



A Study on the Communication Strategies of Chinese Mobile Games Entering Overseas in the Context of Cross-Cultural Communication and Glocalization--Taking 'Realm of Valor' as an Example

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Abstract

As the wave of globalization grows, globalization is gradually taking its place in globalization. This study focuses on the development of 'Realm of Valor (ROV)' in Thailand as a case study to analyze how to localize in target countries in the context of globalization from a cross-cultural perspective. Ten participants were invited to conduct focus group interviews with players and six participants with game producers in this study. The result demonstrated that the game ROV blends a concept of globalization and localization to offer exclusive experiences to players through many items in the game such as skins, term translations, and other graphic things. Focusing on players' perspectives, key concerns include (1) the game's friendliness to local Thai players, and (2) opportunities to participate in international tournaments. In contrast, game producers emphasize (1) the integration of local cultural elements, and (2) responsiveness to player feedback. These insights can guide future game developers in adapting their games for international markets.

Keywords: Uses and Gratification Theory, Cross-Cultural Communication, Glocalization, Mobile Games, Realm of Valor

Introduction

This study examines the Thai version of HOK, which named Realm of Valor (ROV), a MOBA game developed by Tencent's TIMI Studio and co-published with Garena. Since its December 2016 launch in Thailand, ROV has been the top downloaded MOBA game in the country. In the first quarter of 2023, Thailand contributed 23% to Southeast Asia's mobile gaming revenue, with ROV leading the download charts on Apple and Google Play stores (Rui Ma, Mobile Insights Analyst, 2023). Overseas people often learn about Chinese culture through one-way contact, such as reading books or other art forms, which lacks



two-way interaction. Therefore, China's rich cultural deposits tend to become difficult for people in other countries to understand. The emergence of games has improved this situation, especially mobile games, which have become a new way for the world to understand Chinese culture and play a key role in promoting cultural exchange (Lin S.Y., 2019). When developing different markets, companies should adjust to marketing communication strategies in the face of cultural differences, thus making local consumers more receptive to goods and brands (Cai Y.M., 2022). Based on this, this study focuses on communication strategies for game exports. For example, what localized changes have been made by ROV for the Thai market, and what factors have contributed to the success of ROV in the Thai market? From the perspective of game makers and players, how to make cross-cultural communication games more popular in overseas markets? To summarize, the communication strategy of game export has reference value for both cultural communication and company's profitability. This case study of ROV's effective cross-cultural communication and localization development in the Thai market will provide experience for other game companies and governments seeking to expand into international markets.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the success factors of the mobile game titled Realm of Valor (ROV).
2. To study a strategy to improve ROV's elements in terms of globalization and cross-cultural communication through the perspectives of games' producers and players.

Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to the success of the mobile game titled Realm of Valor (ROV)?
2. What strategy can be used to improve ROV's elements in terms of globalization and cross-cultural communication through the perspectives of games producers and players?

Concept Theory Framework

This study will use the Uses and Gratification Theory, Glocalization Theory and Cross-cultural Communication Theory as the theoretical basis of the study. The Uses and Gratification Theory emphasizes the player's position and the player's role and status. Studying players' needs and satisfaction points can help us understand why ROV has been successful as a MOBA game. The Glocalization Theory emphasizes the development of globalization and localization changes, and the theory helps us explore the localization



changes made by ROV in the Thai market and the corresponding marketing strategies, to understand the reasons for ROV's success in the Thai market. Cross-cultural communication theory emphasizes communication in diverse cultures and plays a crucial role in understanding how ROV communicates with its audience. This theory will guide game companies to have a deeper understanding of how exported games can benefit from a more nuanced understanding of local cultural dynamics.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, our goal is to explore the factors that have contributed to the success of ROVs and some of the problems that still exist, and to provide guidance to future game companies in exporting their games. Therefore, we conducted focus group interviews with players who were deeply involved in ROV's game and in-depth interviews with the game makers. The interview data were also analyzed so that the research objectives and questions could be analyzed and interpreted.

Materials and Methods

1. Research Design

Based on the theories of cross-cultural communication, global localization, and game communication, this study was conducted to investigate and organize the actual situation of ROV in Thailand. The study adopts qualitative research (QL) methodology to screen and invite players and producers to conduct focus group interviews and in-depth interviews respectively from the research objectives. Objective evaluations of ROV were obtained from the players' point of view, and the success factors of ROV were preliminarily judged. From the perspective of game producers, we summarize the strategic characteristics of ROV and discuss in depth the successful experience of ROV and the future development direction that can be improved.

