

What Makes Loyalty Programme Work: The Effectiveness of the Battle Pass System in Chinese MOBA Game in the Perspective of Consumer Perception

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Abstract: As the online video game industry becomes increasingly competitive, game marketers have introduced various loyalty programmes to keep player retention, the Battle Pass system is one of them. This work aimed to find the drivers influencing loyalty programme effectiveness. In other words, to understand how the loyalty program in online video games really works, especially in Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games. To answer this question, the Battle Pass system in the Honor of Kings, one of the most popular MOBA games in China, has been chosen to be studied. This paper conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain players' veritable feelings about this loyalty programme from multiple angles. The results of these in-depth conversations provide viable explanations of the research questions from which 5 main motivations have not been observed in other research and were summarized as factors affecting loyalty programme effectiveness. Overall, this work fills the research gaps using qualitative research methods; in addition, it provides the possible indicator for the research on consumer behavior in online video games and the value of guiding marketers to formulate practices that rely on the continuous engagement of their users.

Keywords: Battle Pass System, MOBA game, Loyalty Programme, Consumer Behavior, Marketing.

1. Introduction

With the proliferation of mobile games, the competition within the video game market is becoming increasingly fierce. Consequently, game companies have introduced a variety of loyalty programme. However, the effectiveness of loyalty programmes in genuinely augmenting user loyalty remains a matter of debate. For example, Honor of Kings, a well-known Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game renowned for its extensive user base and robust profitability in the Chinese market, has encountered a growing concern regarding user attrition in recent years. They have introduced the Battle Pass system as a loyalty programme. The programme is a reward system widely used in the game field, which requires players to obtain rewards by completing challenges or tasks at a specific time. The effectiveness of such a programme has attracted diverse opinions from players and individuals across various sectors of society.

Current researches on video games mainly focus on finding what are the factors that influence on player loyalty and to level do they affect it. For example, there is a research looking into factors such as game experience and fanwork creation where a positive implication has been found [1]. At the same time, there are studies working on revealing the relationship between different ingredients in the procedure of loyalty programme. In the research conducted by Balakrishnan and Griffiths, game addiction of players had a positive relationship with both loyalty and in-game purchases, and there is a positive correlation between player game loyalty and player intention to purchase more in the games. However, there is no research that describes the motivations that influence the effectiveness of game loyalty programme and the specific reasons for this. So our question is why some customers become loyal and others don't when they sign up for the loyalty programme.

To answer the question, in the paper, we will first review the relevant literature. Then, we choose the Honor of Kings as a case. Because we are interested in whether factors such as gender, gaming age, and gaming purpose affect players' loyalty to the game and how they affect players' subsequent participation in the game, semi-structure interview is taken as method to study the question. With the findings, we will finally discuss about implications and limitations of our research.

2. Literature review

The online video game industry has grown significantly, and loyalty programmes have become a popular strategy to boost user engagement and spending. In Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games, the Battle Pass, a unique loyalty programme, has been key for game companies to enhance user activity and encourage in-game purchases due to its distinct reward and incentive systems. Current research has focused on improving the Battle Pass's interaction design by studying various factors. However, despite numerous updates to the Battle Pass system, player turnover remains or even increases, raising doubts about its effectiveness as a loyalty programme. This prompts us to investigate the gap in understanding the effectiveness of loyalty programmes in MOBA games, specifically exploring the factors that influence the loyalty of Battle Pass buyers and their mechanisms.

2.1. Brand loyalty and loyalty programmes

Brand loyalty means consumers' consistent preference and purchasing behavior to a particular brand in their purchasing decisions [2]. It not only relies on the quality of the product itself but is also closely related to factors such as consumers' emotional attachment and their experience [3]. In the gaming field, brand loyalty refers to players' deep emotional connection and continuous gameplay towards the game [4]. Loyalty programmes are a series of reward measures designed by companies to build customer loyalty [5]. These programmes incentivize customers to make repeated purchases and increase consumption through methods such as point accumulation, membership privileges, and exclusive discounts. Research has shown that effective loyalty programmes can significantly reduce marketing costs, increase market share, and enhance brand competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of loyalty programmes varies across different industries and markets, and its impact is influenced by all kinds of factors such as the types of industries and the level of competition in the markets [6].

