

Analysis of marketing strategy of 'Honor of Kings'

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Abstract: This article analyzes the game 'Honor of Kings', which has held the top spot in the MOBA mobile gaming market for a decade. By applying the 4C marketing theory and SWOT analysis, and using industry data from 2017 to 2023, it systematically examines the innovative strategies of 'Honor of Kings' in user engagement, brand promotion, and commercialization. The article reveals the key factors behind its long-term dominance in the MOBA mobile gaming market, aiming to provide insights into the MOBA mobile gaming market and offer valuable lessons for other game developers in the industry.

Keywords: Honor of Kings; Marketing strategy; SWOT analysis; MOBA mobile game market.

1. Introduction

According to the 2023 China Game Industry Report [1], the actual sales revenue of the domestic game market in 2023 reached 302.964 billion yuan, marking a year-on-year increase of 13.95% and surpassing the 300 billion yuan mark for the first time. The number of game users also hit a record high of 668 million. Among various game genres, MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) mobile games have attracted a large number of players due to their unique competitive and social aspects, maintaining a market share of over 30% year-round. For instance, in the Southeast Asian market, MOBA mobile game revenue grew by 25% year-on-year, with games like 'Mobile Legends: Bang Bang' standing out. These games not only satisfy players' competitive desires but also enhance social interaction through teamwork and communication. As a leader in MOBA mobile games, Honor of Kings has not only set industry trends but also built a vast user base globally. According to Tencent's 2022 financial report [2], its daily active users (DAU) peaked at over 100 million, and monthly active users (MAU) have consistently remained above 200 million. Additionally, the game maintains its leading position in the fierce market competition through its unique hero design, diverse game modes, and the continuous update of 1-2 new heroes and monthly theme gameplay updates. The stable and growing market share further demonstrates the excellence of its game mechanics and user experience.

As a highly popular multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game, Honor of Kings' marketing strategy has not only facilitated the widespread dissemination of the game but also provided valuable insights and lessons for the entire gaming industry. By deeply analyzing Honor of Kings' marketing strategies, we can develop a methodology applicable to the entire lifecycle of game product operations, which is of significant reference value to other game developers. Additionally, Honor of Kings skillfully integrates traditional cultural elements with modern technology in its marketing strategies, pioneering a new approach to the digital dissemination of traditional culture. This not only enriches the game's cultural depth but also enhances the efficiency and impact of traditional culture dissemination, infusing new vitality into the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

2. Literature Review

According to He Yanping's research [3], the widespread use of electronic devices has made computers and mobile phones the primary platforms for online games, driving the rapid expansion of China's gaming industry. A popular mobile game, through its unique operational strategies, successfully attracted a large number of former League of Legends players. By optimizing combat mechanics, refining game rules, and enhancing the game's fairness and acceptability, it developed a distinctive marketing model. In 2017, the parent company's studio, particularly in the development and operation of games like Honor of Kings, generated nearly 35 billion yuan in economic benefits. The marketing model behind such a significant profit from a single mobile game is worth exploring in depth.

In her research titled "Research on the Communication Strategies of Mobile Online Games — Taking Tencent Mobile Games as an Example [4]," Zhang Tiantian suggests that popular mobile online games typically feature two modes: a casual mode and an adventure combat mode. The casual mode offers players the freedom to progress through levels and complete tasks, while the adventure combat mode provides a platform for competitive play with friends. These two modes complement each other, seamlessly blending elements of both casual and competitive play. Interactivity is becoming an increasingly important aspect of game systems. For instance, in "Honor of Kings," interactivity is prominently featured through free interactions among players, such as competing for high scores, teaming up to complete levels, or simply chatting. Despite the growing importance of the interaction system, some mobile online games still only offer basic friend addition features. However, the interactivity in games goes beyond this; users are eager to share the gaming experience with friends. "Honor of Kings" emphasizes the interactivity system, allowing users to freely enjoy the game and compete with others, and to share their competitive results on social media platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Facebook, to gain praise from friends and maintain their interest in the game. By leveraging its competitive spirit and a rich array of holiday activities, "Honor of Kings" has successfully attracted a large number of players, increased player engagement, and enhanced its appeal and brand

recognition.