2. Population and Sampling methods

2.1 Selection of game players

Ten gamers were selected through online and offline solicitation to conduct focus group interviews. They aged between 18-35 years old, which is the main user of this type of handheld game (Ke Xiao game, 2023) and have at least one year of experience in playing the game ROV or others.

2.2 Selection of game producers

The sample consisted of practitioners in different links of the Chinese game production industry chain. Six game producers were selected to participate in the in-depth interviews. Their ages were not limited, but they had to have a deep understanding of ROV, and had directly or indirectly participated in game production, and their positions included, but were not limited to, original artists, software engineers, game test engineers, UI designers, and game release publicity.



3. Data analysis

In this study, a coding strategy was used to analyze and summarize the interview data. American psychologist Michelle pointed out that this strategy includes the characterization of situations, events, and behaviors of oneself or others, which is a crucial factor in determining individual behaviors (Lin et al., 2003).

After collecting the interview data from players and producers, the data were first organized and cleaned to eliminate invalid and repetitive content, then organized and verified the interviewees' speeches, confirmed the content through secondary conversations, and added explanations. Subsequently, the final content was integrated, and the results were interpreted by applying the generalized organizational method of the coding strategy.

Results

RQ1: What factors contribute to the success of the mobile game titled Realm of Valor (ROV)?

This article is divided into two main sub-themes to explain the ROV's success, one from the perspective of glocalization and the other from the perspective of cross-cultural communication and provides a comprehensive account of the reasons for the popularity of ROVs in the Thai market.

1. Factors for ROV success from the Glocalization perspective

Factor 1: The game is friendly to local Thai players.

1.1 Changed the UI and art aesthetic.

ROV adjusted its UI and art aesthetic to suit Thai players' preferences. The game features heroes with Thai local culture, diverging from Honor of King's beautiful art style. Its interface has a minimalist design, simple and clear, facilitating player entry. In game design, UI and art design are crucial as they serve the players' gaming experience.

1.2 Optimized the game settings.

To adapt to Thailand's local network and game environment, ROV adjusted its game mechanism. It cut the number of soldiers, shrank the map, compressed game memory, and lowered quality. This aimed to minimize lag caused by unstable mobile networks across Thailand. Shorter game times, along with diverse game modes, maintained and enhanced the gaming experience, making ROV a top choice for potential players of similar mobile games.

1.3 High-quality limited skins related to local culture.

The hero's character image design as well as skin design not only looks good but also combines the local culture as well as the local players' preferences, launching IP co-branded skins, virtual anime limited skins, Thai element limited skins, and all kinds of



themed limited skins. Participant 3 has pointed out that, “co-branding with an IP that has a large audience in itself, can share the influence and enhance the spending power of potential consumers”. Whether it's IP co-branding or themed skins, high-quality skins are one of the most important reasons for successfully attracting local players.

Factor 2: Participating in international tournaments.

2.1 Organize and participate in large-scale competitions.

Organizing tournaments and participating in international tournaments is one of the remarkably effective means of expanding one's influence. Participant 6 mentions that “people who want to play the same type of handheld game for the first time will surely give preference to the handheld game with more influence and popularity”. Organizing or participating in tournaments not only proves the value of the game itself to players but also strengthens the players' sense of participation and pride and attracts more potential players who have not yet joined the ROV through such behavior.

2.2 Cooperate with local KOL for publicity.

Utilizing local celebrities to create buzz is an effective way to promote ROV in the Thai market, as Participant 7 notes, “ROV has actually collaborated with local celebrities who are well known to the public in Thailand, such as Baifern Pimchanok's ‘Arum’ and Mario Maurer's ‘Hayate’, to name a few. ‘Arum’, and Mario Maurer's ‘Hayate’, to name a few. Utilizing the influence of celebrities and KOLs to drive more players to join this game or participate in cosplay activities, which can increase the talk of ROV. Celebrity endorsement or organizing some celebrity participation activities can increase the influence of the product.

2. Factors for ROV success from Cross-cultural communication

Factor 1: The facilitation of virtual communication among players.