2.2. Loyalty programmes in MOBA games

Loyalty programmes are also widely used in the field of mobile gaming. By offering rewards such as in-game currency, rare props, and skins, these programmes motivate players to participate in the games and spend more in games continuously [7]. Research indicates that effective loyalty programmes can significantly improve player retention and willingness to pay [8]. The design of loyalty programmes in MOBA games, a popular genre in the field of e-sports, is more complex. These

programmes not only focus on players' personal wins but also emphasize teamwork and social interaction [9]. By setting up mechanisms such as leaderboards, seasonal rewards, and team honors, loyalty programmes in MOBA games can make players feel sense of belonging and achievement [10].

2.3. Battle Pass system

The Battle Pass is a kind of new loyalty programme widely used in MOBA games. It allows players to get rich rewards by completing a series of tasks and challenges [1]. The Battle Pass typically offers different rewards based on the tasks completed by free and paying players. It is worth mentioning that the task reward structure differs between free and paying users, mainly reflected in additional rewards for paying users. Even if a Battle Pass is purchased, additional rewards can only be obtained if the tasks are completed within the specified time. These rewards, including rare skins, props, and experience bonuses, can enhance players' gaming experience and sense of accomplishment. Research shows that the Battle Pass not only improves player activity but also promotes in-game consumption [11].

According to previous studies, we find that there are many researches about the fields affecting player's loyalty. For example, the causes like addiction to games [4], the element in games [12], loyalty programmes used by the game company and fanworks created by players have impact on the loyalty of customers [13,1]. After viewing their results, we find that a loyalty programme with high effectiveness can lead to high player loyalty. However, there needs to be more research on the motivations affecting the effectiveness of loyalty programmes in video games, as shown in Figure 1. To be specific, the gap lies in the question of what influences the loyalty of Battle Pass buyers and how they work. In Figure 1, the "motivation" is a moderator.

It is worth noting that the term "motivation" has been extensively researched in the field of marketing. For instance, customer motivation comprises three dimensions: hedonic, normative, and gain, and it significantly impacts customer engagement behavior [14]. Additionally, motivation provides an explanation for why customers participate in loyalty programmes [15]. However, it is important to clarify that the "motivation" discussed in these studies differs from the one referenced in Figure 1. In our research, "motivation" specifically refers to the reasons or factors that drive the success or failure of loyalty programmes. Similarly, Yang's team discovered that a customer's cultural background can influence the effectiveness of loyalty programmes, echoing the findings of our study [16].

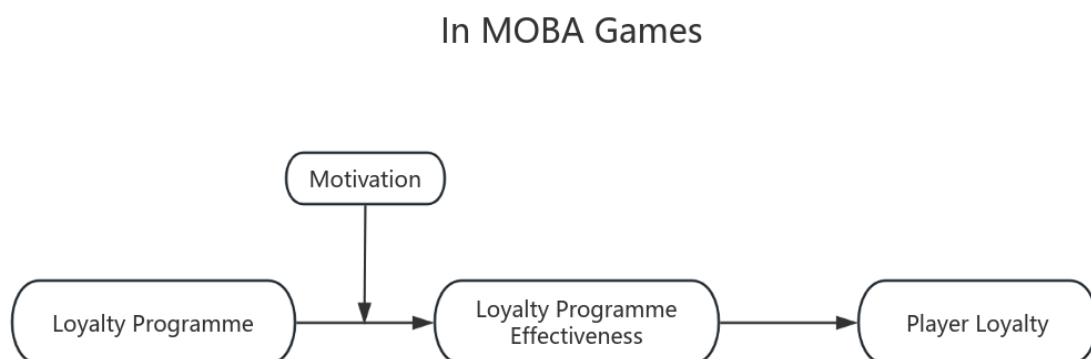


Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of the process in the loyalty programme

3. Methodology

Our methodology will be case study because our question revolves around the motivation that affects the effectiveness of loyalty programmes in video games, and it is a broad topic, the best approach for us is to use a case as an entry point. We are conducting an explanatory case study because we aim to understand why the same loyalty programme works for some but not for others. This is a single-case study because we want to pinpoint the exact reasons influencing loyalty programmes in video games. Furthermore, we believe our case is representative of this field. Interviews and documents will be the primary sources of our data. Data such as opinions from players, their traits or experiences, and some official reports will also be utilized.

