

# Evolution in Tencent's Game Marketing Model under the Adolescent Model: Case Study of Arena of Valor

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**Abstract.** China is the most promising game market in the world. However, with the development of the game industry, the Chinese market is facing a severe problem - the problem of addiction to games among the youth group. The issue of youth game addiction has become a problem that cannot be ignored in society. How game operators should actively respond to the national policy and simultaneously cope with the social resistance to games is the first problem that needs to be solved. Based on the above background, this study selects a typical case in China's game market-Wang's Glory-for multi-dimensional analysis. This study argues that introducing the youth mode has greatly standardized minors' play modes and habits. With the launch of the youth model, indirect problems such as buying and selling accounts and the influx of many target customers into the overseas game market have arisen.

**Keywords:** Tencent's Game; Marketing Model; Adolescent Model.

## 1. Introduction

China, the game market with the most significant development potential globally, has a player base of 600 million. In 2021, the actual revenue of China's game market will be 296.513 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 6.4%. Under such a favorable market, China's game market industry has been fully developed, and the industry's technical level and technical capabilities have been upgraded. China's game industry has ushered in a golden period, Genshin Impact, Arena of Valor, and other works with Chinese characteristics.

However, with the vigorous development of the game industry, there are problems such as the addiction and addiction of such consumer groups to games. According to a survey report by Niko Partners, a data analysis agency, there are about 122 million underage gamers in China in 2020, accounting for 60% of the total population of minors; the average weekly game time of this group is as high as 6 hours, of which 13.2% are underage players. It can be seen that the problem of juvenile game addiction has become a problem that cannot be ignored in society.

Therefore, in the face of China's seriously young game market, it is bound to set off a new wave of storms under the hot discussion from all walks of life. The company's product layout will have a profound impact. As one of the national games, Arena of Valor is also amid this storm. How to actively respond to national policies and, at the same time, deal with social resistance to games is undoubtedly the number one problem that Tencent needs to solve.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 The Development of an "anti-addiction system"

As early as 2007, the state began to pay attention to the problem of minors' game addiction and released the "Real Name Certification Program for Online Games Anti-Addiction System" in the same year, which is centered on limiting minors' "healthy" game time to less than three hours. Pan (2016) also claimed that under-18s who log in with their genuine ID numbers face restrictions on the

time they can play online [1]. However, with today's gameplay updates, major games no longer rely on "revenue" to influence the gaming experience. Major short video platforms continue to encroach on teenagers' study and leisure time. Therefore, in 2019, the State Internet Information Office promoted the pilot launch of an "anti-addiction system for youth" on major short video platforms, live streaming platforms, and some large handheld games. Unlike the previous non-mandatory restrictions, the system will strictly regulate and limit teenagers' use time, length and content.

Since the "teen model" has become increasingly popular in China, domestic scholars have also analyzed it in the short video and game markets. Wang and Xu (2020) have conducted a comparative analysis of the use of the "teen model" by different innovative media, pointing out the disadvantages of the "teen model", such as low uniformity and weak regulation [2]. Zhang and Jia (2021) pointed out that the teenage model will soon enter the 2.0 stage, which is not only regulating the length of use of teenagers but also encouraging them to establish correct values, fundamentally solving game addiction and avoiding addiction to the "virtual world" [3].

However, although there are many policies to restrict young players, the market size of games is still growing steadily, and many scholars have analyzed its development trend and explosive growth size. Kim (2014) pointed out that mobile games will become mainstream game market development. In such a situation, the marketing methods and priorities within the video game industry are bound to be affected to some extent [4].