Incorporating communication features in a virtual community centered around a video game enhances the players' link to the game. This explains how and why an online community enables players to interact within the game. Mora- Cantallops and Sicilia (2018) in their related literature on MOBAs had presented an insight on eSports. They say that strangers are assigned in a makeshift squad to accomplish a complex common goal in an abbreviated period of time, less than an hour most of the time, is interesting (Mora-Cantallops, M., Sicilia, 2018). Because the gameplay of MOBA itself determines that this type of game has a certain social function. Therefore, valuing the virtual socialization of players in the game and constantly having to provide them with rich means of communication can keep players linked to the game.



Factor 2: Use Chinese cultural elements to help game producers build their brands.

ROV has retained many Chinese elements related to Chinese culture in the game, which plays a key role in the spread of Chinese culture. The first is the characters and skins related to Chinese traditional culture. Chinese history and culture carry its own charm, and the mysteriousness of Asian culture can easily attract users' attention overseas. However, grafting and transplanting of cultural elements are only shallow surface work, skillfully integrating Chinese cultural elements into the inner part of the product to make it have distinctive Chinese characteristics is the key to the construction of the game's cultural brand.

RQ2: What strategy can be used to improve ROV's elements in terms of globalization and cross-cultural communication through the perspectives of games producers and players?

The content of this section is synthesized from both players' and producers' perspectives in the game ROV. It is also divided into two sub-themes. One is from the perspective of glocalization, and the other is from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

1. Strategies to ROV games for the game developers from Glocalization in the view of players' perspective

Strategy 1: Local culture in the game.

It is suggested that more localized elements should be incorporated into the communication of ROV by combining local cultures to enhance players' sense of exclusivity. Scholar Liu (2020), in his article 'Analyzing the Cross-Cultural Communication of Video Games', suggests that groups of players consisting of indeterminate individuals will establish novel shared cultural contexts against the backdrop of a common desire to share experiences. In addition, the barriers inherent in cross-cultural communication, especially those related to transmitting original messages across cultural boundaries, will be reduced (Liu J.W., 2020). Similarly, if the game itself can form a new cultural community that allows players to transcend the constraints of cultural boundaries, it can foster a stronger connection between players and the game. In the case of ROV, for example, it has not drastically altered the Thai culture, giving the impression that it is not designed specifically for Thai players, such as few Thai heroes and skins, small changes to hero skills, and only simple adjustments to some settings. Participant 10 stated,

"Take Ragnarok X: Next Generation (ROX) developed by Jun Dream Games and published by Asahi Koyo. Thailand is the main market for ROX, so the game was launched with a series of activities around the traditional Thai festival, which is followed by a challenge using the TikTok platform that allowed players to trigger



in-game costume stickers through specific actions. The exposure reached 386 million with significant online traffic”.

(Interviewed on 15 December 2023)

It is evident that establishing an emotional connection is important to Thai players. Game companies dig deep into local cultural characteristics to trigger emotional resonance, and integrate local culture into their promotional activities, which will help them compete in overseas markets in the long term. Therefore, it is recommended that ROV incorporate special cultural elements or activities with the local Thai culture to enhance the interactivity and sense of exclusivity with players.

Strategy 2: Player's feedback and replies.

1. It is a significant need of concerning about decent quality of network and system optimization, system updates. Thailand is a special situation, some players have network, update and other problems, engineers need to strengthen the system and server. The game ROV has many players, with high demands for game functions, graphics, and interactivity. Designers need to consider the needs for automatic settings and accurate translation.

2. As an improvement of the gameplay matching and reporting mechanism, ROV players pursue valuable experience, unreasonable matching, and reporting difficulties. It will make players dissatisfied or even abandon the game. The matching and reporting system of each version needs to be improved by focusing on players' feedback and replies. It can be improved by increasing the feedback mechanism to maintain the fairness of the game and the environment.

In conclusion, optimizing the network system, paying attention to players' feedback, and solving problems are the keys for the game to gain a foothold in the local market.

