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Identity Construction in Digital Youth Culture: A Case Study of Mobile Games in China

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Abstract

Through the research methods of questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore the identity construction process of Chinese youth in mobile games and its influencing factors. It has been found that players' identity construction is a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic process in which gaming experiences, social interactions, consumption behaviors, and emotional responses are key factors in construction of identity. Specifically, players construct and express their self-identity in mobile games through character selection, completion of in-game tasks, and in-game social interactions; online and offline social interactions enhance players' sense of belonging and recognition of their identity; players' consumption of virtual items improves players' status in the gaming community and their sense of self-recognition; and in-game emotional experiences have a significant impact on identity construction and recognition. In addition, gender stereotypes still exist in mobile games and have some degree of influence on players' identity construction in mobile games.

Further, this study also focuses on analyzing the impact of the convergence of online and offline identities on Chinese youth's identity construction. This convergence promotes youth identity in both online and offline communities, reinforcing the influence of gaming culture in players' lives and blurring their self-presentation in different environments. However, while this convergence is an irreversible trend, there are specific types of games where players are avoiding it as much as possible because they want to establish distinct boundaries between online and offline identities for a better gaming experience and to try to explore more different identities in an anonymous environment.

The contributions of this study are, first, to extend the application of identity construction and identity theory to online spaces and mobile games. Second, this study analyzes the behavioral patterns and characteristics of Chinese youth's identity construction in mobile games, demonstrating the new dynamics of youth identity construction in digital culture. Third, the results of the study provide theoretical support and relevance for understanding the behavior and psychology of contemporary Chinese

youth in mobile games, and provide practical references for the fields of game design and policy making.

In addition, this study has certain limitations, such as the small sample size and the primary reliance on qualitative data, which may lead to generalizability of the findings to be further verified, as well as the possibility of some degree of social desirability bias. Therefore, future research can be conducted to further validate and enrich the findings of this study by expanding the sample size, combining behavioral data and empirical research. It is worth to note that with the popularization of VR, AR and AI technologies, the boundaries of identity construction in offline and online spaces may be further blurred, and identity research will also be expected to usher in new theoretical challenges and opportunities, which provides a broad space for future research.

Keywords: Identity Construction, Mobile Games, Chinese Youth, Social Interaction, Online-Offline Convergence

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Mobile games have become an integral part of youth's daily lives in today's digital age. A mobile game is any video game played on a smartphone or tablet (Wei & Lu, 2014). With the popularization of Global Positioning System (GPS) and location-aware services, and the shift of phones to multi-modal mobile media, smartphones can offer high-definition screens, accelerometers, gyroscopes, and touchscreens (Fidelman, 2011), and the possibilities are endless for players to traverse both the online and offline worlds through haptic screens that allow them to access new experiences on a variety of levels (Hjorth, 2011).

Compared to computer games, the trend of mobile games encourages users to download and keep updating mobile games in the app store, allowing users to experience asynchronous gameplay, social interaction, and digital currency while playing mobile games (Hsiao & Chen, 2016). Its best feature is mobility (Cheung et al., 2021), as long as you have an internet-enabled mobile device, then you can play the game almost anytime and anywhere. Richardson (2012) argues that this mobility creates a special relationship with the body that is characterized by the player's vulnerability to interruptions and distractions. As a result, many mobile games require players to focus their attention for short periods of time, for example by limiting each play session to 60 to 120 seconds (Grüter, Hajinejad & Sheptykin, 2014). Bao (2022) also noted that Chinese consumers preferred small-volume mobile games compared to those in other countries, as such games require them to play for a shorter period of time. Moreover, according to Newzoo (2023), the number of gamers worldwide will reach 3.387 billion by 2023, with most of the growth coming from mobile gaming, and that mobile gaming continues to generate the most revenue in the global gaming market at USD 92.6 billion. However, in terms of game types, there are significant differences between Chinese and Western games. For example, sports games based on soccer and volleyball, which are famous in the United States, do not perform well in China (Bao, 2022), and mobile games that are very popular in China, such as Honor

of Kings, a game in which local cultural elements, storylines, and historical figures are deeply explored, are highly compatible with the cultural background and aesthetic preferences of Chinese players.

Furthermore, with the popularity of smartphones, more and more Chinese youth are spending a lot of time and money on mobile games, and they are shifting part of their activities such as socializing, entertainment, and identity construction to mobile gaming platforms. According to the data in 2021, China's smartphone users reached 1.007 billion, of which 730 million were mobile game users (Jiguang, 2021). And, while the revenues of computer games and web games in China continue to decline, the revenues of the mobile game industry are growing rapidly, and in 2020, the actual revenues of mobile games in China reached 209.7-billion-yuan, accounting for 75.2 percent of the sales revenues of the game industry. Especially during COVID-19, the growth rate of mobile game revenue was 32.6 percent. In terms of game users, the proportion of users in the Z era is close to 90 percent (Jiguang, 2021), and the percentage of female players in certain mobile games reaches 67.6 percent.

Thus, mobile games have become one of the most popular entertainment activities in China, and it can be seen as a branch of popular culture that influences the cultural environment of Chinese society. However, with the advancement of Internet technology and China's rapid development over the last three decades, almost all social, cultural and cognitive areas of Chinese society are being called for modernization and reform in the collective name of the state (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). The new generation of Chinese youth is living in an environment where modernization is almost everywhere, yet the emergence of new management systems and the collapse of the planned economy have had a huge impact, and China still has some specific, culturally ingrained complexities. Against this backdrop of confrontation and contradiction, Chinese youth create a picture of a longed-for China amidst the precariousness of their lives and the confrontation of cultures, with the expectation that this picture will lead them to a freer world. Hence, the way identities are constructed on new media platforms is a further manifestation of the ordinary

people's desire to inhabit a global space, and this is replete with narrative discourses and identity symbols of modern China.

Mobile gaming is a new platform for constructing identities that allows youth to stay in touch with their friends asynchronously, its portability allows for freer gaming environments and experiences, and e-payments allow for varied and quicker consumption behaviors. However, this changing pattern of social interaction and consumption has also brought new challenges to Chinese society. For example, users reconstruct their identity and sociality in online spaces. The blurring of boundaries between mobile gaming and the offline world has created a new cultural paradigm for youth, who are discovering new types of friendships, gender relations, identities, and social dynamics in a synthetic world that mixes the real and the virtual. As a result, mobile games not only provide entertainment, but also become an important place for youth to explore their identity, display their personality and build social relationships.