In her research titled "Brand Communication and Marketing Strategies of Online Mobile Games in the Scene Era: A Case Study of Honor of Kings," Yu Jiajia [5] notes that another significant advantage of Honor of Kings is its low entry barrier and simple gameplay. The game's rules are straightforward, making it easy for new players to understand. For instance, when logging into Honor of Kings for the first time, users receive detailed tutorials that gradually introduce hero skills and attributes. Players must gather five heroes to enter the official ranked battle arena, a process that encourages them to accumulate gold to unlock new heroes, ensuring they gain both a deep understanding of the game mechanics and practical combat experience. Additionally, the mobile screen size limits the game design to be concise. The panoramic map, ten summoners, dozens of towers, and signal communication modules are displayed on only two buttons on the keyboard, which control the heroes' movements and skill selections. This intuitive and simple design, combined with a low entry barrier and high operability, significantly broadens the audience base and serves as the core appeal that attracts and retains players.

3. SWOT Analyse

The remarkable success of *Honor of Kings* is not a fluke;

it is underpinned by a rigorous and innovative marketing strategy. This strategy, from precise product positioning and comprehensive market promotion to meticulous user operations, demonstrates its exceptional professional skills and keen market insight. By clearly targeting its audience, *Honor of Kings* quickly captured the attention of a large number of players and significantly boosted user retention. Through a variety of marketing methods, including targeted social media campaigns, deep collaborations with influential opinion leaders (KOLs), and hosting large-scale offline events, *Honor of Kings* successfully established a distinct brand image among players and significantly increased brand awareness. In terms of user operations, *Honor of Kings* continuously updates its game content, introducing new heroes and enriching gameplay, while enhancing social interaction features, effectively increasing player engagement and loyalty. The combined application of these marketing strategies has enabled *Honor of Kings* to maintain its leading position in the competitive market, setting a benchmark in the gaming industry. In this chapter, the author uses the SWOT analysis model to conduct an in-depth analysis of *Honor of Kings*'s marketing strategy, exploring the key factors behind its success.