## 2.2 Marketing under the "anti-addiction system."

The public's attention is often focused on the social impact of games, such as the adverse effects on minors' physical and mental health and the violent elements in games. But there are always two sides to everything, and the same is true of video games. People overlook the possibility of video games being used in other areas; one of which has attracted attention in recent years is the educational aspect of video games. Video games include action games, simulation, strategy, role-playing, sports, puzzles, and adventure. What makes for good video game design spans these genres, immersing the user in a rich, interactive digital micro-world [5]. And in the process, the player's creativity and artistry are stimulated in a way that can facilitate the application of the player's skills in real life. The best example is the game "Minecraft," which has become a global phenomenon in recent years. This game has been used to leverage the educational potential of its entertainment-based content and to get into the subject of spatial geometry early in grades 5 and 6, teach sustainable planning, language and literacy, ecology, geology, and many other things [6].

The format of this game provides marketing lessons for many other games. How to maintain player size and even expand in the underage model? Use the educational aspect of the game. Not only "Minecraft" but also the game "Wolf's Den", developed by North Carolina State University's College of Education, provides a platform for teachers to teach online and actively engage students. With a lot of theoretical and practical support, game developers should be able to see the game's educational potential. This is one of the marketing tools that Arena of Valor can use under the fragile conditions of the "teen model" and the weakness of the anti-addiction system [7].

## 3. Research Method

The research is going to analyze the changes in Tencent's product layout and marketing strategy before and after the introduction of the youth mode through case analysis, and take the "Honor of Kings" as an example, discuss the impact of this mode on Tencent's game products, and in the face of many anti- "youth mode" chaos, how should game companies respond?

### 3.1 Case Description

As a representative work of domestic MOBA mobile games, Honor of Kings attracts many game players with its fabulous and innovative gameplay and excellent game graphics, which could be reflected in the data. According to the 2018 annual report of Honor of Kings released by Aurora Big

Data, the game has reached 201 million users, with a user penetration rate of 22.3 percent. In terms of gender, age, education, and income level, the proportion of female gamers (54.1%) was higher than that of male gamers (45.9%). The majority of players are between 20 and 24 years old (27%), but there is also a minor demographic (22.2%); The overall education level of players is generally a bachelor's degree (49.5%), and the income level is usually low, between 3001-8000 yuan (47.8%). However, the enormous number of "Honor of Kings" players also generates substantial revenue, despite the low economic level of individual players. According to Sensor Tower Store Intelligence data, Honor of Kings raked 268 million dollars globally in the App Store and Google Play in May 2022, up 1.7% from a year earlier. The Chinese iOS market accounts for 95% of revenue, while overseas markets account for 5%.

### 3.2 Problem profile

This report uses the 6P theory as an essential framework to study the marketing problems of "Honor of Kings" in the "teen model". After analyzing the six aspects of product, price, place, promotion, political power, and public relationship, we found that the main marketing problems of this game are mainly focused on the "demonization" of the characters; channels, promotion, ineffective circumvention, and social opinion.

#### 3.2.1 Product

Product marketing is based on the game's content, including the gameplay, artistic images, and the game's worldview, and the main idea is to decorate and package these things to make the game more attractive [8]. "Honor of Kings" invokes Chinese historical figures to create and position the game characters and assign attributes to them. For example, Li Bai, the "God of Poems" of the Tang Dynasty, is classified as an assassin in the game; Wu Zetian, the first female emperor of China, becomes a mage; Dee Renjie, a politician of the Tang Dynasty, is forced to change his "profession" and becomes an archer, etc.

Few games can teach through lively entertainment but often try to inspire players' creativity. However, when Tencent was designing and marketing the product, "Honor of Kings," it made arbitrary "demonization" of traditional historical characters without any basis, using only the gimmick of "history + reality" to attract players' attention. Considering the age range of the game's audience, some players are still immature teenagers, and such "demonization" is very likely to hurt teenagers' physical and mental development by reversing history and misleading the history learning of minors.

#### 3.2.2 Place

As is well known, "Honor of Kings" is a domestic MOBA game that connects with players through mobile phones as its primary operation channel. Whether the discussions among the users or their feedback, by choosing mobile marketing in the Internet era, "Honor of Kings" can undoubtedly communicate and engage with its audience in an interactive and relevant way through any mobile device or network more easily [9].