1.2 Research Questions and Study Aims

Although mobile games have become more than just a tool for leisure and entertainment, they have become an important platform for users to engage in social interactions and self-expression. However, currently, in the Western context, researches on mobile games have focused on topics related to challenge, control, entertainment, self-identity building, psychology and addictions. In the Chinese context, researchers have focused more on player types, media management and censorship. Research on identity construction and identity in mobile gaming is still limited, especially how users construct and present their identities in online spaces.

Reviewing many of the previous game studies, most of them will choose a specific mobile game to discuss in an attempt to understand how the construction of the audience's identity takes place in this particular game. First, however, this paper argues that the current Chinese mobile gaming market is characterized by a wide variety of games, ranging from simple casual games to complex multiplayer online and role-playing games, each of which is likely to appeal to a different type of player and motivate them to construct identities in different, or mixed, ways. Thus, fixed

research on a particular game may limit the ability to understand the ways and dynamics of players' identity construction in different gaming environments. Second, different mobile games may be popular in different cultures, locations, or social groups, which reflects how various cultural and social factors influence game acceptance and player behavior patterns. Studying multiple games permits the analysis of identity construction in more diverse socio-cultural contexts, providing data support for understanding how identity is expressed cross-culturally in online spaces. Third, due to the rapid development and technological innovation of the mobile game industry, new game types and gameplay continue to emerge. For example, in China's mobile game market, for example, Honor of Kings and Game for Peace have always been the top two downloaded games in the app stores, but the ranking of other games will constantly change. For example, two games such as Onmyoji and Honkai Impact 3 are classic games that have been released for many years, but it has a large and fixed player base, and although it is difficult to attract new players to download them, they are still popular among the old player base. Therefore, considering the overall picture allows for better adaptation and reflection of the industry and ensures the timeliness and relevance of the findings.

Therefore, this study aims to deeply explore the process of identity construction and its influencing factors among Chinese youth in mobile games. Through comprehensive observation and analysis of the behaviors, experiences, and social interactions of youth Chinese mobile game players, it aims to reveal how they shape and express their self-identity in online gaming environments, and how this identity constitution is influenced by factors such as game characteristics, social interactions, and culture, and how it affects their self-perception in the offline world.

Therefore, my research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do Chinese youth construct identities in mobile games?

RQ2: What factors influence this identity construction?

1.3 Thesis Disposition

In Chapter 1, I explore the significance and relevance of the topic of identity construction in mobile games and provide broad background information.

Chapter 2 is a review of contemporary literature, including topics such as definitions of youth, digital culture among youth, online identities, identity construction processes in the digital age, game studies, and gender stereotypes.

Chapter 3 is the theoretical framework of this study. This study will explore the identity construction process of Chinese youth in mobile games in terms of identity recognition, identity performativity, mediated identity, and an online identity model. These theories not only provide a powerful tool for understanding Chinese youth's identity formation, but also offer a new perspective for exploring identity construction in the digital age.

Chapter 4 is the methodology where I will detail the type of my methods, design, process, analysis, limitations and ethical issues.

Chapter 5 explains my findings in detail. Chapter 6 is the summary section where I will briefly answer the research questions as well as state my findings and point out the limitations of the study as well as possible directions for future research. Chapter 7 is the references. Chapter 8 is the appendix section that contains the questionnaire design and semi-structured interview questions.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1.1 Youth Definition and Digital Culture

According to the youths development plan of China's State Council, the age range of Chinese youths is 14 to 35 years old, including youths and teenagers (Xinhua news, 2017), and according to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO) (China, 2018), the age range of youths is 15 to 24, and according to The paper (2024), the age range of China's top ten most outstanding youths each year is 18 to 40 years old, and the age range of the participants for this award is even raised to 45 years old in the selection of the local governments. As a result, the definition of youths keeps changing with the political, economic and socio-cultural situation, and the definition

of the youths' age group varies from country to country and from research field to research field. Further, according to Iresearch (2022), the age distribution of mobile gamers in China in 2021 was relatively even, with 29.2 percent of gamers between the ages of 25 to 35, which has accounted for almost one-third of the total number of mobile gamers in China. That is to say, this age group is both in line with the age range of youths as well as a large base of gamers with certain spending power. As the Internet entered China in 1994 and developed rapidly, youths aged 25 to 35 years old grew up in the era of the Internet's development, are more affluent and better educated compared to their fathers' generation, most of them are only children, and are more concerned with self-expression and identity display (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). Furthermore, youths aged 25 to 35 years old are in important life stages such as career development, marriage and childbirth, and they need to construct multiple identities to suit changing environments and real-world practices, both in offline and online environments. Therefore, I chose to target youths aged 25 to 35 years old who were born or reside in Mainland China, excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, for this study.

In addition, youths remain a prevalent perspective in popular and academic discourse, and youths are used by scholars as a subject for debate and discussion of social change. New technologies are often seen as natural partners for youths, and it seems that they will always be quick to grasp and use emerging technologies. In the new or even two generations of youths' growing up experiences, they are no longer self-sufficient compared to their fathers' generation, but they have started to rely on a wider network to satisfy different aspects of their needs emotionally, economically, and culturally (Goggin & Crawford, 2017). This wider network focuses on the diverse connections and resources provided by digital technologies and the Internet, such as online learning platforms, social media, e-commerce platforms, digital media and entertainment. Youths socialize, learn, and innovate through digital media (Horst et al., 2010), communication technology reduces the physical distance between people as they carry this technology with them (Arnd-Caddigan, 2015), and online platforms, especially social media platforms, provide a space for youths to share their

experiences and seek emotional support (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014) and have a positive impact on their mental health (Grieve et al., 2013), online games also provide a space for youths to temporarily escape from the pressures of their lives while they can gain more control and a sense of achievement in their games (Yue, 2016), and Chinese mobile gamers prefer games with local cultural elements (Bao, 2022), which can be seen as a potential influence of culture on gaming platforms, and the extensive network also provides opportunities for freelance and short-term work, which, despite the simultaneous challenges and opportunities that come with it (Malhotra & Van Alstyne, 2014), is important for youth's career development and economic independence. Therefore, online platforms have become an important place for youths to explore and construct their identities, which not only provides a space for self-exploration and expression, but also prompts youths to reassess their positions and roles in society.

