

Analysis of the Internet Marketing Strategy of Electronic Games --- Taking Hongkai: Star Rail as an Example

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Abstract. With the popularization and rapid development of the Internet, the electronic game market has shown a booming trend worldwide. At the same time, online marketing has become a marketing tool that cannot be ignored. As a new game released in 2023, Hongkai: Star Rail has gained a wide market in the world with its excellent game quality based on the flexible use of online marketing. Taking Hongkai: Star Rail as an example, this paper deeply explores the current situation of online marketing in the electronic game industry. This paper describes three representative online marketing strategies in detail and analyzes their respective advantages and disadvantages. Finally, some specific opinions are put forward for the shortcomings of the above strategies. In summary, this paper comprehensively analyzes the current situation and optimization direction of online marketing of electronic games, and provides valuable reference and inspiration for researchers and practitioners in related fields.

Keywords: Hongkai: Star Rail; online marketing; electronic game.

1. Introduction

With the advancement of technology and the popularization of the Internet, the game industry has continued to grow in recent years, and the game market has expanded year by year. Since the early 2000s, global online game market has been grown rapidly and has been developed into the core of the world cultural industry. The electronic game industry has become a rapidly developing entertainment industry. Simultaneously, traditional marketing has been perceived as an intrusive manner in which people are interrupted to interact with a certain product for a long time [1]. On the contrary, the increase in Internet users and the popularity of social media have also brought great development momentum to online marketing channels. Therefore, in-depth research on the role of online marketing in promoting the operation of electronic games has extremely high theoretical and practical value.

This paper aims to systematically analyze the internal mechanism and external performance of Hongkai: Star Rail's online marketing by using the literature review method. Specifically, first, the author will widely collect and sort out relevant data at home and abroad to build a solid theoretical background. Then, the literature review method will be used to deeply explore and analyze the three online marketing methods used by Hongkai: Star Rail to reveal the laws and trends behind them. Finally, combined with the shortcomings exposed in the actual situation, targeted suggestions and countermeasures are put forward to provide a reference for Hongkai: Star Rail to further optimize its online marketing strategy.

2. Case Background

2.1. Market Situation

Global online game market has been grown at a high rate of speed and has been developed into the centre of the world cultural industry since the early 2000s [2]. According to a report released by the China Research Institute of Industry, from the perspective of global market size, the online game



industry has experienced rapid growth worldwide, with a market size of more than 100 billion US dollars, and is expected to continue to grow in the next few years. From the perspective of the Chinese market size, the actual sales revenue of the Chinese game market is expected to reach 324.644 billion yuan in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 13.95%. This shows that the Chinese online game market has strong growth momentum and a huge market size. At the same time, the scale of online game users in China has reached 732 million in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 11.2%. This shows that the online game user group is extensive and continues to grow.

2.2. Overview of the Online Marketing

The game market has a huge scale and optimistic development prospects. With the expansion of the market, more and more game companies have independently produced more and more games. From the perspective of consumers, although the game products on the market are becoming more and more abundant, the consumption expenditure budget of most consumers for game products is generally relatively stable and will not increase too much with the increase in the number of games. This factor means that game companies need to attract customers, seize customers and guide user consumption. Each game manufacturer needs to attract players to play through its own unique advantages such as game quality. In the context of such fierce competition, online marketing is an important strategy for mobile games to quickly open up the market and continue to gain market popularity [3]. Each game has invested a lot in advertising and buying volume. The advantages of online marketing are multifaceted. First of all, online marketing can use a variety of media forms such as pictures and videos to display products and services. This multimedia display method is more vivid and intuitive, which can attract consumers' attention and stimulate their desire to buy. At the same time, the materials of game categories are very suitable for multimedia display. In addition, game users are generally young and active users on the Internet, and are more likely to be exposed to online advertising. Moreover, compared with other marketing methods, online marketing can achieve accurate and personalized marketing strategies with the help of tools such as big data. Finally, for game manufacturers like miHoYo that have a global layout, online marketing has a wide coverage. miHoYo has invested a lot in promoting by purchasing traffic. According to DataEye-ADX (an intelligence analysis tool under SHENZHEN WISDOM SPARK TECHCO.,LTD that focuses on advertising in the global game industry), Hongkai: Star Rail ranked second in the placement of ACG game materials in the nearly 90 days ending May 12, 2023, second only to Genshin Impact which ranked first (game released by miHoYo in 2020). For the reasons above, Hongkai: Star Rail is very typical and reference for the online marketing of electronic games, and is suitable for studying the online marketing strategies of electronic games.