As of December 2021, the popularity ratio of intelligent mobile devices as the primary Internet access device in China has reached 82.9% among Chinese minors' Internet users in China [10]. So, compared to online games, phone games are more accessible to children. Combined with the high penetration rate of mobile devices, the marketing strategy of "Honor of Kings" through mobile devices may counter the "teen model" and problems related to the rejection of external environmental factors.

#### 3.2.3 Promotion

Regarding the release of phone games, it is difficult for merchants to reach their target audience and choose the right marketing strategy for different users' acquisition channels [11]. So, it's inevitable that they can't accurately provide the appropriate promotion methods for different users. On the other hand, Tencent promotes "Honor of Kings" through two social platforms owned by itself,

WeChat and QQ, with their large user bases. WeChat and QQ users can easily, and even from time to time, find ads about the game popping up in their Moments of WeChat or banner ads on QQ chat pages.

WeChat and QQ both have a “Teen Mode” option, which can go some way to avoiding undesirable online behavior by minors. But how they are set up is easy, which means how they are removed is also easy. It is not possible to altogether avoid the bad online behavior of minors. For example, in the case of the recent lottery of character images of “Honor of Kings” in WeChat mini apps, any WeChat user would quickly learn about this activity and participate in it as long as the “teen mode” is removed. The effect of “teen mode” is minimal under such promotion and marketing methods.

### 3.2.4 Public relationship

As a new type of addictive behavior, phone game addiction has attracted the attention of researchers because of its possible adverse effects on mental health problems. The research found that mobile game addiction positively correlates with social anxiety, depression, and loneliness [12]. In China, the phenomenon of minors being adversely affected by cell phone addiction has also been one of the parents’ key concerns in recent years.

As the “top-selling item” phone game, “Honor of Kings” has inevitably been boycotted by parents and even public interest organizations. In June 2021, the Beijing Youth Legal Aid and Research Center took the game to court for harming the rights of minors. This incident attracted some attention but did not adversely affect Tencent’s stock market. Still, Tencent has strengthened its focus on children and launched an anti-addiction platform. However, its effectiveness does not seem to be evident at the moment. As one of the external conditions, public relation is an inseparable factor for business development. How to hold steady under the social opinion is one of the most critical problems that the “Honor of Kings” should concern with.

## 4. Suggestions

According to the Chinese laws and regulations on corporate social responsibility, enterprises should undertake the responsibilities of education, promotion of national culture, youth health protection, and public opinion orientation. This article aims to seek reasonable solutions for Tencent from the perspective of corporate responsibility.

Video games are an indispensable part of a country’s multiculturalism. The interactive content it presents can bring consumers a unique experience, and it is also one of the important ways of cultural dissemination. In recent years, in the “Arena of Valor” update’s content, many characters that are inconsistent with history have been launched. There has been confusion in image, gender, and personality, resulting in these lifelike historical figures having the name of account but not the reality of history, which undoubtedly caused criticism from society; throughout the world’s excellent video games, their success lies in the establishment of their own original “IP,” and gradually formed their game world view, such as NetEase’s “Decisive Battle! Ping An Jing” shares the same worldview with its subordinate game “Onmyoji” so that Ping An Jing’s characters will not collide with history or famous novels. Players can learn about many folklore legends of neighboring Japan in the background story and character setting of “Ping an Jing.” The same is true for the famous “League of Legends.” Many players still talk about the “De Marcia” universe created by this game, and a group of “historians” have been born in the player community, spontaneously for “Heroes” The world view of the Alliance adds to the building blocks.

