

Digital Utopia: An Analysis of Contemporary Slow-Paced Community Games

–The Case of Obi Island

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Abstract: With the development of society, slow-paced community games are becoming more and more popular. This paper will take the players of the slow-paced community game Obi Island as the research object, the research method combines case analysis with network participatory observation, mainly discussing the causes and marketing models of the popularity of the slow-paced community game represented by this game in modern society, and put forward directions and suggestions for the future development of such games. This paper analyzes the behavioral feelings of players in Obi Island from the perspectives of nostalgia, liquid society, media nostalgia, etc., introduces and analyzes the emotional value brought by such games from multiple perspectives, as well as their influence and connotation, in an attempt to provide ideas for the future development direction of such games and conduct self-optimization. The research finds that the essence of "Obi Island" is to construct a nostalgic utopia of good times to resist anxiety for emotionally disturbed players, and players should not be overly addicted to this virtual fantasy in the current society. Therefore, game manufacturers should change their attitude toward the game, not only to innovate and try within the framework of the concept of the game but also to actively take responsibility to guide players to face reality correctly. Nostalgia is not the ultimate goal, nor is it an escape from reality. The healing power obtained from nostalgia utopia is the driving force for progress in reality.

Keywords: Obi Island, liquid society, media nostalgia, nostalgic utopia, propagation mechanism

1. Introduction

Slow-paced community game is a kind of game composed of the two concepts of "slow rhythm" and "community cultivation". Such games are typical of Obi Island and Moore Manor, giving people a relaxed, pleasant, stable, and quiet feeling, usually closely related to the keywords "beautiful" and "childhood". Using Obi Island as an example, this paper focuses on the impact of a slow-paced community game on players in a modern society where there is a lonely self, a useless freedom, a disorderly world, a loss of security, and the fear and anxiety of survival. This study is of great significance for discussing and helping people to resist and relieve anxiety in a mobile society. This

study mainly focuses on the reasons why slow-paced community games are becoming more and more popular among players as the pace of life continues to accelerate, and how related game enterprises adjust and develop. The research methods of case analysis and network participatory observation are used to observe and analyze games and game players, and the combination of the two methods can better explore and discover the nature of games and players' attitudes, which is conducive to the research. The ultimate goal of this study is to take "Obi Island" as an example to deeply analyze the spiritual core of nostalgia utopia in slow-paced community games, and try to propose a discussion on the causes of players' play.

2. Background

On September 25, 2008, a slow-paced community game named "Obi Island" was launched into the game market by Guangzhou Baitian Information Technology Co., LTD., and became one of the most influential slow-paced community game IP in the future. As of August 2022, Obi Island has 300 million registered users, with a peak MAU count of more than 11 million. Until 2023 the web game era has long passed today this web game is still in successful operation. In the game, the player will be an avatar of a different color of the bear "Obi", in the ocean on a virtual island "Obi Island" farming, decorating, and design of houses, fishing, raising livestock, breeding pets, dressing up and making friends, through the free and imaginative way to play for the player to build a peaceful and beautiful, always sunny Utopian new world. This world has left a deep impression on many "post-95" and "post-00", which has not only become the enlightenment of the game for this part of the players but also become the representative of the players' childhood memories. For this part of the players, mentioning "Obi Island" can return to the memory of that warm afternoon, young self incarnated as Obi in that fantasy continent to release the imagination, at this time "Obi Island" is no longer just a game, but also the link and intermediary of the player's time memory.

On July 12, 2022, the Obi Island mobile game "Obi Island: Dream Country" was launched, and the 14-year-old IP rushed into the top 10 best-selling lists and lasted for a whole week, known as the miracle of the game industry. In a rapidly evolving contemporary society, such longevity of IP is very rare. The success of "Obi Island" lies not only in the content of the game but also in the pursuit of childhood memories and slow-paced life through the intermediary of this game. In this sense, the Obi Island game has become a new medium and carrier, used by players to spread culture carry memories, and awaken players' childhood memories. Players use the game to reminisce and write to build collective memories. In Liquid Modernity, Bauman mentioned that the main feature of today's society is mobility. Individuals are gradually separated from the long-term stable community, social status is constantly changing, and intimate relationships become fragile and fragile, which brings personal uncertainty and anxiety. At this time, players tend to use nostalgia to relieve this sense of unease. "Obi Island" runs through the player's best childhood, becoming the player's digital utopia in today's fast society, allowing the player to break away from the noisy real life into a similar "wonderland" realm, in which to recall the past, think about the present, and re-establish confidence in the future.

This study takes the slow-paced community game "Obi Island" as the research object, combines the research methods of case analysis and network participatory observation, and focuses on exploring why this game can be so successful today, extending this kind of game to provide reference for relevant game manufacturers and try to analyze the spiritual world of contemporary people.