2.3. Overview of the Game

Hongkai: Star Rail is a turn-based game released by miHoYo in April 2023. The game is set in the galaxy, and players will travel between planets as a special passenger by space train, being advertised as a “space opera” [4]. Since it is the first new game released by miHoYo after Genshin Impact, Hongkai: Star Rail has received widespread attention since its release. After its release, it has been widely praised worldwide, winning many awards such as TGA (The Game Awards) 2023 Best Mobile Game, Google Play Game of the Year, and App Store Game of the Year. According to SensorTower (a well-known mobile application data analysis company), Hongkai: Star Rail has accumulated more than \$500 million in global turnover in just 4 months after its launch [5].

Hongkai: Star Rail's audience has distinct characteristics. In terms of age, it is mainly teenagers aged 10-20, and of course some adults are attracted by the quality of the game. In terms of gender, the number of male users far exceeds that of female users, accounting for about 70% of the number of users. From the perspective of the global market, Hongkai: Star Rail has the highest revenue share in East Asia (China, Japan and South Korea), reaching more than 63% of the total revenue, it has also done well in the US and UK market.

3. Marketing Strategy Analysis

3.1. Sign-in Activity

Award-acquiring sign-in activity is a common way for companies or organizations to attract users to engage in activities. Through daily check-in behavior, game companies aim to increase user activity, enhance user stickiness, cultivate user habits, and promote interaction between users and the platform.

On the social software developed by miHoYo, players can log in to the APP every day to sign in and receive a certain amount of game resources. A certain amount of sign-in rewards can consolidate the player's retention and activity, and help build a game community environment.

On Weibo, Hongkai: Star Rail will launch a limited-time sign-in event in its Weibo Super Topic, a special section or community on Weibo, dedicated to a particular topic, interest, or celebrity. It allows users to discuss, share content, and engage with others who share the same interests, creating a more focused and active community environment within the broader Weibo platform. In a Super Topic, users can also participate in various activities, polls, and fan creations related to the topic, fostering a sense of belonging and community among its members. A few days before each version update. Players need to log in to Weibo continuously and click to sign in on the designated web page. On the third day, they will receive a game virtual currency redemption code worth 8 RMB as a reward. However, if a player misses a sign-in on a certain day, it will be difficult for him to receive the reward on the third day, but if he has a member of the Weibo platform, he will be eligible to make up for the sign-in, so that he can still receive the reward when he misses the sign-in.

Therefore, the sign-in event on the Weibo platform is not only conducive to increasing the use time of Weibo software, but also to promoting the subscription of membership business in a low cost.

However, the promotion of the sign-in event is small-scale, so many players are unaware of the existence of the sign-in event; at the same time, the sign-in reward value is low, thus the enthusiasm of players to sign in is low either.

3.2. Promotion videos

The character Promotion videos (PV) released by the official account supplements the character's personality, living environment, past experiences and other character settings, deepens the player's understanding of the character, helps the audience like the character, and thus generates paid purchase behaviors.

On various online platforms, Hongkai: Star Rail has released a large number of video advertisements. These advertising materials come from game PV, in-game footage and pictures spliced together through editing to attract users' clicks.

The advantage is that these short videos usually have beautiful pictures and mainly show the character design. Viewers who have no previous knowledge of the game can also be interested in the characters in the advertisement. The promotion dimension is wide and the effect is considerable. On the other side, the disadvantage is that this type of short videos usually focuses on showing the art style and plot content of the game. It is difficult for users to get to know the game type and actual playing experience from it, resulting in unclear and inaccurate promotion. Taking Hongkai: Star Rail as an example, as a typical turn-based game, it will not promote the gameplay in advertising, instead, it will focus on showing art resources such as character design. On the one hand, players who originally like playing turn-based games find it difficult to notice Hongkai: Star Rail. On the other hand, after players who are not interested in turn-based games are attracted by ads and click on them, they are unlikely to download and convert into customers after knowing further information.