2.1.2 Identity: Real and Virtual, Offline and Online

In summary, youths' lives increasingly involve cyberspace and are increasingly dependent on the wider web for different aspects of their emotional, economic and cultural needs. This means that youths, in order to enable and facilitate interactions in computer-mediated environments, must construct a virtual identity to assume a specific online presence (Koles & Nagy, 2012). By online presence they mean the role played or self-image presented by an individual in the online environment and constructed through personal interaction and expression on digital platforms such as social networks, forums, online games, etc., which includes elements such as nicknames edited by the users themselves, their personal profiles, the content they present, and the behaviors they interact with. Stald (2008) explains virtual identity as how one constructs and presents their social identities through cell phones and other mobile devices. This includes how they use these technologies to maintain social relationships, express personal characteristics and participate in social activities. It is worth noting that Stald's (2008) explanation of virtual identity is much broader, not only including the construction and display of self-identity in online environments,

but also addressing the role of mobile technology in combination with socialization activities. However, Hongladarom (2011) uses the term online identity to describe a similar meaning. He argues that an online identity functions as a persona and that people can create their own persona in any way they like, Turkle (1997) sees online identity as the representation of individuals in the virtual world, which often includes the way they interact in social media, games or online communities, with a particular emphasis on the opportunities that cyberspace offers for experimentation with identities. Therefore, in this study I will use the term online identity to denote an individual's digital image on the Internet and the individual's constructed behavior on digital media. On the other hand, I will use the term offline identity to describe an individual's social performance and self-expression when digital technologies and the Internet are not connected or used, including behavioral patterns developed in daily life, social identities, and self-presentation in face-to-face interactions.

In addition, this does not imply that this online and offline identities are opposing concepts, as the interaction and self-presentation of individuals in cyberspace is also a reality for the individual; in other words, reality itself is constituted by information. Hardey (2002) argues that although the Internet provides a platform that does not require a physical presence, the social, physical and cultural experiences of users significantly shape online interactions. This refutes the notion that online identities exist completely independently of the real world. Thus, there is continuity and consistency between online and offline identities, and as Hongladarom (2011) argues, there is an ongoing convergence between offline and online in the realm of the self.

2.2.1 Identity Construction in The Digital Age: From Social Interaction to Virtual Laboratories

Identity is an ambiguous term with different research approaches and cognitive perspectives in different disciplines (Fu, 2018). In this paper, I explore identity construction from a postmodernist perspective. Youths are a particular social group whose identities are formed in relation to a wide range of social, cultural, and economic factors (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011), and within the framework of

postmodernism, identities are viewed as an ever-changing and evolving process that emphasizes the fluidity, diversity, and construction of identities. Identities are constructed through language in social, cultural and historical contexts, in interactive situations, and are a diverse and varied process (Edwards, 2009). Constructivism rejects the essentialist view of identities and argues that identities are not innately determined but are an open, dynamic process. Daily life is a continuous socialization process in which individuals learn and internalize social norms and roles through interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and in this dynamic process, an individual's sense of identity and status is gradually formed and solidified, which means that identities are also malleable and adaptable. According to Butler (1999), identity is constituted through repetitive performances of behavior and expression. Individuals present themselves in social situations to confirm or reshape their identities by conforming to or challenging established social roles and expectations, and this performative process of identity construction is not only an expression of intrinsic self-traits, but also a reflection and re-creation of socio-cultural structures. Buckingham (2007) views childhood and adolescence as key periods for identity formation. At the same time, he points out that the term identity encompasses both similarities and differences. Every individual possesses multiple identities that are defined and expressed in interpersonal and cultural contexts. Individuals seeking identity and a sense of belonging often build a social circle by seeking out others who are similar to them, based on shared interests, beliefs, languages, cultural backgrounds, experiences, etc., but individuals develop unique self-perceptions, e.g., generate their own perspectives, values, and behaviors, in the context of their interactions and in the broader socio-cultural contexts.

Therefore, creating a social identity involves three processes: categorization, recognition, and comparison (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). Firstly, people categorize themselves into different groups based on social constructs (e.g. race, nationality, gender, etc.) in order to better identify themselves. In this process, even though these groups do not really know themselves, they use categorized terms to refer to others (e.g., in China, these terms might be Southerners, Northerners, Han, Muslims, college

students, netizens, etc.). Secondly, the recognition process is the process of recognizing a person's behavior, occurrence, or situation (Benwell, 2006). The central function of this process is to specify a person's social role or personality traits. Within this framework, identity is viewed as an essential attribute of a person that includes aspects of their personality, role, social status, and group recognition. An example of this is when a teacher encounters a student in the school hallway and addresses him by the student's name: "Hi Lee, what activity are you going to do in gym class today?" Here, the teacher identified by using the student's name and mentioning the activity related to the student's role. This identification not only confirms the student's identity (who he is) but also reinforces his role as a student and his relationship with the teacher. The final step is social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2014). Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) is a key theory to understanding how individuals assess themselves in groups, asserting that people have an intrinsic drive to assess their own opinions and abilities, and often in the absence of objective criteria. Once a person has categorized and identified themselves, they begin to compare themselves favorably to other groups. According to Festinger (1954), such comparisons are driven by accuracy (individuals seek to confirm the accuracy of their social behaviors and beliefs) and the need for self-improvement (assessing one's social status and self-worth by comparing oneself to others). Identity comparison and recognition therefore implies connections to wider social groups (Buckingham, 2007) such as cultural identity, national identity, and other shared interests and values. Social identity theory suggests that interactions within a group change an individual's behavior (Turner & Reynolds, 2010), but it is based on the premise that identities are produced through a process of difference, and that their definitions are relative or flexible depending on the activities in which a person engages. What cultural and social theories of identity have in common is that they assume that individual and collective identities are multiple rather than singular, dynamic rather than static, and variable rather than consistent (Van Zoonen, 2013). This conceptualization of identity is particularly helpful in understanding the relationship between identity and digital media.