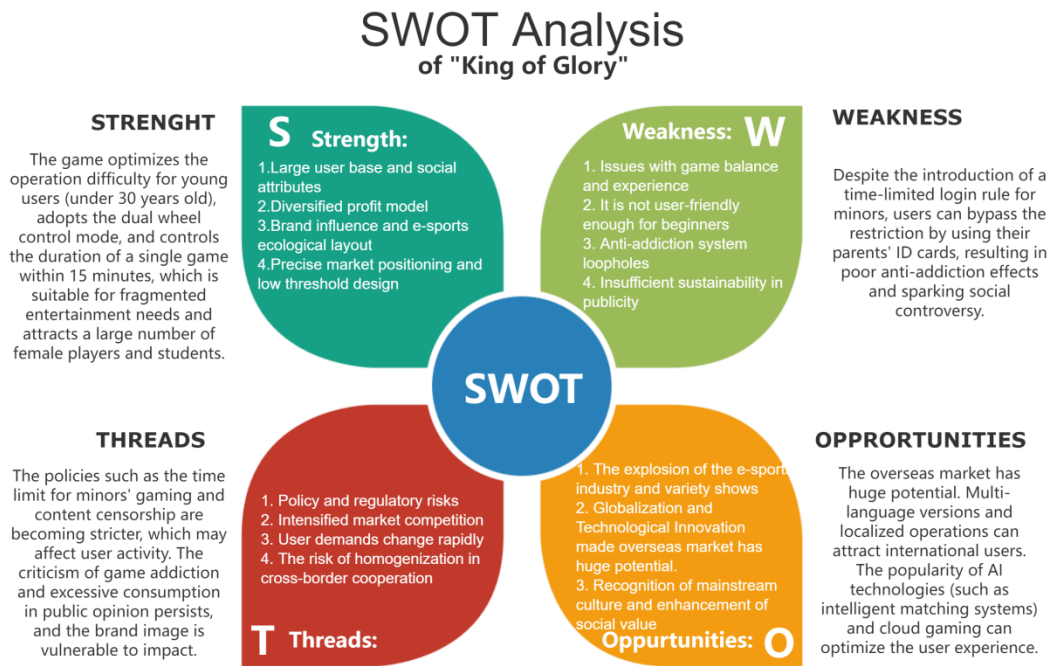


Figure 1. SWOT analysis of marketing strategy of 'Honor of Kings'

3.1. Strengths (Strengths)

3.1.1. Huge user base and social attributes

'Honor of Kings' has achieved exponential user growth through Tencent's social platforms (QQ and WeChat). The game's built-in features, such as team formation, voice chat, and mentorship systems, have enhanced user engagement, creating a closed-loop ecosystem that combines social interaction with gaming. According to 2024 data, China's e-sports user base reached 490 million, with a significant proportion of these users being 'Honor of Kings' players.

3.1.2. Diversified profit model

The game makes money through skin sales (such as the "Heart of the Engine" single skin sales exceeded 200 million

yuan), membership services, event sponsorship and other ways. In addition, cross-border joint ventures with brands such as Pop Mart and Wang Lao Ji further expand the revenue sources.

3.1.3. Brand influence and e-sports ecological layout

As a flagship product of Tencent, Honor of Kings relies on Tencent's strong resource integration ability to build a complete esports system (such as KPL professional league), and successfully integrate into international events such as the Asian Games, becoming a representative symbol of esports culture.

3.1.4. Precise market positioning and low threshold design

The game optimizes the operation difficulty for young users (under 30 years old), adopts the double wheel control mode, and controls the duration of a single game within 15 minutes, which is suitable for fragmented entertainment needs and attracts a large number of female players (59%) and students.

3.2. Weaknesses (Weaknesses)

3.2.1. Game balance and experience issues

Players generally report that the strength of heroes is unbalanced (such as some heroes are too strong or too weak), which affects the fairness of competition; in addition, the punishment of the reporting mechanism is insufficient, and behaviors such as cheating and language attacks occur frequently, resulting in the loss of some users.

3.2.2. Lack of novice friendliness

The novice guidance system is not perfect, and it is difficult for new players to get started. Especially in the context of intensified competition in MOBA games, it is easy to be replaced by similar products.

3.2.3. Vulnerabilities in anti-addiction systems

Although the rule of limited login for minors has been introduced, users can bypass the restrictions through their parents' ID cards, resulting in poor anti-addiction effect and causing social controversy.

3.2.4. Lack of sustainability in advocacy

In the early stage, it relied on celebrity endorsement (such as Lu Han) and event promotion, but the subsequent publicity efforts weakened, failed to continue to detonate topics, and the effect of event information dissemination was limited.

3.3. Opportunities (Opportunities)

3.3.1. The explosion of e-sports industry and variety shows

Variety shows (such as "Battle to the Peak" and "Five Hours of Time Difference") have become a new growth point for long video platforms. In 2025, the KPL finals will be held at the Bird's Nest for the first time, pushing the popularity of games beyond the circle. Brands such as Hisense have deepened their connection with young users through innovative marketing activities such as "Golden Rain".

3.3.2. Globalization and Technological Innovation

The potential of overseas market is huge. Multi-language versions and localized operations can attract international users; the popularity of AI technology (such as intelligent matching system) and cloud games can optimize user experience.

3.3.3. Recognition of mainstream culture and promotion of social values

After esports entered Asia, the Asian Games version of Honor of Kings won its first gold medal. Through the "smear-marketing" strategy (such as Andy Lau's cheering song "Dangdang"), it successfully bound the brand with the spirit of sports, gained endorsement from mainstream media such as CCTV and People's Daily, and reshaped the public's perception of esports.