Therefore, Tencent should thoroughly learn from the successful experience of its competitors, independently design and write game characters, form its own unique “IP”, and “recall” some characters that do not meet the requirements. However, we must be responsible for historical facts, Chinese culture, and players. In terms of design techniques, we can also try to combine traditional elements with information such as humanities, history, and ethnicity to create character types that conform to the aesthetics of the new era; build an “Arena of Valor” creation forum or character maker to allows players to participate in the process of designing characters, writing background stories, and

character design to increase players' sense of participation. It can also combine the historical facts of the characters to launch a knowledge question and answer session, with in-game props as prizes. The questioners are encouraged to make it truly entertaining and to spread Chinese traditional culture.

From the perspective of education responsibility and adolescent health protection responsibility, parents are their children's first teachers. Therefore, preventing children from indulging in the Internet must start with parents. As a responsible enterprise, Tencent should deliver correct information to parents by regularly holding family education lectures and placing public service advertisements; so establishing a good family atmosphere and education is crucial, and helping parents change their minds and control the "flood beast" of online games. The panacea of the game has always been in the hands of parents, and enterprises only play a supporting role. Therefore, instead of blocking games, it is better to guide children to the real world, enrich their extracurricular life in combination with school and society, and make children understand that games are not the only way to relax.

For the behavior of gray industries such as selling game accounts in the market, we must achieve "zero" tolerance and rely on big data and consumer behavior habits to further optimize the detection of minors' fraudulent use, embezzlement, and other behaviors, so that children can realize the formation of a good family atmosphere through education, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of minors through technology. While making profits for the enterprise, it abides by corporate responsibility and protects the rights and interests of the next generation.

Advertising plays a vital role in Tencent's promotion of "Arena of Valor." The purpose of advertising is to promote consumption and to convey a consumption concept invisibly. Therefore, whether it is a commercial advertisement or a public service advertisement, its essence is a kind of public opinion, which uses the Internet, books, or self-media channels to promote products, so that it is subtly implanted in consumers' subconscious, thereby affecting consumers' purchasing decisions, and the potential consumers of "Arena of Valor." The age distribution spans a wide range, resulting in players' varying cognitive and recognition abilities. This indiscriminate publicity model often attracts people who should not be the target customers - minors; Tencent Taking the promotion methods of WeChat and other channels as an example, Tencent should realize the interconnection and interoperability of internal data so that all its social software can be bound with real-name authentication or login to the youth mode only once and reduce or stop its software according to the age of users. Push game advertisements to minors. Some minor players who unbind the minor way without authorization should use big data and players' play habits to detect and timely block suspected little accounts and make full use of them. Perform a second face recognition test.

Tencent should also actively use the positive leading role of advertising public opinion, combine its substantial social media resources to guide young people to play games correctly and reasonably, and use advertising public opinion to lead society to abandon the inherent stereotypes about games. Cultivate advertisements such as programming engineers and convey to the community that the online world is neither "heaven" nor "hell". It is necessary to face its advantages. Minors shouldn't indulge in the virtual world. Only correct guidance and scientific utilization are the only reasonable ways.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, introducing the youth mode has greatly standardized minors' play modes and habits. Still, in the face of the younger age of the game market, the content has been controversial, and public social opinion has become polarized. This is undoubtedly a huge challenge. It will severely impact significant game companies if it cannot be adequately handled. However, taking Tencent's Arena of Valor as an example, it needs to start with the responsibilities of education and promotion of national culture so that education guides parents and technology guards against Internet addiction, advertising, and public opinion lead the society and other measures, to actively reduce contact with minors, give full play to the strength of family and community, make public social relations more comprehensively deal with and correct the negative impression of the whole society on games so that the Minors are

slowly removed from the target group to achieve the ultimate goal of product target customer transformation.

At the same time, with the launch of the youth model, indirect problems such as buying and selling accounts and the influx of many target customers into the overseas game market have arisen. It walks out of the haze, effectively discourages minors from indulging in video games from the root cause, changes the way of after-school entertainment for the next generation, and walks out and forms a development path of domestic games with Chinese characteristics. The grading system and market are absorbed and spared by the whole world. At the same time as the excellent foreign culture, more and more domestic masterpieces are brought to the world, demonstrating cultural self-confidence.

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