Furthermore, based on this theory, we turn to how the same phenomena can be observed in a digital environment. The new generation of Chinese youth is growing up in an Internet environment that has become part of their daily lives, and they are encountering unprecedented freedom of expression and wider opportunities for interaction. Platforms such as blogs, social media, video sites, and video games constitute a hybrid platform for self-presentation (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). Individuals are limited in their self-presentation in offline spaces, and asynchronous online communication is well suited for carefully curated self-presentation (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). Examples include the appearance of in-game avatar figures, player icons, homepage on social media, photographs and personal introductions. Moreover, this reliance on media not only changes the formation of identities, but also accelerates the rate of their change. Thus, we can still use the above process to describe the emergence of online identities. Stald (2008) argues that, on the one hand, the identities of youths are influenced by their use of media. The Internet provides a unique environment in which users can explore different identities with less social risk, which may allow online identities to be expressed in a richer and more diverse way than offline identities. Youths are constantly negotiating who they are, how they became that identity, and how identities change from one to another. On the other hand, it implies that youths' identities are fluid, changing and evolving over time. The popularity of mobile devices and the emergence of new technologies have greatly expanded the fluidity of identities. As communication in cyberspace is characterized by freedom, anonymity, and symbolic diversity, it makes it easier for youths to establish identity attributes and affective belonging (Tan & Yu, 2024), and provides individuals with a kind of virtual laboratory environment to explore and experiment with different versions of the self (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons, 2002). As a result, youths can sort of build and express their online identities in cyberspace and shape them according to their expectations (Nagy & Koles, 2014), upon which they can construct the selves they want to present. However, identity construction is complex in an evolving technological environment.

2.2.2 Youth Identity Construction: Interactions and Impacts in Offline and Online Spaces

In the digital age, identity construction is no longer limited by geographic location and physical space. In China, many youths are mobile in local, and in some cases global, environments, and their identities and social interactions are blended in offline and online environments to form a dynamic, multi-layered system of interactions, a concept of mutual embeddedness that Zemmels (2012) refers to as a new social operating system. Such kind of system allows individuals to simultaneously exist and interact in multiple social environments, which include offline, online communities, cyberspace, social media, game worlds, and so on. For example, while youths are engaged in a discussion about a social event on a Chinese social media platform, they may also be discussing the event with friends, family, and classmates in the offline world, as well as debating it in a social setting or in a classroom. Such online and offline interactions enhance their sense of social engagement, and they can also express and explore their identities in different contexts, and also generate identity and social comparisons. Overall, youths are increasingly fluid and integrated in both offline and online spaces, where they are constantly creating and adapting their online identities.

Yue (2016) offers a new perspective on Chinese youth identity, arguing that the current online identity culture of Chinese youth is an expression of transnational market ideology. Due to globalization, individual consumerism has been confronting and integrating with each other and traditional Chinese culture since its entry into China. In the face of this irreversible trend, the prevailing social perception in China has increasingly come to see consumerism as a belief and value system. Thus, in this ambivalent and antagonistic conceptual transformation, the values of the new generation of Chinese youth are also changing. Wang (2006) summarizes this change as an awakening of individualism, which is manifested in an emphasis on the individual, a heightened sense of self-awareness (Jin, 2003), and a strengthened sense of independence, as well as an over-concern with personal well-being and a certain disregard of the interests of others (Bai, 1998). As a result, youths are allowed to rebel

appropriately in online spaces without attracting the attention of the authorities (Sima & Pugsley, 2010). However, this rebellion is not directly reflected in real life (Yue, 2016). On the one hand, youths are unable to change their appearance and gender in reality, nor can they fully control the physical cues that occur during face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, although online spaces offer the freedom to express individuality and explore identity, this freedom is still influenced by traditional Chinese social values and collectivism. Giddens (1991) points out that although modern society appears to be open and pluralistic, the construction of an individual's identity still cannot be completely divorced from the influence of the socio-cultural environment. Factors such as social structures, cultural traditions and economic systems play a decisive role in shaping an individual's identity.

This means that while identity construction has a degree of freedom in online spaces, where youth can explore different identities under conditions of anonymity, limitations still exist. King, Pan and Roberts (2013) show that Chinese censorship skillfully balances tolerance of government criticism with suppression of collective action and expression. This is demonstrated by the fact that China's Internet censorship generally allows for individual criticism of government officials and policies, but clamps down on any content that might inspire collective empathy or broad public mobilization. In other words, China's online space appears to be open and free, but strict censorship can force youth to become more cautious in constructing their online identities. For example, some youths may choose to include the Chinese national flag in their icons or include something like "Long Live the Communist Party" when commenting on certain posts in order to avoid their comments being deleted, and some may try to bypass censorship by finding more subtle or symbolic language and ways of expressing their self-identity. Sandel and Peimin's (2020) findings suggest that China's Internet environment is a platform for the emergence of new forms of hybrid language, characterized by a mixture of English, Mandarin, dialects, and memes when people communicate on the Internet. Thus, in this social context, youths' self-presentation and interactional behaviors in online spaces are not only an individualistic awakening, but also a response to

limitations. This interaction between online and offline highlights the complexity of online identity construction and its impact on offline spaces.

Additionally, Hongladarom (2011) argues that identity is not a trait that is intrinsically inherent, but rather a concept constructed through social interactions and cultural influences. As online identities can be freely constructed, they reflect how individuals utilize digital technologies to redefine who they are and how they interact socially. In other words, the construction and maintenance of an individual's identity depends not only on the internal psychological state, but is more influenced by the external social and technological environment. Hongladarom (2011) applies externalism to the construction of personal identity, especially the formation of online identity. He argues that our social interactions and identity expressions are increasingly dependent on information technology and online platforms. These technologies and platforms constitute the external conditions for identity expression. One example is that algorithmic recommender systems can influence the kinds of information that users are exposed to, which in turn influences their opinions and expressions of identity (Pariser, 2011). That is, as technology and social media become more prevalent and evolve, the boundaries between online and offline identities become increasingly vague, and the process of their construction becomes more complex and continuous. In addition, Gackenbach and Dopko's (2012) research suggests that online identities can enhance an individual's problem-solving skills and creativity, but over-reliance on online identities can lead to a degradation of real-world social skills. Yee and Bailenson (2007) used the Proteus effect to describe how the online space in which a person adopts an identity and behavioral characteristics that in turn shape their self-perception and behavioral performance in the offline space. For example, if a person regularly takes on leadership roles in the online world, this may enhance their leadership abilities in the offline world because behaviors, experiences, and self-confidence in the online space can translate into behavioral dispositions and skills in the offline world. It also means that the interactions and influences between online and offline identities are reciprocal, and that youth can find

their self-worth in both worlds and use the online space as an effective tool for self-exploration and self-expression.