3. The Creation of a Nostalgic Utopia in the Slow Pace of Obi Island

The concept of utopia originated in Plato's "The Republic", and the term utopia and modern utopia first appeared in Thomas More's 1516 book "Utopia", meaning a perfect place that exists only in

people's imagination. Utopia is the spiritual impulse of pursuing ideals, perfection, and freedom in the structure of human existence, which is an important dimension of human existence [1].

Nostalgia originally referred to as "homesickness," is a condition involving feelings such as depression and even a tendency to self-destruct. Later, the word "nostalgia" gradually moved away from the medical category and slowly integrated into society, and its connotation also expanded and extended. In 2002, scholar Svetlana Boym published her book "The Future of Nostalgia", in which she pointed out that the era of globalization was accompanied by a universal global nostalgia. In her introduction, she mentioned that the 20th century started from a futuristic fantasy, and nostalgia goes beyond individual psychology. It is not only the yearning for a different era but also the irreversibility of human beings beyond time. And the possible process of rediscovering identity [2].

The concept of nostalgia utopia comes from the famous British social theorist Sigismund Bowman's book "Nostalgia Utopia", in which Bowman pointed out that the book is full of the word "return". Nostalgia utopia is a synthesis of the two concepts of nostalgia and utopia. Bowman believes that in the face of the uncertain future of the 21st century, people increasingly want to return to the past, and thus enter an era of nostalgia [3]. Although the nostalgic utopia is called inverse Topia by Bauman, its spiritual core is still a utopia, and its main function is to provide an ideal society of security, stability, and freedom for the restless people. The core of the popularity of "Obi Island" is actually that the game brings a fictional world of nostalgic utopia to the players, and the players are led to the nostalgic utopia by feeling the pictures, music, and interactive experience in the game, temporarily leaving the noisy and changing society and reviewing their childhood together in this virtual field to resist anxiety.

3.1. An Attempt at a Nostalgic Utopia

Jianbin YAO pointed out that if you want to mention the ultimate concern, utopia is the biggest ultimate concern [1]. "Obi Island" through a specific background and field to build a utopia called "Obi Island", to give players a state of play, so that players feel safe and stable. At the same time, the specific background and play mode not only have Utopian properties but are also close to rural life in the real world. First of all, the island set in the background of the game is in the middle of the ocean, which is simply isolated as described in Tao Yuanming's "Peach Blossom Source". Secondly, most of the gameplay in the game is farming, breeding, fishing, decoration, cooking, and other self-contained pastoral lifestyle gameplay, and the task is usually to communicate with the villagers, which is the perfect combination of man and nature. The countryside is not only the ideal life for most Chinese people but also the rural-style space and the scene of the village-style slow pace of life easily cause Chinese people to miss the past. As a concrete representative, "homesickness" is a nostalgic utopia of Chinese style. In today's rapidly developing and constantly changing cities, "Obi Island" is in line with people's yearning and replacement for the peaceful and peaceful life in the countryside. "Homesickness" has a kind of excellent beautification of the reality full of pain by turning to the past, turning to the beautiful countryside, and it is precise because of this form, it has a strong emotional color that utilizes the "past" [4]. The characteristics of ruralization like Obi Island are undoubtedly in line with this concept, leading players who want to escape the high-pressure reality to hide in this fictional nostalgic utopia, firmly grasp the player's desire to play.

3.2. Shelter in a Liquid Society

In his monograph "Fluid Modernity", Zygmunt Bauman summarized the characteristics of modern society as mobility, the awareness of the inherent defects and dangerous tendencies of the current stage of modernity: Just as solid modernity produces repression, submission, and the asphyxiation of freedom, fluid modernity induces individual loneliness, the futility of freedom, the disorder of the

world, the loss of security, and the fear and anxiety of existence. Existing rules and standards are rapidly liquefying, there is no longer a solid single authority, the traditional order system is disintegrating, structural unemployment and flexible labor market make work increasingly unstable, causing workers anxiety and insecurity, "fast" has become the characteristics of The Times[5]. Obi Island, on the other hand, provides a "slow" choice and destination for the anxious player in the moment, where nothing has to be done, all activities are arranged by the player, and the missions released in the game are not mandatory. There is no real urge and impetuous life here, players can calm down to experience every activity, and every scenery, in this shelter together with other players, temporarily abandon distracting thoughts, and return to their childhood of pure and sincere nostalgia utopia.

From this point of view, Obi Island is no longer just a game for children, but also a refuge in today's fluid society, helping players resist anxiety and fear. Wandering aimlessly around the island, talking to the sky and the sea is an expression of the slower pace of life, and the player can escape the modern panic through the actions of the game. It can be said that "Obi Island" is through the slow pace of shaping to bring comfort and security to the player. By controlling Obi to sit in the square and talk and play songs, or to attend one party after another, it successfully creates a sense of "home" years of calm and good feeling - no stress, no fatigue. "Obi Island" melts the repressed social atmosphere and people's sense of tension in modern society, and the slow rhythm soothes the highly strained nerves and numb hearts, becoming a spiritual guide.