3.1. Honor of Kings

Honor of Kings is a MOBA game released in 2015 by Tencent. According to Tencent Games, by July 17, 2023, the number of players of "Honor of Kings" has reached 620 million. This figure shows the game's huge user base around the world. Based on the data released by QuestMobile and the global mobile game revenue ranking in 2023, the total annual revenue of Honor of Kings on Apple and Google App stores is as high as 1.48 billion US dollars (about 10.62 billion yuan). This figure shows the game's strong ability to make money. Also, in a given month, such as January 2024, Honor of Kings reached \$233 million in monthly revenue, reclaiming the top spot in global mobile game revenue. This is further proof of the game's high popularity among players and strong commercial value.

Battle Pass was introduced in Honor of Kings in 2019. In this system, players gain experience points by completing daily tasks, participating in matches, etc., within the time allotted, improving the battle level, and unlocking rich rewards, including skins, character pieces, inscription pieces, etc. The Battle Pass is divided into base and advanced versions, and the advanced edition requires players to pay extra for more rewards and faster upgrade speed. Our research focus is on the effectiveness of the paid version.

According to Honor of Kings, the Battle Pass system is introduced to make the game more interesting and interactive while providing players with more rewards and challenges. However, most netizens on social media describe the Battle Pass system as a commercial means of profit. They see the Battle Pass system as a new type of virtual item peddling model that aims to increase the game's revenue by offering a range of rewards to entice players to purchase the Battle Pass. This design is based on psychological principles and life experience, forming a balanced rule that aims to improve user retention and activity. However, interestingly, according to the statistics of Sensor Tower and SuperData, compared with 2018, the revenue of Honor of Kings in 2019 has decreased.

On official social media and forums, many players have commented positively about the Battle Pass system. They believe that the Battle Pass system offers a wealth of rewards and challenges that make the game more fun and enjoyable. At the same time, some players said that although the Battle Pass system requires a certain amount of investment, the rewards they receive are worth the money, especially the unique skins and items, which add a lot of fun to their gaming experience.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

In all the interviews and discussions with participants, nearly every question was anchored in a conceptual model developed by the research team after reviewing prior academic literature. This model, as depicted in Figure 1, introduces a novel framework for assessing the effectiveness of loyalty programmes. It outlines the relationship between the proactive engagement of paying players in these programmes and their subsequent loyalty to the game. The model dissects this process into finer details and places the motivations explored in this study within the context of this transformational

relationship. Unlike previous research on loyalty programmes in MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) games, which predominantly explored the impact of other factors on game loyalty, this study offers a fresh perspective.

This case study used semi-structured interviews to conduct qualitative research which aimed to deeply explore the perceptions and feelings of players who have purchased the Battle Pass in Honor of Kings. The research wanted to understand the logical changes in their gaming behavior following their active participation in this loyalty programme. Moreover, after discussing and comparing these players' opinions on other paid activities in Honor of Kings that co-exist with Battle Pass, the study looks forward to discovering the influence of loyalty programmes on their gameplay behavior and psychological states. This process was important for validating the effectiveness of the loyalty programme, as well as for making meaningful improvements in game design and offering strategic insights for game marketing.

It took one week to collect our data. Each interview was conducted either face-to-face or via voice call, with interview durations varying between 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the depth of the respondents' answers. All interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately, followed by meticulous organization and analysis. Sixteen players were randomly selected for one-on-one in-depth interviews. However, one sample was excluded from the analysis due to internal logical inconsistencies and significant contradictions in the data. Consequently, data from 15 participants were used in the study. Of these, 8 were male and 7 were female, with their ages primarily distributed across three ranges: 18 to 25 years, 26 to 33 years, and 34 to 40 years. The limited sample size resulted in a narrow age distribution among the respondents, a limitation that will be addressed later in the discussion.

