

# Research on the Operation and Communication Strategies of League of Legends IP - A Case Study on the Launch of League of Legends: Wild Rift (China Server)

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**Abstract.** League of Legends, as a renowned and influential IP in the gaming industry for more than a decade, has consistently dominated the MOBA market. With its engaging gameplay, vast roster of unique champions, and thriving esports scene, League of Legends has garnered a loyal and dedicated player base worldwide. However, recognizing the evolving gaming landscape, Riot Games, the creator of League of Legends, ventured into the mobile gaming realm, expanding their IP beyond the PC platform. One of the notable outcomes of this expansion is League of Legends: Wild Rift, popularly known as League of Legends Mobile. This mobile adaptation aims to bring the immersive League of Legends experience to a broader audience and tap into the growing demand for mobile gaming. This study will focus on the Chinese version of League of Legends Mobile. By conducting a comprehensive research and analysis, the study aims to identify potential issues by comparing League of Legends Mobile and Honor of Kings and provide strategic recommendations for Riot Games to enhance the performance and competitiveness of League of Legends Mobile in the Chinese mobile MOBA market.

**Keywords:** League of Legends; League of Legends; Wild Rift; IP; Honor of Kings.

## 1. Introduction

League of Legends (LOL) is a 5v5 multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game developed and published in 2009 [1]. Over the past decade, LOL has dominated the MOBA gaming market and remained popular with a large audience. In just January 2024, LOL accumulated 24.46 million hours of weekly viewership on streaming platforms, ranking first among MOBA games in terms of weekly viewership [2]. The viewership of LOL-related esports events has also been increasing year by year, with a peak of 6.4 million viewers for the 2023 World Championship.

However, in the era of rapid development of mobile gaming, as a traditional PC gaming IP, LOL faces many challenges. These include the complexity of its gameplay mechanics and the arrival of the “post-player era” (higher entry barriers for game experience, reduced influx of new players, and player churn), which have made the transformation of the LOL IP more urgent. In 2019, League of Legends: Wild Rift and Crown Legends: Battlefury were released, filling the gap for LOL on mobile platforms. Among them, League of Legends: Wild Rift, which closely resembles the gameplay mechanics of the PC version, had accumulated 40.99 million downloads as of April 2024. In November 2023, its global revenue reached \$29 million, ranking second in MOBA game revenue, indicating the significant success of the transformation [2].

This study will focus on League of Legends: Wild Rift (China version) as the research subject, analyzing the operational and communication strategies of the LOL IP during its transition to the mobile platform. This study employs literature review, case study, and comparative research methods to analyze the operational and communication strategies of League of Legends IP during its transformation to the mobile platform. It incorporates cultivation theory, symbolic interaction theory, and communication ritual theory.

## 2. Case Study

### 2.1. Content of Product

The following section will explore the inheritance and changes of game content itself as it transitions from the PC platform to the mobile platform.

#### 2.1.1. League of Legends: Wild Rift - Inheritance during the transition to the mobile platform.

(1) Inheritance in terms of game map, heroes, skill mechanics, and background story has been maximally preserved. As an IP with a history of over a decade, League of Legends has a large audience base for its game map, heroes, skill mechanics, and background story, as mentioned in the introduction: in January 2024 alone, the weekly viewing time on streaming platforms reached 24.46 million hours, ranking first in the weekly viewing time for MOBA games on streaming platforms. The number of viewers for League of Legends-related events has been increasing year by year, with the highest viewership reaching 6.4 million in the 2023 World Championship. The cross-media narrative of League of Legends' background story has been successfully operated through diversified media forms and channels, extending the story and expanding the game's story world, thanks to the strategic approach of the game's story creators. Incorporating these aspects into League of Legends: Wild Rift can attract a large number of PC gamers and League of Legends IP enthusiasts to try the mobile version. Therefore, preserving these highly attractive IP elements is a wise decision, making the release of League of Legends: Wild Rift highly anticipated and with a large potential user base.

(2) Inheritance of business model: League of Legends: Wild Rift continues the free-to-play business model of the PC version, relying on additional products (such as hero skins and cosmetic skins) for revenue generation. These additional cosmetic products do not affect the fairness of the game.

#### 2.1.2. League of Legends: Wild Rift - Changes in the transition to the mobile platform.

(1) Simplification of game mechanics and faster gameplay pace. Through adjustments to the map, health points, and control methods, the average game time for a match in League of Legends: Wild Rift on mobile devices is significantly lower compared to the PC version. This greatly reduces the entry barrier for players and the time commitment required for each game, while still maintaining the unique features of the PC version of League of Legends, satisfying the needs of PC gamers.