Furthermore, online spaces provide new sites of identity comparison (Stets and Burke, 2014). Individuals may compare themselves to classmates or colleagues in offline spaces, and they may strive to meet or exceed the level of their peers in online spaces to shape and change their self-esteem and self-image both online and offline. Thus, online spaces become spaces for individuals to explore and express the diversity of their selves (Turkle, 1997), and it is in these environments that individuals can experiment with different selves and form and understand their identities through these online experiences (Arnd-Caddigan, 2015). For example, youths can create identities that represent their ideal selves in online spaces, and this continually negotiated and constructed online identity often reflects aspects of their offline identities (their real selves), whether it is their ambitions, hidden traits, inhibited desires, or wished-for traits. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008) showed that although social media is rooted in real-life relationships, users present idealized selves through carefully curated profiles and online interactions that reflect their true ambitions and traits. Bargh et al. (2002) showed through three experimental tests that on the Internet, individuals' 's concept of authentic self is cognitively more easily activated. This implies that individuals are more likely to express their true character and interests in the online space, helping to build deeper understanding and empathy. Although face-to-face interactions in the offline world are often considered as real because individuals can observe clues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, etc. during face-to-face interactions, the online space offers a unique reality as well. This is because anonymity allows individuals to feel fewer social constraints as well as a greater degree of freedom of expression. Thus, youth interactions in online spaces can be viewed as an extension or exploration of offline identities, and this online construction of identity interacting with the offline world reflects how individuals are reshaping their social interactions and social identities through digital technology. At the same time, this interaction also reveals the complex connection between online and offline spaces. Through such a complex and dynamic process,

youths are constantly searching for themselves between the online and offline worlds, and responding to the multifaceted challenges of modern society.

2.2.3 Interweaving Virtual and Real: Exploring Youth Identity Construction and Self-Cognition

The youths elaborated in this study were born after 1988, and their growing up in China, where collectivism is prevalent as well as traditional conservative ideas, can be seen as a process of depersonalization (Yue, 2016). For example, on campus, everyone had to wear the same school uniform, have a prescribed hairstyle, were not allowed to wear any jewelry, and there was no freedom of speech. This environment may limit the diversity and freedom of personal expression, which to some extent limits the possibilities for youth to shape their identities; however, although Chinese youth spend most of their formative years in the campus environment, they still have the opportunity to shape their offline and online identities through other channels. Therefore, online identities have become a means of escaping, rebelling and personal display (Yue, 2016), and are increasingly understood and used by youth populations. For example, the popularity of online gaming as discussed by Yue (2016) has provided a unique identity marker for many Chinese youth. Youth view online games as a form of rebellion to demonstrate their independence from parental control and supervision. These games can provide youth with a sense of empowerment, which can be seen as a sense of control over their lives and themselves, as the absence of parents and elders within this space creates a freer and more open space, and youth can gain a sense of empowerment and respect from other players, which stems from a different definition of success (Yue, 2016).

Further, due to the overly competitive educational system in Chinese society, family expectations amplify the pressures of this system, creating environments that generate significant stress for youth (Liboriussen & Martin, 2016), and the relatively homogenous social and cultural criteria for success in China, for example, good grades on exams, a high income, or a job with a state corporation are commonly viewed as success. This intensely competitive environment puts enormous pressure on

youth in the offline world, where they face challenges and pressures from family expectations, academics, career development, and finances. Youth thus see the online world as a way to escape. In online games, for example, superior gaming skills, the ability to help other players collaborate, or having good-looking gaming items are new criteria for success or being respected. In social media, youths engage in social behaviors to distract themselves and seek emotional value. Thus, the online space can be viewed as an escape from the offline world, a space where youth explore the freedom of various types of identities (Liboriussen & Martin, 2016). Youth are free from social pressures and parental expectations in online spaces, as well as a way to seek self-worth and gain control and respect. In addition, Chen's (2021) research suggests that playing social mobile games can be effective in helping youth recover from stress and tension. A more fundamental reason for this is that youths gained more control over their experience in a low cognitive demand gaming condition.

According to Yue (2016), youth explore each other's true identities by creating identities in cyberspace. Whether it is dating or relationship, getting to know someone in cyberspace is through their online identity, and it is in the process of interaction that a deeper level of communication is formed and a long-term relationship can be established. Fu (2018) pointed out that young Chinese Internet citizens experience different senses of belonging by flexibly utilizing the communication and networking functions of social media platforms, and these senses of belonging play a key role in forming and maintaining their identities. In addition, Qin and Lowe's (2021) study of Chinese youth's online identities suggests that online identity modes can fulfill different needs of participants and that youth will choose different identities to fulfill different needs rationally according to different online environments, which is manifested in the fact that what youths lack in the offline world tends to find its way out in the online space. On the other hand, youths will tend to avoid negative aspects through the expression of their online identities; for example, youths will tend to display a positive and optimistic self in their online identity expression in the circle of acquaintances, while they will display more negative aspects in the circle of anonymity, as strangers are naturally characterized by secrecy and loyalty. However,

youth can use their online identities to project a more favorable image and demonstrate a sense of personal self, but this in turn can have a role-modeling effect, making it easier for people to idealize the image with which they interact (Liu & He, 2021). As a result, youths also often perceive themselves as being in an unrealistic social environment. In addition, they found that as more and more online relationships moved to offline relationships, many youths' offline identities did not match their online identities, which created a kind of social fatigue among the youth group, who cared less and less about managing their online identities. In other words, youth's online identities are being reconfigured in different environments and interactions, and these online identities also interact with offline identities.