During the week of data collection, several different paid reward mechanisms existed simultaneously in the game Honor of Kings, which can be considered as loyalty programmes set up by the game developer. At the same time, the research subject of this study, namely the Battle Pass, was also on sale. Therefore, this period was considered suitable for comparing different paid activities. By observing and understanding the respondents' perceptions of these paid activities, the differences in the effectiveness of different paid activities were gradually discovered, primarily focusing on the respondents' perceptions and feelings about the Battle Pass.

In all conversations and interviews with respondents, their personal information was first confirmed, including gender, age, and educational background. The respondents in this study came from various social backgrounds and professions, with differing income levels and disposable assets available for game-related expenditures. Nearly half of the respondents were university students, with the remaining respondents including high school students and individuals from various professions. Also, all participants had purchased the Battle Pass at least twice in the past year and were very familiar with this system.

A comprehensive and diverse set of interview questions was carefully crafted to explore players' gaming behavior, with the aim of creating a detailed gaming profile for each of them. This section of the interview included questions about the information of respondents' Honor of Kings accounts, such as whether they had multiple accounts when they registered and their total playtime. These details helped to determine whether the players were veterans or new players and showed how much they are familiar with the Battle Pass. Additionally, respondents were asked about their usual login times and how long they stayed online to ensure they had established their gaming routines.

After establishing a basic gaming profile for the respondents, we focused on their in-game spending habits. Players were asked about how many times they had purchased the Battle Pass and the specific levels they chose each time. In Honor of Kings, there are two types of Battle Passes now: the regular Battle Pass, which costs 388 vouchers, and the premium Battle Pass, which costs 988

vouchers. While both Battle Passes require players to complete the same set of tasks, they are different in rewards, with the premium Battle Pass providing a larger quantity and a wider variety of rewards.

Subsequently, the research team asked respondents about their experience in completing the tasks set by the Battle Pass. They were required to specify how long it took them to finish all the tasks and to detail the frequency with which they logged into the game to complete these tasks within the Battle Pass's limited time, as well as their final outcomes. More crucially, the study sought to assess whether the respondents' participation in the game's primary mechanics changed after purchasing the Battle Pass. Participants were asked about how often and how long did they take part in core gameplay activities, such as competitive matches, after buying the Battle Pass. These inquiries aimed to figure out whether the Battle Pass had influenced players to change their original gaming patterns. Additionally, respondents were asked about their views of other paid systems in Honor of Kings and how they engaged with these paid activities. This was intended to understand whether players made choices among the different types of existing loyalty programmes and how they performed in each.

Furthermore, the psychological characteristics of these players were separately identified and analyzed as a specific area of research. A set of questions was designed to explore psychological aspects such as emotions and feelings toward the in-game purchasing, particularly the Battle Pass. In this set of questions, respondents were first asked about their overall understanding of the game, specifically how they define Honor of Kings or, in other words, for what purpose they play the game. The purpose of this question was to examine the respondents' motivations for engaging with the game and to observe whether this intention changes as their gameplay and purchasing behavior change. Following this, respondents were asked about their feelings towards the game's payment mechanisms, such as any particular likes or dislikes, especially their overall impressions and understanding of the Battle Pass. The research team paid special attention to the changes in players' psychological feelings and emotions after purchasing the Battle Pass, as this was considered a factor that might influence players' perceptions and preferences regarding the game's overall characteristics and further affect their loyalty to the game.

In addition to the above questions related to Honor of Kings, questions about the respondents' gaming profiles and payment mechanisms in other games were also asked. The research team hoped to help respondents form an understanding of game payment systems, particularly in MOBA games, through these questions. Respondents were asked whether they played other games and what types of games they played. Besides, they were asked if they played other MOBA games and whether they had purchased the Battle Pass system in these games. The respondents' answers to these questions directly reflected their understanding and engagement with this type of payment mechanism and also allowed them to better describe their perceptions and understanding of the Honor of Kings Battle Pass through comparison.

4. Discussion

4.1. Five main motivations

Through the discussion and analysis of the interview, five key motivations were ultimately identified as particularly important in influencing the effectiveness of the Battle Pass as a loyalty programme. They can be categorized into two types: game objective motivations and player subjective motivations. The game objective motivations include The settings of the tasks in Battle Pass and The quality of the rewards in Battle Pass. The player subjective motivations include The player's budget for in-game spending, The player's perception and pursuit of the game, and The player's own behavior patterns.