(2) Optimization of hero modeling. League of Legends: Wild Rift adopts the free-to-play model with revenue generated through additional products, and it is worth mentioning that the majority of revenue from MOBA games comes from a virtual product called "skins" [3]. Based on the previous arguments, League of Legends: Wild Rift has optimized hero modeling. In the hero selection interface, players can see clear and detailed 3D models of the heroes, along with the ability to rotate and view skins from a 360° perspective. Additionally, special artwork for skins is provided. Compared to the PC version, which offers relatively blurry models and special artwork for skins, the enhanced skin recognition in League of Legends: Wild Rift strengthens the appeal of skins. The design of recognizable skins in MOBA games directly affects the player's consumption experience and enjoyment, and the increased recognition of skins helps to enhance player retention and maintain balanced game revenue [4]. Therefore, the optimization of hero modeling better satisfies players' visual effects, thereby enhancing the game's attractiveness and stimulating players' desire to purchase hero skins.

(3) Addition of regional hero ranking mechanism. The PC version of League of Legends has a complex ranking system based on winning matches and accumulating points to advance ranks [5]. In League of Legends: Wild Rift, a regional ranking mechanism has been introduced. This mechanism focuses on individual heroes, and players accumulate points through game ratings (MVP, A, S) while using a specific hero. As the points increase, players are included in the ranking system, allowing them to see their rankings for that hero in their city, province, or region. Players can also see the rankings of their in-game friends. Unlike the PC version's rank system, which relies on winning matches to accumulate rank points, the regional ranking system diminishes the importance of

“winning” and emphasizes the significance of “participation.” This allows players to gain a sense of achievement even if they lose the game, optimizing player satisfaction. Moreover, this mechanism better connects the game with the real world, further enhancing the social aspect of League of Legends: Wild Rift. Regional rankings become a form of identification and endorsement within the game community, which reflects the well-known Symbolic Interaction Theory. This theory has three basic premises: first, people engage in actions based on “meaning”; second, meaning is generated through “social interaction”; and third, “meaning” is interpreted by individuals [6]. In assigning social significance to regional hero rankings, players gain a sense of social interaction for their own region, which initially lacks social attributes.

(4) Convenience in login channels. The PC version of League of Legends (China server) uses QQ accounts for login. In League of Legends: Wild Rift (China server), players can log in using either WeChat or QQ accounts, and they can also see their WeChat or QQ friends who are playing the game. By integrating the game with social media platforms, and considering that WeChat and QQ are essential social apps in China, the social attribute of the game is significantly reinforced.

## **2.2. Product Promotion**

### **2.2.1. Platform promotion.**

The official website of League of Legends took advantage of the game’s tenth anniversary celebration to launch its mobile version. Major platforms related to League of Legends, such as the League of Legends PC game and the mobile game, also carried out corresponding promotions. Simultaneously, promotion was conducted on various social media platforms, such as Bilibili, where League of Legends mobile game has an official account and releases updates. Users can directly find the download link for League of Legends mobile game on Bilibili.

### **2.2.2. Co-branded product launch.**

The promotion of League of Legends mobile game utilized co-branded product launches with several brands, including Coca-Cola, Burger King, OPPO, and Anke. Co-branding helps enhance brand image and value [7]. The collaboration between League of Legends mobile game IP and the aforementioned brands established a youthful, trendy, and fashionable image for the game, setting the main tone. This approach expands the target audience and taps into consumer potential [7]. The brands involved cover trendy beverages, fast food, electronic devices, and fashionable clothing, all of which align with the potential user demographic of League of Legends mobile game. Co-branding activities can explore potential League of Legends mobile game users among the customer base of these brands. Co-branding also promotes brand information dissemination and reduces advertising costs [7]. Although major platforms related to League of Legends have been promoting the launch of the mobile game, there is no doubt that the target audience of general promotion is far smaller compared to the vast audience reached through co-branded promotions. League of Legends mobile game has successfully embedded its IP into a much larger market through co-branding activities.

### **2.2.3. Celebrity endorsements.**

League of Legends mobile game attracts attention by organizing celebrity tournaments, inviting participants from various fields. Participants include retired professional players like “Letme,” popular stars like Wang Junkai and Angelababy, and internet celebrities like “Mr. Meniere.” Fans are the most sensitive and enthusiastic about brand-related information endorsed by celebrities, making them the core target audience [8]. Non-fan consumers, or ordinary consumers, may not pay excessive attention to “influencers” or related endorsed products [8]. However, due to the close association between “influencers” and entertainment resources, they are highly topical, creating opportunities for brands to enter their field of vision [8]. Influencer endorsements are a common promotion method.

### **2.2.4. Organizing esports events.**

League of Legends mobile game has organized national and university-level esports leagues. One of the core values of esports events is to meet the audience’s demand for watching games. Esports events,

unlike traditional sports events, attract a younger audience who enjoys pursuing new things and is enthusiastic about social interaction. Organizing national and university-level leagues provides visual experiences, fresh topics, and helps increase the IP's visibility and expand the user base [9]. Organizing national tournaments and university leagues provides spectators with visual experiences, fresh topics, and helps to increase the IP's visibility and expand its user base.