However, due to the changeability of online identities, especially when compared to offline identity development, most people have a positive attitude towards the overall process of identity modification (Koles & Nagy, 2012). For example, users have a strong desire to change their identity to further enhance their feelings of goodwill and satisfaction with themselves, and online users seem to create their avatars in order to portray themselves as an attractive person, with a strong desire to connect with others, and sometimes even to modify their avatars to fit the needs and requirements of their environment. Yet, there are similarities and differences between online and offline identities, and according to Evans (2011), many users' avatars in online spaces reflect the ideal self they want to express, which may be an amplified or glorified version of their real-life self, and despite the fact that the online space and the way it is interacted with is different from that of the offline space, individuals usually hold the same core values and personality traits in the online space as they do in the offline space. For example, a person who is very extroverted in real life may also be an actively engaged individual in the community in the online space. Alternatively, as the online space provides a safe environment, users can explore and experiment with roles that they would not normally play in real life, e.g. a male player using a female character in a game does not suffer from the social pressures and consequences that may arise. Moreover, individuals may have different avatars in the online space, and users can change and adapt to different identities at any time

depending on different scenarios and needs, whereas in the offline space, such changes are usually more fixed and slower (Evans, 2011).

Additionally, Merchant (2006) introduced the concepts of anchored identities and transient identities, stating that individuals may exhibit stable identities (anchored identities) based on longstanding socio-cultural practices or more changeable and malleable fluid identities (transient identities) in different social situations. Anchored identities are usually expressed as core personal characteristics that individuals constantly present and emphasize in their social interactions, for example, a person may emphasize their religious beliefs or ethnicity in their social media profiles, which are usually a core part of their sense of identity and social belonging. Transient identities are manifested in online and offline interactions as individuals experiment with and adjust to different roles and identities. These identities are usually related to the individual's interests, hobbies, current activities, or the social circles in which he or she lives, and may change over time and circumstances. Thus, these two identities are not independent; they often influence each other. Individuals may explore new transient identities based on the foundations of their anchored identities, while the expression of transient identities may in turn reinforce or challenge aspects of the anchored identities through interactions in different social networks. Notably, these two concepts help to understand the expression and change of individuals' identities in online and offline interactions, and they demonstrate the complexity of individual identities in the blending of offline and online, as well as their intertwined relationships, providing a framework for interpreting online and offline identities. Overall, youths' construction of identity and self-perception in the intersection of online and offline demonstrates how individuals find and express themselves in the multicultural and technological environments of modern society. This process is not only about an individual's inner exploration, but also involves a wide range of social interactions and cultural adaptations. In this process, youths explore different selves through their online identities and reassess and adjust their identities in the offline world.

2.3.1 Differences Between Mobile Games and Other Video Games and Socio-Cultural Influences

Shaw (2010) emphasizes the importance of considering video games as a cultural practice. This means that studying this field requires multiple perspectives on game content, player communities, industry standards, and how games reflect and shape cultural values. This perspective provides this paper with a view of mobile gaming as a cultural practice, a socio-cultural expression in which youth explore and construct their own identities by engaging in mobile gaming, and in which this online identity intersects with and influences their offline identities. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss how mobile games are different from other online games. Firstly, the most significant features of mobile games are mobility and accessibility (Wang, 2022). Players can access these games anytime and anywhere via their smartphones, which is different from other online games that require a fixed device such as a personal computer or a game console, for example, in the competitive game Honor of Kings, each game lasts for 10-15 minutes, and players can log in or out at any time. Secondly, mobile games are often designed to be fragmented experiences, they typically have simpler controls and shorter play cycles than computer games that are often designed to be more complex and require a longer time commitment, making them suitable for playing during short breaks (Groh, 2012), and they are simple to operate and take less time to play (Omori & Felinto, 2012). And third, the very social and physical intimacy of mobile games is central to their success (Katz & Acord, 2008). On the one hand, although mobile games were initially considered a personal technology (Kleijen, de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2003), the popularity of mobile games developed around the simple logic of allowing players to chat with each other, participate in tournaments, and post scores on community boards. In China, social networks have been a key force in the popularity of mobile games (Ip & Che, 2016). As Facebook and Twitter (X), two of the most well-known social networks, were banned in China, the country produced its own unique social platforms such as WeChat, QQ, and Weibo, which together provided a solid foundation for the spread of mobile games in China. Mobile players are confronted with game partners who have

personalities and real human intelligence (Wang, 2022), and real-time online communication can make real-time interactions between players come alive, and it is this kind of interaction that satisfies people's social needs. On the other hand, mobile games are a fully physical activity (Katz & Acord, 2008) where the player's body can be considered as an input device for the game. This means that, in contrast to traditional computer games or console games, mobile games require the player to use a touchscreen for a direct interactive experience, where the player can control the skills of the game character on the touchscreen through different gestures (Fung, 2017), accelerometers and gyroscopes allow the smartphone to detect physical movements such as tilting, swaying and wobbling, and even in some sports and adventure games the player needs to change their physical position to navigate the game space. As a result, mobile games, like cell phones themselves, continue to blur the boundaries between work, leisure, family life, and public space (Katz & Acord, 2008).

2.3.2 How Mobile Games Influence Youths' Behavior and Identity

Construction

The large audience and market for mobile games in China also implies that it is becoming an important site for youths' identity creation and reconstruction. Therefore, Shaw's (2010) concept of video game culture as a cultural practice provides a perspective for this paper. Mobile games can also be viewed as a cultural practice, a socio-cultural expression in which youth explore and construct their own identities by engaging in mobile gaming, and in which this online identity also intertwines with and influences their offline identities. We can begin our discussion with the identity of the player. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that the identity of player is a behavior because appropriate behavior as a player means that one's actions are described and evaluated according to these normative concepts. This means that the identity of a player is continually constructed and confirmed through interactions with others and the performance of behaviors that are socially expected. In other words, the identity of player is socially constructed (Vermeulen, Abeele & Van Bauwel, 2016), a choice, and

related to dominant discourses (Shaw, 2013). The identity category of player has become a position of investment, an identity that emerges from a structured dialogue between the individual and society that is not entirely self-defined by the person playing the game, but rather encompasses a variety of cultural practices, social constructs, consumption behaviors, and group identities. Furthermore, the identity of player has been widely criticized and satirized for some time as representing the group of people who engage in specific types of gaming and who pathologize their playtime (Shaw, 2010). Shaw (2013) also urges researchers, rather than attempting to counter these criticisms and caricatures, to show how players make sense of their relationship with games through the one constructed identity of player. Although mobile games offer players a new way of expressing their identity, the formation and identification of this identity does not happen in isolation; it is constructed in the context of ongoing social interaction and cultural consumption. Moving forward, I would like to discuss how cultural practices and the ways in which they are interacted with influence the construction of youth identities.