4.1.1. The settings of the tasks in Battle Pass

The degree to which Battle Pass tasks are integrated with competitive matches is a crucial motivation in determining the effectiveness of this loyalty programme. An effective Battle Pass system should strategically align players' routine gaming behaviors with competitive match requirements through thoughtfully designed tasks. These tasks include daily logins, participating in matches, or using specific heroes, balancing between being straightforward yet challenging. Players are required to complete numerous tasks to earn rewards, with the rewards increasing as they progress. However, a major point of contention among players is that obtaining the final reward often demands completing all tasks over a span of several months.

In this study, most respondents reported feeling pressured by the Battle Pass requirements, as both regular and premium tiers now demand that players complete at least 80 levels to earn the final reward skin. Although minor rewards are granted with each level gained through task completion, respondents expressed that there were other incentives than these. There are exceptions; for instance, some players who engage in the game primarily for social reasons noted that some minor rewards in the Battle Pass include items that increase player intimacy, making these rewards valuable to them and sometimes justifying the purchase of the more expensive premium Battle Pass. Nevertheless, the task settings within the Battle Pass often appear overly complex, regardless of the financial cost. In the current version of Honor of Kings, for example, obtaining a limited-time skin may require completing up to 130 levels of tasks, which can feel daunting and seemingly endless.

Fortunately, most tasks in the Battle Pass are designed to be naturally completed during competitive gameplay, which some respondents appreciated, noting that they "finished the tasks without even realizing it." This implies that while the system avoids overwhelming players with undue pressure, it might also fail to motivate increased playtime sufficiently.

Respondent 1, for instance, mentioned that tasks are typically completed naturally during competitive matches, and he perceives this as a motivator rather than a burden. This reflects a trend among respondents who feel more inclined to continue playing after purchasing the Battle Pass. However, they also pointed out that they would likely only purchase the Battle Pass if the tasks were manageable. Multiple respondents revealed that they calculate the time needed to complete the tasks before committing to a purchase. "I calculate whether I can reach level 80 first; only when I am sure of this will I click to buy," said Respondent 6. Respondent 9 took a more cautious approach, stating, "For the last two times, I waited until I had completed all the tasks before clicking the purchase button because I always felt insecure. I would only feel assured of receiving the rewards when I was certain that I had finished all the tasks" This respondent expressed dissatisfaction with the time it took to complete the tasks, although these tasks led to an increase in their gameplay time.

Overall, connecting Battle Pass tasks with competitive matches can significantly encourage players to spend more time and energy in the game. The design of these tasks plays a key role in shaping players' attitudes towards the Battle Pass. Well-conceived and engaging tasks can boost players' enthusiasm for participation. At the same time, tasks which are too complex or detached from players' usual gaming habits may cause feelings of burden and ultimately diminish players' engagement.

4.1.2. The quality of the rewards in Battle Pass

The core concept of the Battle Pass is rewarding players who have bought it, and respondents said that the rewards are their primary focus. Players' satisfaction with the Battle Pass system largely depends on whether the rewards match their personal preferences. If the rewards include skins or items that players like, they are more likely to purchase the Battle Pass and actively participate in completing tasks. Respondent 4 said, "I buy the Battle Pass mainly because it is cost-effective, and

the skins in it are usually of high quality." Respondent 11 had a neutral attitude towards the Battle Pass system and placed more importance on the quality and value of the skins. Conversely, if the rewards do not meet players' expectations, they may develop a negative attitude towards the Battle Pass system. In this study, most respondents were satisfied with the rewards offered in the Honor of Kings Battle Pass, with some even describing it as "excellent value for money." It is worth noting that this perception was common among players who purchased the regular Battle Pass. They chose not to buy the premium Battle Pass because they felt the additional rewards did not justify the extra cost, meaning they found the premium Battle Pass to be overpriced with fewer rewards. Respondent 15 stated, "Even though the tasks have become tedious, seeing rare skins and items still motivates me to complete them."

