant correlation between the game playing and players' knowledge of historical figures. Cultivation Theory in Media studies and the concept of player-avatar identification and empathy in game studies could be used to interpret results.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2017, *HoK* suddenly became phenomenal. And discussions about whether it affects minors' historical cognition became common and intense. However, those discussions just described the game's content such as character design or represented results of some interviews with primary school players, there is still a lack of reliable empirical study to confirm their standpoints. This paper is going to conduct an empirical research based on this hot and realistic topic to fill the gap. Besides, there are three considerations to decide on this topic.

First, *HoK* is a typical MOBA game. Compared to RPG with complexity of narrative, it is more emphasis on competition than story. Second, most champions of this game are derived from historical figures. During the game, players may pick a champion named after a historical figure and be exposed to its visual image and lines. Third, though the object of most existing discussion about the game's influence on historical cognition is minors, major players of *HoK* is adults according to the game design and operational data. As well known, adults are sufficiently rational to distinguish between game content and historical facts. So, whether the game affect adults' historical cognition is worthy to find out. For research convenient, we choose college students as research object.

According to the literature in recent years, players' active participation during the game does affect their cognition about aggression and other aspects. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept of player-avatar identification in video gaming. The interactivity and immersion when players operate their avatars in video gaming increase the player-avatar identification. In *HoK*, it may take the form of that players will prefer a specific champion than others if their champion proficiency is higher. Besides, they may look forward to learning more about the specific historical figure and even mistake some game content as historical fact. So This paper will focus on the impact of game behavior on players' emotional attitude, willingness to learn more and cognition of historical figures, using *HoK* as an example.

2. METHODS

907 valid data were collected through questionnaire survey, including three scales of respondents' emotional attitude, willingness to learn more and historical cognition, their game behavior (champion preference, frequency, duration and level of this game) and basic information. Players account 34.4% among them. According to their proficiency of one specific champion, respondents were divided into non-players, general players and skilled players. The data of the three are used for comparative analysis. Spearman's rho was used to assess how well the relationship between one argument and one dependent variable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the descriptive data, players generally believe that those game characters in questionnaire differ greatly from real history. That is, as mentioned above, adult players can distinguish between games and facts.

3.1. The skilled players demonstrated stronger preferences towards historical characters they are familiar with in the game than other groups

Based on the analysis results, respondents' gender, education level and major have little to do with their emotional attitude towards historical figures, while whether they have played the game has an impact of 9.7% at the 99% confidence level. But this variable is negatively correlated with the dependent variable. With further analysis of each historical figure separately, the results show that, for emotional attitude, skilled players > non-players > general players. It can be inferred that general players have more negative attitude toward a specific historical figure than non-players, perhaps because the game is at a disadvantage when they encounter the corresponding champion.

3.2. Respondents' willingness to know more about the specific historical figure has positive correlation with their proficiency of the figure

Based on the analysis results, whether respondents have played the game has nothing to do with their willingness to know more about historical figures overall. And the relationship between game behavior and dependent variables in the three groups is not significant. But the proficiency of the game character has positive correlation with players' willingness to know. Also, for most historical figures, gender is a factor that affects the players' willingness to know. Female players' willingness is higher than male players.

3.3. Respondents' cognition of historical facts has no significant association with their game behaviors

Whether respondents have played the game only affect the cognitive level difference of 5.3% at the 89% confidence level, which is not significant. And the correlation between their champion proficiency and their cognition of historical figures is not significant. However, gender has an impact of 24% at the 99% confidence level, and male perform better than female. Besides, Major has an impact of 8.9% at the 99% confidence level. As can be seen, respondents are able to judge the fact of some historical figures based on their own knowledge rather than their game behaviors.

4. CONCLUSION

Almost all the players think that those historical figures in *HoK* do not match the real historical figures, they also can tell the differences between digital games and reality. However, the result showed that playing *HoK* does have emotional impact on their attitude and willingness to know of historical figures. On the other hand, the game experience doesn't influence their rational cognition significantly. The effect of player-avatar identification and empathy can partly explain the result.

In the interview on *HoK* players, some respondents mentioned that the first image emerging in their head when they heard the name of a historical figure is the game image rather than the image constructed by films, TV dramas or books. Cultivation theory can be used to interpret it although it was originally used to examine the long-term effects of television.

OPTIONAL BIO

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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