Yue's (2016) findings suggest that youths' family structures and friendships are reconfigured in online games. Teammates in games are often friends in reality but play the role of virtual family members. Therefore, brotherhood is a new theme in youth identity culture. Due to China's one-child policy, classmates take the place of biological siblings, and brotherhood becomes a more distant friendship in real life. However, youths' understanding and practice of brotherhood extends to online spaces, such as in-game battles and missions, where they reach a desire for mutual support and gain value from working together to complete a mission or battle. This in turn is closely related to traditional Chinese culture, where youths may lack the ability to work in teams because they have been taught from an early age to be winners in competition rather than contributors in teamwork. In the online space, "my values" and "our values" are reconstructed on a personal level. However, Carr (2021) argues that players find it difficult to negotiate one identity when they construct an identity around their favorite mobile game. Adults, in particular, have an identity that encompasses both their responsibility to the real world of adulthood and the world of

childish games. On the one hand, in many cultures, adult participation in video game activities is often seen as escapist and unwillingness to take on adult responsibilities (Allison et al., 2006), and furthermore, in the popular mind, the devoted player of the game has always been a young male geek (Wirman, 2014). As a result, players seem to be avoiding being labeled with this identity. For example, some players do not refer to themselves as players, but rather as players of a specific game, such as League of Legends players. On the other hand, mobile games do not hold particular value for adults (Carr, 2021). Adults tend to assess the value of mobile games based on their own lives and values, and broadly speaking, mobile games are difficult to value because they are often devalued as casual games, which are understood to be opposed to hardcore games, which are more "serious" and focused, and casual games, which are derided as mere entertainment. Although the categories of hardcore and casual are overly stereotypical and formalized, many people's stereotypes of mobile gaming have turned into common judgments. Hence, just by relying on labels like casual games, the value of mobile games has been pre-constructed, as well as the identity of mobile players (Carr, 2016). Therefore, when players construct their identities in mobile games, they not only need to consider the types of games they play, but also have to face how these games are perceived and evaluated by the outside world. In other words, players' identity construction is directly affected by perceived value. In addition, Carr (2021) argues that mobile games offer a way for players to reconnect with each other in the form of new content, and that players see the games that offer these opportunities as valuable additions to the series they already enjoy. The nostalgia that adults find in mobile games, where mobile games are linked to nostalgic identities associated with players' childhoods, for example when the Chinese mobile game Snake Off was released in 2016, the casual mini-game with social features gained the number one download in the global Apple Store in September 2016 based on downloads from players in China alone (Jagger, 2016). The mobile game is a great example of how mobile games can help players to reconnect with their childhood, as it is a great example of this. Despite its low-budget and copycat labeling, its popularity in China has not suffered, but rather demonstrates the appeal of a culture

and nostalgia. Snake Off utilizes players' nostalgia for the classic game Snake while adding social interaction elements, transforming the single-player experience of a wide range of players' childhoods into an online social game that can be played by players around the global. Overall, players can feel a connection between themselves and mobile gaming, but this connection can be complicated by social pressures, adult responsibility, socio-cultural stereotypes of games, nostalgia, and the relaxing and entertaining nature of mobile games, which means that their identities are in a constant state of negotiation.

Adding to this, consumption behaviors in mobile games also have had a significant impact on the construction of youth identities both online and offline. Hamari and Keronen's (2017) study suggests that players purchase virtual items not only for their personal gaming experience, but also to gain status and recognition within the gaming community. By purchasing specific in-game items, players can demonstrate their commitment and in-game achievements within their social circles, for example by purchasing virtual items and services, behaviors that also serve as markers of identity and status on a social and cultural level, and that this act of consumption reinforces the group identity of players, making them feel part of a specific gaming community. For example, in some gaming communities or clubs, administrators may require that every member have the same format name, or the same item or skin, and these requirements are often accompanied by consumption behaviors. Ip and Che (2016) point out that the culture in China is such that players usually do not want to pay for downloading games, but they are very willing to spend large sums of money for extra features during gameplay, and their tendency to spend more money on games increases once they get into the habit of playing them repeatedly. Typically, players can spend money to unlock new levels of gameplay, special abilities, or exclusive content. This system not only encourages players to spend money, but also helps them to progress in the game, which builds a sense of achievement and self-efficacy. This feeling strengthens players' online identity and influences their self-efficacy and behavioral patterns in the offline space (Zhong, 2011). Additionally, aesthetic attributes are a major purpose of players' consumption

(Lehdonvirta, 2009). In Lehdonvirta's (2009) study, it was noted that in World of Warcraft, players can purchase special effects known as "enchants" to improve the performance of their weapons. Despite the very limited performance gains from enchants, it is one of the most popular virtual commodities due to its ability to give weapons a reddish glow, which one player described as, "not very useful, but very cool." Thus, if the aesthetic properties of virtual items are attractive enough, players may derive hedonistic pleasure from the experience. On the other hand, virtual items can also have a social role; if a player holds a better-looking weapon or wears a better-looking costume in the game, other players can evaluate the player's competence and commitment by observing the item, and the player can also use these virtual items to show other people their personal tastes, social places, or group affiliations, which can lead to the formation of a tighter social network in the game space.