4.1.3. The player's budget for in-game spending

Economic motivations are also important in shaping players' attitudes towards the Battle Pass. For players with better financial conditions, purchasing the Battle Pass and actively participating in tasks may be a natural spending behavior; however, players with tighter budgets may be more cautious in deciding whether to purchase the Battle Pass.

In this study, the financial situations of respondents varied. Some players with ample budgets should have paid more attention to task completion after purchasing the Battle Pass, as it was not a financial burden. Respondent 7 mentioned that his economic situation allowed him to comfortably spend money on the game, so spending on the Battle Pass did not make him focus more on task completion. He said, "If I do not complete the Battle Pass tasks while playing casually, I might play a few other modes to finish it, but this is a rare occurrence."

On the other hand, some respondents who were still in school indicated that a significant portion of their pocket money was spent on the game, and they "somewhat regretted" it. As a result, they spent more time focusing on task completion. One respondent said, "I have to make sure I get my money's worth; if I do not complete the tasks and receive the rewards, it would be a failed investment." Indeed, this financial investment brought some psychological pressure to players. However, looking at it from another angle, this expenditure increased their time spent in the game, making them more loyal to it.

This was indeed the case, as several respondents who were already working had their own sources of income, allowing them to spend more money on the game easily. For example, one 24-year-old male player, who was experienced in the game and had reached the V10 noble level, mainly played the game for entertainment and collecting skins. He preferred to purchase the highest-priced Battle Pass. Respondent 14, a 40-year-old veteran player with a sufficient budget, believed that the Battle Pass system was cost-effective and did not affect her gaming experience. In contrast, university students often had smaller budgets for the game, and their social needs and pressures influenced their choices of different Battle Pass systems. For instance, Respondent 10, a 21-year-old male player who had been playing since the game's launch, regularly purchased the 388-priced Battle Pass each month, finding it cost-effective and worthwhile. Similarly, another respondent, a 20-year-old female student, purchased the Battle Pass to appear more presentable in social interactions with friends. However, due to her limited living expenses, she often felt regret and therefore reduced her time spent in the game "to avoid more temptations to spend money." This outcome seemed to contradict the concept of "loyalty".

4.1.4. The player's own behavior patterns

Typically, the Battle Pass is believed to help extend the time players spend online. Players often need to invest more time in the game to complete the Battle Pass tasks and obtain substantial rewards. This

mechanism indirectly extends players' gaming time and increases overall game activity. However, the reality may sometimes be less ideal. From the interviews, it is evident that respondents from different life circumstances have different lifestyles. Motivations such as the respondents' age, occupation, and educational background are the main reasons for their varied lifestyles, influencing their gaming behaviour patterns. Some respondents prefer to separate gaming from their daily lives and find extended periods of free time specifically for gaming. For instance, Respondent 4 mentioned that he sometimes increases his gaming time to complete Battle Pass tasks, especially when the competitive season is approaching. He spends more time participating in competitive matches to ensure he can reach higher ranks and earn more rewards. Similarly, Respondent 10 also noted, "I usually play more ranked matches at the end of the season to rank up while also completing Battle Pass tasks."

On the other hand, some respondents indicated playing games during breaks in their daily routine, which means they cannot stay in the game for long periods and thus have less time to complete tasks. Respondent 7 said, "I play less than 2 hours daily, but I usually complete the tasks naturally." There are also more specific examples, such as Respondent 13, who has a strict daily schedule. She might play Honor of Kings with friends during tea breaks or lunch, but after work, she prefers to avoid logging into the game when she has ample free time. Instead, she is more inclined to exercise at the gym or swimming pool. She said, "Compared to in-game levels and rankings, I care more about my health. After all, although I enjoy this game, it is not my whole life."

4.1.5. The player's perception and pursuit of the game

It is clear that players have different perceptions of the app on their phones. Some respondents see Honor of Kings as a source of excitement and competitive thrill, something they cannot find in daily life or single-player games, highlighting the unique appeal of MOBA games. The Battle Pass does not hold a strong presence for these players and does not fundamentally alter their view of the game. Respondent 8, a dedicated competitive match player, buys the Battle Pass primarily to have more skin options for his favorite character. He said, "This way, I have more choices during competitive matches. I like this character and hope having a skin will help me perform better." However, he is indifferent to whether or when he completes the tasks in the Battle Pass system. "Honestly, I don't pay attention because, in my experience, the tasks are already completed before I even notice," indicating that the auto-completion of tasks hasn't impacted his emotions or gameplay. For him, the loyalty programme does not play the role marketers intend, as he is already highly motivated to engage with the game.