3.3. Nostalgia in Digital Media

Since the end of the 20th century, the Internet and social media have been widely used, and domestic scholar Peng SHAO has a relatively broad definition of "media memory", clearly pointing out that "media memory" cannot be expressed as "media and memory", nor can it be understood as "memory of media", but should be "media is memory" [6]. As a medium of video game, "Obi Island" itself has become an intermediary reminiscence object for emotional arousal. Compared with the audio-visual advantages of TV media, video game media also offers more immersive experience. Nostalgia objects, as a material medium, trigger the public to generate nostalgia emotions [7].

Jiawen ZHU divides the media narrative in the game into two aspects: "walking simulation" and "musical interaction". She believes that the media interinfiltration in memory writing can comprehensively and deeply reflect the spiritual world, so that players can get rich and full subjective feelings from it[8]. The play method and mechanism of "Obi Island" also uses music interaction and walking simulation methods. Players will use Musical Instruments to follow the progress of the story, for example, players will help the characters play music in the story with musical theme. Through media interaction in this medium, players can deepen their experience and impression of the game and generate a sense of inclusion. At the same time, this medium interaction allows the player to better understand the game's expressive intent.

The interactive nature of the digital medium makes the player the subject of the practice in order to construct the emotional connection between the subject and the object. When the digital media "Obi Island" becomes the platform and link relying on nostalgia, it will drive the interaction and resonance of players' nostalgia. "Obi Island" is not only a digital medium for the transmission of nostalgia, but also a material existence bearing nostalgia, and a digital form of nostalgia practice. It becomes a way station and trigger condition for the player's present and past, engaging in nostalgic interactive practice through this game.

4. Communication Strategy and System

With its decentralized and interactive communication characteristics, the Internet makes the media power formerly held by a few people return to the hands of the public, showing a state of participation by everyone, and strengthening and constructing memory in continuous interaction [9]. Based on the mobile game version alone, "Obi Island" released more than 10 different national creative activities in the Small Red Book from October 20, 2023, to November 27, 2023, 39 days, covering painting, punching, live broadcasting, and other fields, attracting the participation of players and even passers-by with diverse and no participation threshold prize activities. Through the Internet to achieve drainage and effective communication between players and officials.

By constantly promoting the concepts of "childhood" and "nostalgia", the game deepens players' goodwill towards the game, allowing players to pay attention not only to the playing experience part of the game but also to the nostalgic medium of the game. This kind of sentiment marketing communication strategy of memory recurrence increases the dependence of old players on the game and the stickiness among players. The social attributes of games also make players' memories consolidated and integrated into the game, and individual memories converge into collective memories to trigger group resonance and shape group identity.

5. Reflection on Consumption Culture

"Obi Island" is a pastoral style of slow rhythm community game to show the players are happy and relaxed, time quiet poetic utopian image so that players forget the reality of high pressure and anxiety. However, this utopia is only a fiction, and in this atmosphere, the player will be blinded by the beautified ideal utopia that the game has created. The game uses hype and proposed nostalgic utopian scenarios to lead players into spending, a spending trap that is easy to fall into. In fact, what people really nostalgia for is the so-called spiritual home, not a real field or space, the focus of nostalgia is not the past but the present [10].

In today's consumer society, players, as the subject of consumption and the subject of consumption, should be wary of the consumption trap carefully woven by games through audio-visual sensation; Game manufacturers should make innovative improvements to the game on the basis of maintaining the core positioning and essence of the game, rather than being complacent and blindly trying to get permanent benefits only through emotional marketing. The game should also use in-game guidance to encourage players to heal themselves in nostalgia not by burying themselves in the real world, but by actively working to solve it.

6. Conclusion

This study finds that the spiritual core of "Obi Island" is the concept of nostalgic utopia, and concludes that the attributes of the game itself and the interactive methods in the game can be summed up as the combined effect of various forms of digital media, and believes that the marketing method of "Obi Island" with the participation of the whole people is also one of the factors contributing to its success. From the perspective of consumer society, it is found that players should avoid falling into the virtual utopia. The reasons for the popularity of slow-paced community games in today's society is discussed from many angles, such as guiding players to face reality positively in the game. Just like the slogan of "Obi Island": Fall in love with Obi Island, happy without worry. Through the three-dimensional virtual body practice of picture, music and interactive experience, the game builds a nostalgic utopia and a shelter for the anxious players in the liquid society. Thus, it is further found that for some players, the positioning of "Obi Island" is no longer a children's video game with simple gameplay, but an intermediary for a generation to trace the good times. This study combines the concept of nostalgia utopia with games to provide reference significance for relieving the anxiety of

contemporary people. Future studies should focus more on the influence and healing effect of video games on people's emotions and conduct in-depth exploration.

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