### **3. Problems and Suggestion**

This part will further study the League of Legends Mobile game and conduct a comparative analysis from both vertical and horizontal perspectives.

#### **3.1. Vertical Comparison**

From a vertical comparison perspective, this study will compare the League of Legends Mobile game with other League of Legends IP derivative products. Among the mobile games are Crown Legends: Battlefury, Legends of Runeterra, Ruined King: A League of Legends Story, and LoL Esports Manager. These games are auto chess, card collecting strategy, RPG turn-based, and simulated strategy games respectively. According to estimates, as of July 2022, League of Legends IP-based mobile games have generated over 800 million US dollars in revenue, while League of Legends: Wild Rift alone has reached a revenue of 500 million US dollars during the same period. Moreover, approximately 72.2% of the revenue from League of Legends: Wild Rift comes from the Chinese market.

Based on the above information, it is not difficult to conclude that League of Legends: Wild Rift holds a significant position among League of Legends IP-based mobile games, with China being its main market. It can be boldly speculated that although the League of Legends IP has a large audience, in terms of the game itself, League of Legends: Wild Rift, which inherits the game mechanics and character images, can create more value and is more popular compared to other League of Legends IP-based mobile games that only feature character images with different game mechanics.

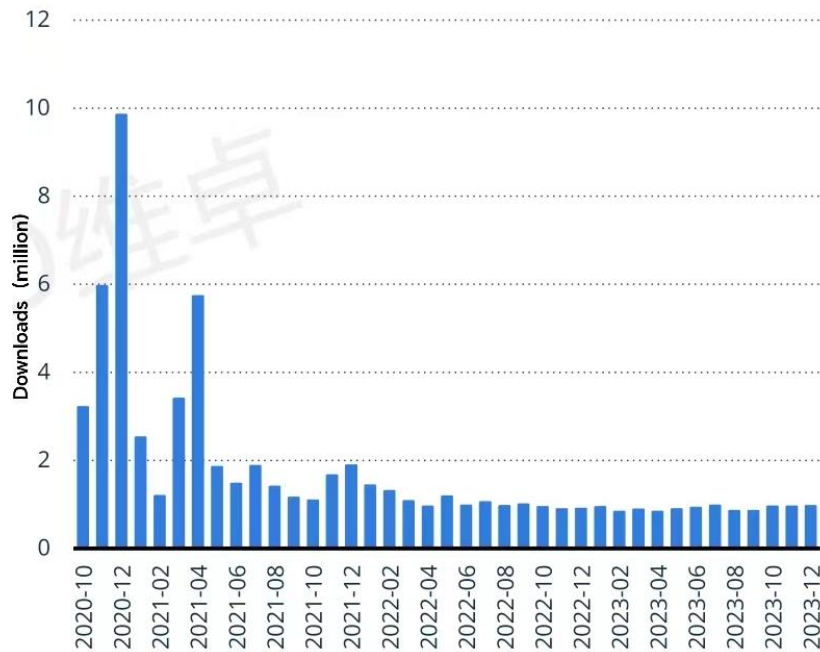
In summary, based on the current situation of the League of Legends IP dissemination, the combination of the original game mechanics and character images has the best dissemination effect. Products that only have character images combined with other new game mechanics are less popular. In other words, the recognition and attractiveness of the League of Legends IP's "character images" are insufficient. The main attraction for League of Legends players is not primarily the "character images," and the "character images" are also less effective in attracting new players.

While actively improving League of Legends: Wild Rift, the operators of the League of Legends IP should also be aware that game mechanics are more likely to be eliminated, but once the character images become deeply ingrained and become classics, they are difficult to be forgotten.