Other players view Honor of Kings as a social tool, using competitive matches to connect with friends or even strangers. For them, the items sold in the game serve more as social assets, boosting their confidence. Respondent 8 mentioned, "I always buy the highest-priced Battle Pass, mainly to collect skins. These skins are not only visually impressive but also allow me to express my personality in the game."

4.2. Implication

Based on the results of this study, we can further explore the application of these findings, especially how these motivations can be used to optimize the Battle Pass in Honor of Kings and enhance its effectiveness as a loyalty programme. The study shows that the five main motivations affecting the effectiveness of the Battle Pass can be categorized as objective motivations of the game and subjective motivations of the players. These motivations provide a theoretical basis for optimizing the design and marketing strategy of Battle Passes.

4.2.1. Application of objective motivations to games

First of all, the reasonableness of quest settings largely determines players' engagement and game experience. Tailored mission settings for different types of players (e.g., core players, social players, and casual players) can effectively enhance the attractiveness and completion of missions. Core players tend to prefer complex and challenging tasks, while casual players prefer simple and easy-to-complete tasks. Therefore, dynamically adjusting the difficulty of tasks and optimizing them based on player feedback is a key strategy to ensure continued player engagement.

Secondly, the quality of rewards is also a key motivation for the effectiveness of the Battle Pass. High-quality rewards (e.g., rare skins and unique items) significantly increase players' willingness to buy and loyalty. Regularly updating the reward content and providing diverse reward options can effectively maintain player interest and engagement. The reward design should consider the needs of different groups of players, catering to both core players' pursuit of high-value rewards and small rewards that appeal to casual players.

4.2.2. Application of player subjectivity

Regarding players' subjective motivations, players' budgets directly affect their choices and purchasing behaviors of Battle Passes. Different players have different spending ability and willingness to pay, therefore, through market segmentation, providing players with different budgets with multi-level options for Battle Passes can effectively improve the market coverage of the product. For high-spending players, premium options with more attractive rewards can be offered, while for players with limited budgets, basic options with better value for money can be offered.

In addition, a player's purpose or pursuit of the game is also an important motivation affecting the effectiveness of the Battle Pass. Different players have different expectations for the game, such as social interaction and competitive play. Through market positioning strategies, gaming companies can call the Battle Pass a product that satisfies different player needs. For example, the Battle Pass can be a way for competitive players to obtain rare rewards and display their personality, as well as a fun activity for social players to participate in with their friends.

Besides, players' behavioral habits have a significant impact on the Battle Passes. By analyzing players' behavioral data, gaming companies will be able to develop more personalized marketing strategies and launch tasks and rewards that match players' behavioral habits. For example, for players with high participation, special tasks and rewards can be used to keep their continued participation. In contrast, for players who have not logged in for a long time, return rewards can be given to rekindle their interest.

The findings of this study provide theoretical support for optimizing the Battle Pass of Honor of Kings. These findings not only help the game company to improve the market performance of Battle Pass through refined strategies but also improve player loyalty and long-term benefits, thereby boosting the game's overall revenue. These strategies also have important implications in the broader software industry, especially products that rely on continued user engagement and loyalty.

App companies make timely adjustments to their loyalty programmes by continuously collecting and analyzing user feedback. This enables the app team to keep up with user needs and make appropriate adjustments. Dynamic customization of the product strategy based on user feedback ensures that the product always meets the needs of the users. This not only increases user satisfaction but also enhances user loyalty and sustains long-term users.

5. Limitation

Although we have collected as much player data as possible through interviews, due to time constraints and research capabilities, some limitations may affect the comprehensiveness and

accuracy of the research results. First, the limitations of sample selection: this study includes only a small sample of interviews with a small number of users, which may make it difficult for the results to represent the general views and behavior patterns of the broader player base. Moreover, while the sample covers players of different age groups, gaming habits, and deposit levels, it may ignore other important demographics, such as geography, occupation, etc. Second, the limitations of data collection methods: all data is based on respondents' self-reports and may have memory biases, exaggerated or reduced subjective feelings, etc., which affect the accuracy of the data.