Strategy 3: Low production cost but high players' experience in game

The purpose of game distribution is to make a profit, and one of the keys to the future development of ROV is to make quality gaming experience to most players at a low cost. ROV can be downloaded for free, and players can also spend money to enhance their experience. Players reflect that the price of the Thai version of high-quality skins is on the high side, and that they would be more willing to spend money and stay for a long time if there were more promotions or free offers. Therefore, game merchants reasonable pricing or skin promotions are effective measures to retain players. Some players have pointed out that high-priced skins should be more distinctive and cost-effective. Therefore, the game ROV can meet players' demand, maintain profitability, and increase daily activity through promotions, limited skin amenity price reductions, or logging in to punch cards to give away good gifts.



2. Strategies for ROV communication from Cross-Cultural Communication in the view of producers' perspective

Strategy 1: Increase professional translation and communication skills.

Game localization is the process of adapting to the culture and language of the target market; translation is the basis but has a broader meaning. In the game 'going overseas' boom, language localization has attracted a lot of attention, and the translation of the game's functional language affects the intuitive experience, and the translation level of ROV is in urgent need of improvement. Participant 6 pointed out,

"Elephants have great significance in Thai culture, but Chaugnar's name in ROV is pronounced like 'elephant' in Thai, but there is no such word in Thai, and the word represents ugly dominion in Cthulhu mythology, which hurts cultural believers".

(Interviewed on 15 December 2023)

This warns us that a lack of translation talent, insufficient cultural vision, and barriers to language translation can affect the quality of the game, increase the difficulty of player perception, and create communication barriers, which in turn reduces the participation of overseas players and their reputation for the game.

The character 'Loose Cannon' in an online game titled League of Legends is translated as 'Bao Zou Loli' in Chinese, which means 'Runaway girl.' But in American culture, 'The Loose Cannon' means someone who is out of control, disregards authority, and breaks rules. But in American culture, 'The Loose Cannon' describes a person who is out of control, disregards authority, and breaks the rules, which is different from 'Runaway Girl.' The word 'loli' originates from the novel 'Lolita,' which is the image of cute little girls in the Japanese animation subculture and is like the pronunciation of the popular Chinese word 'loli' on the Internet. Translating the relevant content as 'Bao Zou Loli' reflects combining the source language culture and Chinese Internet culture (Dai J., 2021).

In conclusion, game translation is related to cultural exchange and artistic presentation. Translators should give full play to their creativity to accurately convey the elements, professional translators can guarantee the operation of the game and user experience, and the quality of their translations affects the game's reputation, players' retention and manufacturers' reputation, and absorbing professionals is the key to the game's overseas expansion.

Strategy 2: Reduce dependence on international IP and attach importance to the spread of Chinese culture.

Chinese games need to be characterized by Chinese culture. Simply catering to local players will weaken the uniqueness of the game, which requires companies to reinterpret the new symbol system for spreading Chinese culture. In the early stage of



development, ROV relied on IP co-branding to make profits, neglecting its own Chinese cultural heritage. Borrowing international IP to expand the market is effective, and ROV has achieved results, but sacrificing its own cultural system cannot achieve the purpose of cultural export. If Chinese game makers want to achieve cross-cultural handheld communication, they not only need to have localized marketing thinking, but also need to have Chinese cultural innovation thinking, combining local and Chinese cultural commonalities to create products and brand culture, and realize cultural output. Take the makeup brand 'Florasis' as an example, it was born in Hangzhou on 8 March 2017, positioning 'oriental makeup, flower makeup'. In the autumn-winter 2020 New York Fashion Week, Florasis and Misawa Dream launched co-branded Korean clothes, and cooperated with designer Yang Lu, integrating fashion into Asian brand elements. The fashion week came to an end with three brands of oriental origin completing their innovations, realizing that to be recognized, it is not enough to superficially combine classical and fashion, one has to understand the connotations of Chinese oriental aesthetics and deliver the underpinnings in a new way (Huanqiu.com, 2019). Beauty is different from the gaming field, but the principle of cross-cultural communication is the same. Chinese handball companies should realize that handball has become a cultural soft power, and when expanding their markets and increasing their revenues, they should not neglect their cultural communication responsibilities.

Discussions and Conclusion

The development of two research questions and their subsequent elaboration in response to the identified inquiries constitutes the core of this study. The game ROV has amended adapt localization in both game content and marketing strategies for the Thai market. The following section outlines the specifics of ROV's localization strategy in the Thai market.

