

Virtual Identity Construction and Community Culture: A Study on the Identification Mechanism of the Online Game "Sword Heroes Fate III" from the Perspective of Art Anthropology

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Abstract

According to the "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet" released by the China Internet Society (CNNIC), as of June 2024, the number of Internet users in China is close to 1.1 billion. In China, the Internet penetration rate has approached 78%[1]. This means that with the rapid increase of Internet users, online games, as a cultural carrier with social attributes, have become an entertainment form that can be seen everywhere in life. In this virtual environment, players can be fully integrated. The boundarylessness, openness and freedom of the game enable social behaviors to unfold naturally. Players are immersed in it and even engage in some social behaviors [2]. Players complete the personalized rewriting of the cultural symbol system through the construction of virtual identities composed of virtual characters in the character creation interface. This process of identity construction gives rise to a new form of social connection. Through cultural performances and interactive ceremonies such as in-game sacrificial ceremonies and virtual wedding ceremonies, it forms an emotional resonance network that transcends physical boundaries in the cyber space through emotional resonance. "Sword Heroes Fate III" is a 3D martial arts MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) set against the backdrop of ancient Chinese style. It officially launched its public beta test on August 28, 2009. The game ingeniously integrates a variety of symbols that embody traditional Chinese culture, such as poetry, dance, silk, guzheng, tea ceremony, music and drinking, to construct an idealized prosperous Tang Dynasty. Based on the perspective of art anthropology, this paper explores this interaction mode that connects the online and offline. Taking "Sword Heroes Fate III" as an example, it investigates the internal construction and external influence mechanism of virtual identities in online games, attempting to analyze the complexity of virtual identity recognition in the digital age from the perspective of art anthropology.

Keywords

Virtual identity, Community culture, Identification mechanism.

1. Identity Construction and Cultural Symbols

1.1. The construction and reshaping of virtual identities

At present, the online virtual space has become a key area for the construction and practice of individual identities. In online games, players construct virtual selves by creating nicknames, choosing characters and interacting with others, etc. In this environment, gamers constantly shape their virtual identities through this online and offline interaction method. Through role-playing, players are actually conducting a virtual identity exploration [1]. The construction of this virtual identity has not only become a way for gamers to express themselves, but also a

means for them to seek recognition and a sense of belonging in the virtual online game world. This shaping process is guided by both the internal rules of the game and influenced by the external cultural environment. In MMORPG games that require the participation of multiple people, players shape their identities in online games under the norms of cultural background and community rules. This identity not only affects players' words and deeds in the game, but also has a reverse impact on their self-identity in the real world.

In fact, individuals not only recognize that they belong to a specific social group, but also experience the emotional and value significance brought by this identity. This is identity. [3] It is reflected in an individual's performance in self-awareness, emotional belonging and role positioning in society, and the formation of this sense of identity is the result of the interwoven influence of multiple factors. The communication among participants is not limited to traditional conversations; it also achieves more intuitive interaction through role actions, perspective switching and other means. In the virtual world, users present the character images they expect by participating in interactions, project their "ideal selves", gain self-satisfaction, affirmation and recognition during the interaction process, promote the construction of self-identity and collective identity, and further improve the identity system [4]. With the changes in the game environment, the growth of characters and the deepening of community interaction, players' identity is not fixed. In the virtual world, the dynamics of this identity construction is particularly prominent. This process itself involves the cognition and reshaping of one's own identity. Furthermore, cultural boundaries, as an implicit norm, have a subtle influence on the formation and definition of virtual identities. Players often choose game characters and interaction methods based on their own cultural background and self-perception of preferences, and these factors further shape their game identities.

Compared with traditional art museums, theaters and galleries, the art field that has expanded to the game world and virtual space allows players to express their personalities through props, actions and other means in the virtual space. The diversity of this way of expression makes the boundaries of identity recognition more fluid and open.

1.2. The symbolic presentation of identity

How do players establish a sense of identity with their virtual identities? The symbols in online games and the symbols of players' identities were classified, and the related symbols were summarized into four major categories: situational symbols, visual symbols, auditory symbols and language symbols [5]. In the game "Sword Heroes Fate III" set in the Tang Dynasty martial arts world, players, as direct participants in the game, can be regarded as a symbolic expression of their identity in terms of well-developed background stories, game rules, character appearances, face designs, character names, as well as the music and sound effects in the game and their words and deeds in the community. Identity is the psychological behavior in which the subject takes itself as the cognitive object and constructs its own personality by absorbing or integrating the people, things and events around it [6]. From this, it can be seen that identity recognition is not a static existence but constantly changes along with the choices and interactions of players. Players gradually adjust and construct their own self-identity by frequently interacting with various elements in the game and other players.