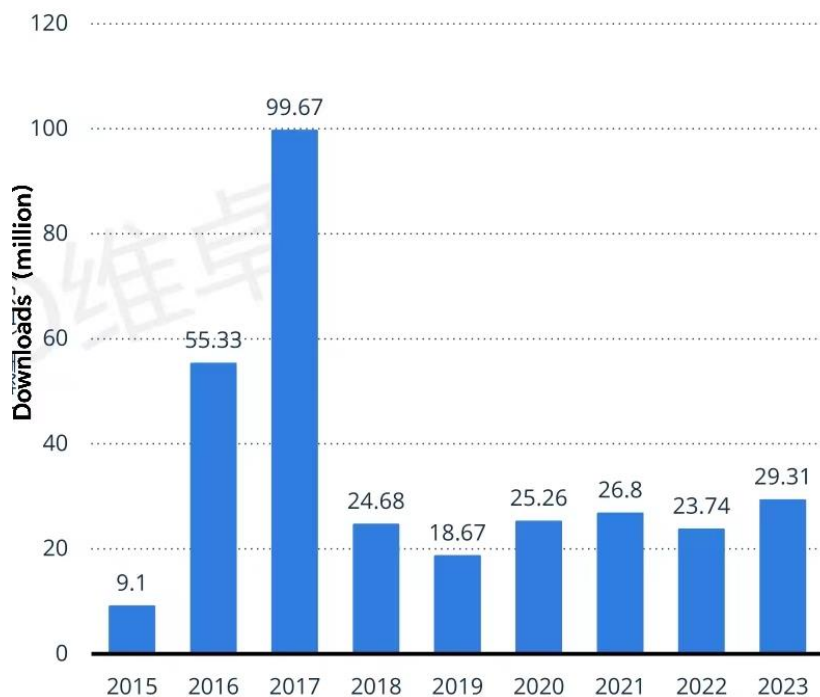
This leads to the importance of non-game products based on the League of Legends IP. This study is aware that League of Legends has dabbled in novels, films, variety shows, documentaries, music, and virtual idols, but it is still far from enough. The operators of the League of Legends IP should increase efforts to develop these areas and create a "League of Legends Universe" centered around the League of Legends characters and background stories, just like what Marvel has done in the superhero film market. At the same time, the operators should make good use of social media platforms, use "virtual idols" as a springboard, start with short videos, and regularly update short films with League of Legends character images as the theme. These short films can be combined with the current market, such as launching short films with Chinese cultural themes on official Chinese social media accounts to gain cultural recognition and resonate with the audience. By attracting the audience's interest in League of Legends characters, they can further explore various products related to the League of Legends IP.

### 3.2. Horizontal Comparison

In the following section, this study compares League of Legends: Wild Rift with the highly similar game, Honor of Kings, based on the number of downloads and provides corresponding suggestions.



**Figure 1.** From AppMagic (Data Source: League of Legends: Wild Rift Downloads from Oct. 2020 to Dec. 2023)



**Figure 2.** From AppMagic (Honor of Kings Downloads from 2015 to 2023)

Based on Fig. 1, we can observe that the download volume of League of Legends: Wild Rift has remained relatively stable at around 1.5 million since December 2021, after the initial surge following its release and promotional offers. However, a single graph may not be sufficient to draw conclusions, so we compare it to the download volume chart of Honor of Kings (Figure 2). Both games are MOBA mobile games, published by Tencent, and they share similar mechanics and gameplay, making them comparable.

According to Fig. 2, we can see that the download volume of Honor of Kings has remained relatively stable since 2020, fluctuating around 25 million. In comparison, it is evident that even after eight years since its release in 2015, League of Legends: Wild Rift has had lower average monthly downloads than Honor of Kings. This can be considered as a less impressive achievement for League of Legends: Wild Rift, which was launched in 2019 and had the advantage of a well-known IP.

Possible reasons for the lower download volume could include: the game mechanics being relatively complex, making it difficult for newcomers to get into the game; players of Honor of Kings, being the potential target audience for a game of the same genre like League of Legends: Wild Rift, might have a psychological aversion to trying out the latter; players of the League of Legends PC game, as another potential player group, might also have a psychological aversion to trying out League of Legends: Wild Rift.

Based on the above, the following suggestions are proposed, focusing on the game content itself:

(1) Simplify the complex mechanics by conducting repeated tests on the test server to actively seek a balance between game attributes and social attributes. This will further adapt the game to the fast-paced entertainment era.

(2) There is a certain level of “hierarchy of disdain” among players between the IPs of Honor of Kings and League of Legends. It is advisable to guide public opinion, encourage friendly dialogue, and stimulate players from both camps to accept and even develop an interest in the other IP.

(3) League of Legends PC players may be reluctant to try out League of Legends: Wild Rift due to its simplified gameplay. Incentives such as special benefits for PC players can be introduced to attract these potential users. Additionally, the game content should incorporate a certain degree of nostalgia, and the mechanics and gameplay should inherit as much as possible from the PC version.

(4) The game’s developers should closely monitor user feedback and promptly address common issues raised by players. Focus should be placed on game matching mechanisms, game balance, and timely updates, as well as introducing new heroes and classic skins from the PC version.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Overall, the transition of the League of Legends IP to the mobile platform is necessary considering the high barriers and limited number of new players in the PC version. The League of Legends IP should continue to improve and optimize its mobile products such as League of Legends: Wild Rift and Crown Legends: Battlefury. It should actively engage in online and offline promotional activities, such as collaborations, celebrity matches, national leagues, and strive to build a League of Legends Universe to keep the League of Legends IP active in the public eye. This will help the IP find its own path in this new era of increasingly fast-paced entertainment.

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