3.4. Threats (Threats)

3.4.1. Policy and regulatory risks

Policies such as time limit and content censorship for minors may affect user activity; public opinion on game

addiction and excessive consumption continues to exist, and the brand image is vulnerable to impact.

3.4.2. Intensified market competition

The diversion pressure from similar MOBA games (such as League of Legends Mobile) and emerging categories (open world, two-dimensional) is increasing, and user loyalty is facing challenges.

3.4.3. Rapid change of user requirements

Players' demands for content innovation are increasing, and if the update pace lags behind (such as new heroes, insufficient gameplay iterations), users may lose.

3.4.4. Homogenization risk of cross-border cooperation

Although joint ventures are frequent (such as blind boxes and FMCG), if there is no differentiated creativity, they may fall into marketing fatigue and weaken the uniqueness of the brand.

3.5. SWOT Summary and Strategy Suggestions

Strengthen advantages: deepen social functions (such as virtual community construction), expand e-sports ecology (such as more international events), and consolidate the user base.

Make up for the disadvantage: optimize the balance algorithm, strengthen the guidance of new players, and upgrade the anti-addiction system (such as face recognition technology).

Seize the opportunity: accelerate overseas expansion, explore AI-driven personalized gameplay; deeply link with variety shows and film and television IP to enhance cultural influence.

Responding to threats: Establish a policy early warning mechanism, differentiated cross-border cooperation (such as co-creating immersive experience with technology brands), and continuously monitor the dynamics of competitors.

Through SWOT analysis, it can be seen that "Honor of Kings" needs to maintain its core competitiveness while being user-oriented and balancing innovation and compliance in order to continue to lead in the fierce market competition.

4. Analysis of user operation strategy

The strong social attributes of the game: The built-in social features, such as the friend system and team system, not only enhance player interaction but also foster a community, further increasing the game's stickiness and activity.

4.1. User Portrait and Hierarchical Operation System Construction

4.1.1. Multi-dimensional user portrait system construction

Through integrating user attributes such as age, gender, and geographic distribution, game behavior data like battle records and operation frequency, and consumption characteristics including payment amounts and item preferences, 'Honor of Kings' has developed a three-dimensional user profile model. Data analysis reveals that the core user group (aged 15-29) shows a strong preference for social interaction and competitive play. Female users account for 54.6% (as of 2022). In terms of character design, heroes like Diaochan (with an aesthetic design score of 9.2) and Yao (with an operational friendliness score of 8.7) have been designed to be visually appealing and narratively rich,

effectively boosting the retention rate among female users. The career characteristics show that college students spend an average of 127 minutes online daily and primarily participate in time-limited activities to earn rewards. The ARPPU value for working users is 328 yuan, significantly higher than that of student users.

4.1.2. Differentiated hierarchical operation mechanism

The hierarchical operation system based on user profiles comprises four dimensions: a progressive guidance mechanism for new users (offering hero and AI battle modules with an operational complexity of no more than level 2), an engagement incentive system for active users (setting up a daily/weekly task matrix with 7 KPIs), a privilege service system for high-value users (custom skin creation and VIP customer service channels exclusive to V8 members), and a user retention algorithm model (using LSTM neural networks to predict churn rates and trigger targeted push notifications with limited skin experience cards).

4.2. Design and Implementation of Social Fission Mechanism (Master and Apprentice System)

4.2.1. Hierarchical gradient master-apprentice system architecture

The master-apprentice system employs a dual-dimensional entry mechanism: mentors must have a level of 15 or higher and a season win rate of at least 55%, while apprentices are restricted to levels 3 to 10. The task system includes stage goals (such as reaching the Golden Rank), collaboration requirements (winning at least 15 team matches), and growth indicators (achieving a mentor-apprentice intimacy score of 600). The reward structure is based on a dynamic algorithm, where mentors earn inscription fragments (with a base value of 200 plus a winning streak coefficient multiplied by 50), and apprentices receive double experience cards (valid for 7 days) and hero trial permissions (3 per week).