Symbols are not only the medium for players to express themselves, but also an important carrier for the shared meaning of the community. For instance, in "Sword Heroes Fate III", the extremely famous event "Great Attack and Defense" involves two opposing camps within the game competing against each other on a map, with approximately 300 players from each camp competing against each other. In this activity, the players' sense of participation was greatly satisfied. The two sides of the game engaged in psychological and operational games with the goal of killing the NPC leader of the opposing camp. During this process, different sects and

camp choices, as well as the NPCs to be protected, all carry specific cultural symbols. Players establish their identification with their own gaming identities through these symbols.

2. Interactive Rituals and Cultural Recreation

2.1. Interactive ceremonies and the shaping of community culture

In the world of online games, interactive rituals are an important mechanism to enhance the emotional connection among players. Collins proposed that Emotional Energy is a long-term and continuous emotional state that exists in social interaction. Emotional energy is a continuum, encompassing everything from high self-confidence and enthusiasm to positive self-experience, then to a stable intermediate state, and finally to depression, lack of motivation and negative self-perception [4]. For instance, in the "Great Attack and Defense" event, the victories brought about by the confrontational games among player camps will serve as a supplement to "emotional energy". It is worth noting that by participating in collective cultural performances like "Grand Offense and Defense", players jointly weave an emotional resonance of "collective stimulants" with a high emotional density.

In the game community, players enhance their understanding of each other by sharing emotional experiences, thereby significantly improving the unity of the group. This sense of unity, in turn, promotes emotional identification, eventually enabling the members of the community to form a common emotional entity [7]. In "Sword Heroes Fate III", there are a large number of multiplayer interactive game modes that players can participate in. From the most common 25-player group dungeons in non-player battles (PVE) to player-versus-player (PVP) activities such as mutual sparking, participation in arenas, and "grand offense and defense". Its participation mechanism has typical ritual characteristics: The fixed reset cycle every week forms the presence of the group in the time dimension, the different occupational divisions (such as tanks, healers, and damage) caused by different sects, and the forced establishment of the character responsibility system, etc. This collaboration under the constraints of time and space forces players to form a cycle of "strategy negotiation - trial and error correction - success verification". The processes and results of these experiences may trigger strong positive or negative emotions in players. When players start to discuss these experiences with each other, similar emotions may form common topics and further enable them to resonate as an emotional community.

This regularly conducted multi-person ritualized behavior generates common emotional experiences and social cohesion, while meeting the group presence requirements of the "interactive ritual chain" [5]. Restore one's own existence through emotional interaction and ritualization processes. This kind of recognition makes the participants more confident and energetic in the subsequent interaction, feel better about themselves, and thus be more engaged in the game.

2.2. Secondary creation and cultural reproduction

Re-creation refers to an artistic expression form opposite to originality and is also known as re-creation [8]. In the process of secondary creation, players often exist not only as participants. The sense of identification with and belonging to culture is a key condition for the collective construction and community dissemination of group culture [7]. In "Sword Heroes Fate III", cultural identity and a sense of belonging will drive players to spontaneously become creators and disseminators of secondary creation works. This spontaneity and interactivity constitute the basic characteristics of the player community. Players will form a shared discourse system through methods such as instant messaging, forum discussions, and live interaction. This kind of creation usually takes the form of painting, novels, music, video editing, etc., effectively conveying the creator's emotional expression and spiritual core. These various forms of

secondary creation content, in the final analysis, are the dissemination of "memes" and secondary creation materials. It also expresses love and identification with the game world through re-creation. This kind of secondary creation, which shares the original content for communication and has a clear purpose, is a related group. These communities come together because of common interests and preferences [9]. Players produce and disseminate high-quality fan works, which not only spread widely within the gaming circle but also extend to mainstream social platforms. This two-way interaction not only promotes the dissemination of brand value, but also enables players to find a sense of belonging in the community, allowing them to gain self-worth recognition through participation. In turn, this further deepens the members' identification with the group culture. The process of co-creation and interaction constructs cultural symbols and emotional resonance points beyond the game itself, thereby evolving into the construction of cultural identity.

3. Conclusion

In the online environment, internal self-identity and external social identity are not in opposition but interwoven with each other. As an important field for the construction of player identities and the shaping of community culture, games allow players to freely shape their own identities in the game world, but such identities are still influenced by the real culture. With the continuous evolution of network technology and social platforms, the interaction mechanism between virtual identities and community culture has shown a more diversified and complex trend. In the game, players not only shape an idealized "ideal self" in the virtual space through role-playing, symbol interpretation and participation in ritualized interactions, but also constantly reconstruct and identify with their identities in the real cultural context. Its internal self-identity and external social norms are intertwined, forming a unique identity construction model in the digital age.

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