3.3. Influencer Marketing

Nowadays, young consumers have a lot of time to entertain themselves and browse social media online. As an illustration, more than 80% of American families allow children under 11 years old to watch videos with pre-roll ads or brand sponsorships on YouTube [6].

Influencer marketing achieves more effective product exposure and sales conversion by leveraging the influencer's audience on social media and their trust and following. Its core lies in influencing potential consumers' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty by leveraging the influencer's social identity, preferences, authority, shortage effect, and the reciprocal relationship and commitment consistency they establish with their fans. Influencer marketing is an efficient and targeted marketing strategy that achieves effective brand promotion and product sales by leveraging the influencer's social media influence and audience trust. As the continuous development of social media, influencer marketing continues to play an important role in the future.

Hongkai: Star Rail cooperates with all kinds of influencers, from micro-influencers to mega-influencers on Bilibili, TikTok and other platforms, who will publish videos or live stream certain games to promote the game positively to fans and audience [7].

The advantage of influencer marketing is high communication efficiency and accurate positioning. Since these influencers themselves are mainly engaged in game production, their fans are also a group of players who pay attention to games. They are more likely to become potential customers of Hongkai: Star Rail.

Drawbacks also exist in influencer marketing. These Sponsored Self-Media often only one-sidedly introduce the advantages of the game, keep silent about the disadvantages as a result. The audience may be dissatisfied with such a subjective video. If the production of these videos is too frequent, it will affect the efficiency of the uploader to produce other high-quality videos, thereby causing a part of the original fans to lose and reduce the influence of the uploader. On the other hand, the cooperation price of influential big Internet celebrities is relatively high, and the publicity and promotion costs may be high.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Increase Publicity and Rewards on Sign-in Event

As mentioned above, since there are few or even no in-game promotions for sign-in activities, most players are unaware of the existence of sign-in activities. In addition, since sign-in activities require continuous investment and the rewards obtained are very small compared to the resources in the game, they are not very attractive to players. Even if some players know about the existence of sign-in activities, they are tired of participating. Therefore, the first direction that can be improved is to increase publicity efforts, pop up a hyperlink pop-up window in the game, and players can click to jump to the website to participate in the activities.

Second, Hongkai: Star Rail can appropriately increase the game resources obtained by signing in and increase the attractiveness of sign-in activities. The existing sign-in activities on various platforms require at least three days to receive in-game virtual tokens, which makes many players lack the motivation to sign in from the beginning. Evenly distributing rewards to sign in every day and allowing players to continue to participate in sign-in can gain better user engagement.

4.2. Focus on the Most Efficient Platforms on Promotion Videos

There are great differences in style between platforms. Taking the Chinese Internet as an example, Weibo is a platform with a large user base but is more news-oriented and does not focus on discussions about games. Bilibili, in the early days of its establishment, was an ACG website. Although Bilibili has developed rapidly in recent years, its scale has expanded, and the scope of topics covered by the website has become wider, due to the cultural influence in the early days of its

establishment, it is still China's domestic one of the most discussed platforms for ACG culture [8]. Since most of the users who use Bilibili are young people below 30, and games and other contents are also quite popular on Bilibili, Bilibili can be regarded as the most suitable website for Hongkai: Star Rail to carry out large-scale online marketing. Hongkai: Star Rail should reasonably allocate its online marketing budget, appropriately reduce the promotion of life-oriented platforms like Xiaohongshu (which has a large number of female users and low discussion of game content), and focus on investment in Bilibili and other game forums.