4.2.2. Analysis of network fission propagation effect

The system has generated significant network effects: the mentor-apprentice relationship chain extends on average by 3.2 levels, and each mentor node on average attracts 1.8 new users. Data indicates that mentor-apprentice teams account for 15.7% of total battles, and the 30-day retention rate of related users increases by 23%. A typical case shows that users introduced through the mentor-apprentice system have a Lifetime Value (LTV) 41% higher than those naturally acquired.

4.3. Construction and Evolution of UGC Ecosystem

4.3.1. Design of UGC creation incentive mechanism

The platform has established a three-tier UGC incentive system: the foundational layer provides a creative toolchain, including the 'King's Moment' editor with 12 special effects templates; the middle layer implements a traffic support program, where high-quality content can receive at least 100,000 views; the top layer sets up commercial incentives, with top creators receiving monthly splits exceeding 20,000 yuan. An innovative three-stage skin development model has been introduced, involving player design, official optimization, and commercial sharing. For instance, the 'Starry Night Chanting' skin for Cai Wenji achieved a user split of 4.3 million yuan.

4.3.2. Analysis of ecological value creation of UGC

The volume of UGC content has seen exponential growth, with an average daily output of 42,000 pieces. Among these, strategy content has reduced the time it takes for new players to progress by 38%. Cross-platform data indicates that 23% of the TikTok TOP100 most popular videos come from game UGC, contributing to an average of 72,000 new users per day. After the player-created 'Clone Battle' mode was launched, the peak daily active user (DAU) reached 21 million.

4.4. Commercialization Path of E-Sports Fan Economy

4.4.1. Construction of pyramid competition system

The competition system is structured in four tiers: the base tier features 3,000 city matches per day, the middle tier includes university leagues (covering 127 universities), the upper tier hosts the KPL (Kangri League), and the top tier is the Global Champions Cup. Technically, it features a multi-dimensional viewing system that includes 8 camera positions for free switching, real-time data visualization (with 12 indicators updated every minute, such as hero economic advantage and equipment comparison).

4.4.2. Fan value transformation model

The commercialization strategy encompasses three key dimensions: 1) direct monetization (annual revenue from event tickets is 230 million yuan); 2) derivative product development (the repurchase rate for team merchandise is 67%); 3) brand value enhancement (sales of vivo collaboration phones have increased by 29%). A fan emotional engagement matrix has been established, featuring weekly live interactions with athletes (averaging 450,000 views per session) and quarterly offline carnivals (averaging 12,000 participants per session), which results in an average annual consumption of 1,520 yuan per core fan.

5. Summary

This study is grounded the SWOT strategic analysis tool and leveraging the industry dynamic data monitoring system from 2017 to 2023. It systematically analyzes the innovative approaches of 'Honor of Kings' in user value operations, brand matrix communication, and commercial value transformation. Empirical research shows that the product has developed a differentiated competitive advantage through the construction of a dynamic user profiling system, a social viral spread model, a UGC content ecosystem cultivation mechanism, and an e-sports fan economy conversion system. The author's research reveals that 'Honor of Kings' has established a mass-professional tournament architecture through its innovative design of a mass-e-sports tournament system and a professional league system. This system, along with the tournament points advancement system and player capability evaluation model, has mechanized the pathway for amateur players to become professional players. In terms of developing fan economy value, a four-in-one value loop has been constructed: 'tournament content-peripheral products-live interaction-offline experience.' This has successfully transformed 312 million tournament content consumers into quantifiable commercial value. Innovations such as the dynamic bidding mechanism for tournament live streaming rights and the IP matrix development model for teams have provided replicable business models for the digital entertainment industry. Future research aims to explore the co-development mechanisms of mobile e-sports and

traditional sports industries from an industrial integration perspective, with a focus on the construction path of digital twin models for virtual idols and e-sports teams under the Web3.0 technology framework, aiming to improve the theoretical framework for the sustainable development of the digital content industry.

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