In terms of marketing execution, firstly, ROV has made a good integration between the game and the local culture by adding Thai cultural elements, such as festival-themed skins, festival-limited activities, and language localization. Then, ROV enhanced players' gaming experience by adjusting in-game settings such as map size, number of soldiers, UI style, etc., and continuously absorbed players' feedback to optimize the game. Finally, ROV enhances the game's own visibility and expands the local influence of the game by organizing large-scale tournaments and co-branded events and cooperating with local KOLs and IPs.

In terms of cultural dissemination, ROV still retains some of the Chinese cultural elements of the original game HOK in the game while disseminating it locally in Thailand, and this part of the game retains the spirit of the original version very well. This suggests that it should be an important prerequisite for cross-cultural communication for games to



appropriately retain their own cultural characteristics while reflecting universal global values. ROV enhances players' sense of identification with the game, for example, by designing related activities around traditional festivals. This suggests that it is an important foundation for cross-cultural communication of games for game companies to deeply understand and explore the cultural characteristics of their target markets, and to enhance the attractiveness of game products through emotional resonance. ROV utilizes social media and other digital platforms for diversified communication to ensure that the message can effectively reach potential users and stimulate their interest in the game. This suggests that the use of diverse channels to publicize the game is one of the most important strategies for cross-cultural communication.

To summarize, this study examines the localization strategy of ROV in the Thai market and its associated factors of success and failure. By studying ROV's localization, this paper highlights the importance of cultural adaptation and user experience in globalization strategies.

Recommendations for Future Application

1. For content producers - Focus on the development and creation of game content

Product quality determines product value, directly impacting game downloads and usage. "Respecting and integrating into local culture is an important path for Chinese mobile games to realize overseas dissemination" (Chen Y.C., 2021). Cultural confidence is vital for national development, requiring game companies to Maintain cultural identity and Optimize game content. Strategically, domestic firms should support local creative SMEs and collaborate with overseas partners. Leveraging foreign enterprises' cultural expertise enables timely product localization, enhancing market adaptability.

2. For game companies - Focus on the construction of the game platform

Strengthening game platform infrastructure is crucial. Dual strategies are essential. Firstly, enhance overseas payment systems (e.g., Thailand's LinePay, TrueMoney, and Chinese cross-border solutions like WeChat Pay/ AliPay) through industry collaboration. Collaborate with payment providers and financial institutions to optimize transaction processes and strengthen oversight. Secondly, qualified developers should establish Steam-like professional gaming platforms through strategic partnerships.

3. For communication marketers - Explore more localized marketing development strategies

Quality game content development and effective marketing are fundamental for market success. Adopting "global localization" as the guiding principle for conceptual research requires researchers to possess global vision, cross-cultural competencies, and localized academic practices. Overseas promotion requires culturally aligned distribution



strategies extending beyond core gameplay to peripheral products (e.g., character-themed music videos, drama sponsorships, collectible merchandise). This approach enhances profitability and brand impact while generating reciprocal benefits for the game's popularity.

4. For policy makers - Strengthen personnel training and introduce protection policies

Talent development remains an undervalued aspect in gaming product lifecycle management. Despite growing public acceptance and corporate training initiatives, critical gaps persist - particularly in specialized training paths beyond technical/management roles. Enterprises should implement three-dimensional solutions, such as knowledge-sharing initiatives, talent attraction/incentive programs, and educational subsidies. Concurrently, national policy interventions are required to promote quality cultural exports, and combat plagiarism through IP protection. Finally, position gaming expansion is a strategic cultural initiative.

Limitations of the Study

Firstly, this study uses quantitative research methods. The small sample size of in-depth interviews cannot fully represent all ROV players' and game industry practitioners' views or may be influenced by the host or participants' personalities and interaction. But the selected interviewers and willing - to - speak participants helped reduce the bias from participants' silence.

Secondly, much of the participants' speech was translated, which may cause content deviation. So, the study summarizes the interviewed content after participants finish and double - checks with them to minimize translation - caused deviation, without affecting ROV's generalization and summary.

Finally, different - nationality players have different ROV demands. This study did not invite European and American players, potentially lacking such samples, thus representing only some Chinese and Thai players' attitudes. Also, this study only analyzes ROV's cross - cultural communication highlights and shortcomings from the global - localization perspective, not deeply exploring the relationship between games and art, etc., so the game's cultural connotation may not be fully shown, which are the study's limitations.



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