4.3. Optimize the Content of Promotion Videos Suggestions on Influencer Marketing

Hongkai: Star Rail's existing PVs generally do not include actual in-game footage, which makes these ads look less intuitive. Although in this way Hongkai: Star Rail provide a unique virtual world, videos can be more purposeful and straight. One suggestion is to use editing to overlap in-game actions with promotion videos, so that the ads can transition from animation to game content. This production method takes into account the advantages of both parts and wow the audience at the same time.

4.4. Suggestions on Influencer Marketing

Selecting influencers that match brand image and target audience should be the first step of influencer marketing [9]. Each influencer has its different audience and preferences. Hongkai: Star Rail is a continuously operating ACG online game that focuses on plot experience and character development [10]. Its player base is generally interested in lightweight games and ACG culture, and rarely overlaps with single-player game players or MOBA players. When looking for influencers in the gaming area, influencers focusing on single-player games and MOBA games are not suitable for marketing cooperation. Inaccurate and large-scale advertising not only has low conversion rates and low revenue, but may even cause customers' resistance. On the contrary, choosing a suitable influencer can achieve twice the result with half the effort. Therefore, when looking for a partner, game companies need to first clarify the type of game that the influencer mainly plays. When choosing an influencer, evaluating the authenticity of the influence, ensuring that the influencer's fan base is real and active, and avoiding working with fake or zombie fans are needed. Video likes, reposts, and playback data are more reliable than the number of influencers' fans as they can better reflect an influencer's actual influence. Compared with an influencer with large fan base but poor video data, choosing an influencer with a small number of fans but a high number of video views is not only cheaper but also likely to have better results.

In addition, allowing objective opinions including criticism and providing an open and free discussion environment can make the game have a higher degree of real discussion. It can further enhance the effect of influencer marketing. Games are not perfect. Allowing diverse opinions can dilute the traces of propaganda, shape an open and inclusive corporate image, improve audience acceptance, and let the audience experience the sense of achievement of continuous improvement in the game with their suggestions.

5. Conclusion

Hongkai: Star Rail flexibly uses a variety of online marketing methods, resulting a high traffic volume on mainstream social platforms and video websites. On Bilibili, before each version update, cooperating influencers will release preview videos of new characters. These videos cooperate with the official and publish forward-looking content in advance, which can gain hundreds of thousands to millions of views, increasing community discussion and game exposure, and its official account on Bilibili has gained more than 10 million fans. Hongkai: Star Rail also has about 3.5 million fans on Weibo, and there are about 30,000 people who sign in to Weibo Super Topic every day. These users mainly discuss game strategies and share their own paintings in the Super Topic. Through official sign-in promotion and players' autonomous gathering, Hongkai: Star Rail's Super Topic has become a highly active and large-scale gaming community. Although there are also criticisms on the

Internet about the excessive placement of video ads and download links, overall, Hongkai: Star Rail's online marketing is quite mature and rarely has shortcomings.

In summary, judging from the achievements of Hongkai: Star Rail in the global market, although it cannot be completely attributed to marketing, the online marketing strategy it adopts must be quite successful, and it is one of the benchmark products for online game operation strategies in the Internet era. To be frank and forthright, there are still many online marketing strategies that are not mentioned in this article, such as search engine marketing (SEM) and Short Message Service (SMS) marketing, and in fact, these two marketing strategies are also widely used by game companies such as miHoYo. And for some personal unfamiliar platforms in China, such as TikTok, and some foreign social media platforms and websites, this article does not mention them. Therefore, the content of this article covers a relatively small scope, is not comprehensive, and the creative depth is not as good as real business analysis. There is no accurate measurement or access channel for data such as clicks and interactions on some platforms. Moreover, as a unicorn company, miHoYo does not publish financial reports, and its specific marketing investment and revenue are unknown, so the relevant data may not be sufficient to reflect the real situation. Future research can draw conclusions that are closer to reality and more valuable for reference when there is more data in the gaming field and the theory is more complete. Nevertheless, the several marketing strategies selected in this article are highly representative and have a certain guiding role in online marketing strategies, especially in the field of games. The future game industry can follow the high-conversion high-quality marketing strategy of Hongkai: Star Rail and improve some of its shortcomings.

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