Also, the study did not set up a comparison group for those who did not purchase a Battle Pass or who had a small amount of top-up, making it difficult to directly assess the specific impact of the Battle Pass system on player behavior and attitudes. Third, the limitations of the analytical method: our research is based on qualitative analysis. Although the research provides rich text descriptions and cases, it lacks quantitative statistical analysis and verification, which may affect the universality and reliability of the conclusions. Fourth, the interference from external motivations: changes in the market environment like players' consumption behaviors and attitudes may be affected by a variety of external motivations such as the market environment, economic conditions, policies and regulations, etc., which are difficult to consider in research fully.

To address these limitations, we make the following suggestions: First, broaden the range of sample selection: By increasing the number of respondents, the results of the study can be more representative and reduce the bias associated with small sample sizes. In addition to considering age, gaming habits, and top-up levels, more demographic characteristics, such as geography, occupation, gender, income level, etc., should be included to more fully reflect the diversity of the player base. Also, by adding players who have not purchased a Battle Pass or have a small deposit as a comparison group, and through comparative analysis, we can more directly assess the impact of the Battle Pass system on players' behavior and attitudes.

Second, improve data collection methods: in addition to self-reporting, cross-validation can be performed in combination with in-game data (such as login frequency, game duration, consumption history, etc.) to improve the accuracy of the data. Third, strengthen analytical methods: on the basis of qualitative analysis, quantitative statistical analysis and verification should be added, such as using SPSS, R language and other tools for data analysis, to improve the universality and reliability of conclusions. Fourth, consider external motivations: analyzing the impact of the market environment on players' consumption behaviors and attitudes based on changes in the market environment, such as market competition, changes in policies and regulations, etc. Fifth, enhance research transparency: submitting research results to peers for review and accepting opinions and suggestions from external experts to improve the quality and credibility of research.

6. Conclusion

As the Battle Pass system is being introduced by more and more games, the effectiveness of Battle Pass as a loyalty programme has become a concern for game companies. This study examines the effectiveness of the Battle Pass system as a loyalty programme in the Chinese MOBA game Honor of Kings from the perspective of consumer perception. Through semi-structured interviews, five key motivations influencing the Battle Pass's effectiveness were identified: The settings of the tasks in Battle Pass, The quality of the rewards in Battle Pass, The player's budget for in-game spending, The player's perception and pursuit of the game, and the player's behavior patterns.

The findings indicate that while the Battle Pass can enhance player engagement and loyalty, its success depends on game-specific factors and individual player characteristics. Critical elements include task difficulty, alignment with core gameplay, reward quality, and the player's abilities and habits. Social interactions and competitive dynamics also play significant roles, highlighting the need for personalized strategies. This study fills a gap in understanding the causes of different player

loyalties in MOBA games, enriches the literature in the field of online game consumer behavior, and provides valuable insights for game marketers to optimize their loyalty programmes.

Future research should delve deeper into how player motivations and behaviors influence the success of the Battle Pass system. To fully understand their impact on player behavior, the focus should be on observational studies and a broader demographic scope.

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Appendix

Questions for interviewers

Gender
Age
Number of accounts
The purpose of playing games
The main game mode
When did you start playing?
Daily play time
VIP level/cumulative recharge
The Battle Pass you buy
Frequency/number of buying Battle Pass

The reason for buying the Battle Pass
Views on the rewards of Battle Pass
The completion of Battle Pass
Buy first or play first?
Do you think the Battle Pass is a burden or a push?
Do you finish Battle Pass deliberate?
Channels to know about the Battle Pass
Other information you will search for
Views on other in-game purchasing (such as skins)
Recharge channel
Other purposes of recharge
Monthly disposable income
Fixed monthly recharge amount
Other games played
Recharge amount for other games
Comments on the Battle Pass
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It is worth mentioning that the above questions are only basic questions that were asked to everyone. Since our interviews are semi-structured, we will ask other particular questions, which are not included in the table, according to each interviewee's different characteristics.