2.3.3 Gender Issues for Players

In previous research, studies in the field of gaming have clearly focused on teenagers (Yee, 2006), which can create the illusion that video games are a teenage subculture. However, its popularity as a form of leisure has become an important part of many people's lives and Yee (2006) confirms the stereotype that video game participants are predominantly male teenagers. This forces us to realize that teenagers are not the only users that researchers should focus on, as video games appeal to a very wide range of people and this appeal is strong. Some scholars (e.g., Fox & Tang, 2014) have drawn attention to a progressive shift in gaming culture that undermines the principles on which player identity is currently based. Vermeulen et al. (2016) argued that this progression has led to a kind of player-status threat that has caused traditionally male players to defend the old norms through a number of counter-attacks, such as the use of humor or sarcastic remarks to show misogyny towards female players. This is because the presence of women in the gaming field is seen as a threat to the notion of the male player, and in the popular mind, women are not encouraged to identify with players as such (Wirman, 2014). Although female players

now make up almost half of the total number of players, only a small percentage of them consider themselves players (Vermeulen et al., 2016). They see this as an inevitable consequence of a culture and industry of gaming that works desperately to legitimize the male player identity. Interestingly, an objective fact of player identity is its focus on masculinity. Looking back at the history of digital gaming, it is clear that gaming has been associated with masculinity from the very beginning. For example, the content and character design of many games reflect a male-dominated perspective. The Super Mario Bros series features Mario as the protagonist, whose mission is usually to rescue a princess in trouble, who is usually depicted as needing to be rescued, and is often portrayed with a traditionally feminine demeanor. The Street Fighter series features mostly male characters, with female characters such as Chun-Li and Crimson Viper possessing a certain level of strength, but are usually designed to be sexualized in the games, with their appearances and outfits presenting more sex appeal and glamour than strength and skill. This does suggest that the dominant discourse around digital gaming culture is a stereotypically male one. That is, male players have a "legitimate" player identity, while female players' player identity is denied. As a result, despite the growing number of female players, they are not seen as players.

However, female perspective games have appeared in the mobile game market, for example, Otome mobile games are female-centered and set the appropriate style for female players, and in the love and nurturing game players always play the female protagonist who is surrounded by young males and develops several romantic relationships (Zhang, 2022). This type of game improves female's power of speech in the game market and builds a platform to show women's unique values and thoughts. Yet, the design of Otome games is based on solidified gender differences. Otome games generally ignore manipulation skills and characterization settings, which may solidify gender bias and exacerbate sexism in the gaming industry. As a result, gender stereotypes and solidified gender differences in gaming culture not only affect female players' recognition and participation, but also youths' perception of identity and self-expression in games.

As a result, gender has been considered as an important research direction in game studies. Although the number of female players has been increasing, and according to the data (Jiguang, 2021; Iresearch, 2022), the proportion of female players is close to 50 percent, and in some specific games, the proportion of female players has exceeded that of male players, their status and recognition in the gaming culture have not been enhanced accordingly. According to Chew (2015), there are similarities in gender inequalities in online game content, game world construction, and player behavior, both in the West and in China. Examples include some prevalent stereotypes, where female players are often seen as having poor gaming skills, as well as sexual content in games and game advertisements that objectify females significantly more than males. Furthermore, Chew (2015) mentions a game design that is highly localized in the Chinese online gaming environment, virtual marriage. It consists of a dating and marriage ceremony for game avatars and provides in-game rewards and/or special virtual items for the married avatar. Such a design may to some extent reflect and reinforce real-world gender role expectations. A unique phenomenon has also been observed in China: a large number of male players prefer to use female avatars and icons for gaming. Although this behavior has not yet been widely discussed in the academic circles and lacks quantitative data to support it, the possible hidden challenges of gender identity exploration and social norms behind it deserve further research.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Identity and Social Interaction in Digital Space

In Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, life is compared to a stage, where people express their idealized selves in the front stage (public) and retain their true selves in the back stage (private). This traditional framework is useful as an explanatory framework for understanding identity through interaction and self-presentation in the online world (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013), despite certain limitations. Wang (2022) argues that the emergence of social media has blurred the

constraints between the front and back stage. For example, Facebook is not a completely anonymous social platform, but it allows people to display both their public and private lives. Chinese Internet users are more likely to show their real selves in anonymous circles (e.g., Weibo) and their idealized selves in semi-anonymous circles (e.g., WeChat) because WeChat is more like an online platform for offline social circles. Although people may still present different selves in the two worlds, the line between the online and offline worlds becomes blurred and interactions in the online space become more common. Therefore, Internet users generally reproduce their offline selves in the online space, but they do not always replicate their whole offline identity, but only highlight certain aspects of their personality (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). In other words, offline identities are divided into several aspects, and people only display some of them in the online space. This partly explains how users adopt online identities. It is also important to note that people's behavior and displays online tend to be an extension of their offline identities rather than a complete fiction or creation of new roles. Waggoner (2009) also points out that users can view both online and offline identities as having equal status. Thus, online and offline identities are the same entity in different contexts (Hongladarom, 2011), and they are both a construct.

Indeed, the institutional construction of identity is a pervasive theme in media representations and social theory (Shaw, 2013). Identity is not simply a fixed and isolated attribute within an individual, but is formed and expressed in the individual's interactions with the social environment, cultural context, and with others (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Appiah, 2005). This perspective emphasizes the socially constructed and reciprocal nature of identity, which is seen to be formed between groups through cultural, historical and social interactions. Actually, this view helps us to understand how individuals position themselves in different social and cultural contexts and how they construct their self-identity through social networks. Furthermore, Hall and Du Gay (1996) argue that in many ways recognition is a more illuminating concept, and that recognition contributes more to an understanding of identity formation than identity itself, as it emphasizes how individuals actively form their own identities in a

variety of social and cultural contexts, rather than merely passively accepting externally defined identities. This perspective emphasizes the interactive nature of the relationship between the individual and society, for example, an individual may adjust his or her behavior and expression according to the expectations of the community to which he or she belongs, which may manifest itself in different identities in different contexts. Nevertheless, if individuals are unable to effectively explore and define their identities, there is a risk of role differentiation, which can lead to feelings of alienation, isolation, and confusion (Erikson, 1959). This perspective is therefore helpful when discussing online identities in mobile games. It not only emphasizes the active participation of individuals in constructing their identities, but also considers the role of socio-cultural factors. As an interaction-rich medium, mobile games provide a unique social stage in which players can explore and express their identities. In-game character selection, social interactions, and teamwork are all key components of identity and recognition formation. The gaming environment allows players to express themselves in ways that may not normally be displayed in the real world, which may include experimenting with different personalities or playing different online characters.

3.2 Identity Performativity

To add to this, Butler's (1990) theory of identity performativity provides a complementary perspective. It emphasizes that identity is continually constructed in social interactions through ongoing performative acts that must take place within a broader system of cultural and social meanings in order for such performances to be understood and recognized. Identity is thus an ongoing performative process in which individuals are constantly shaping their social roles and gender identities through expression and action. In the context of mobile games, this means that each of the player's choices and interactions can be seen as a performance of their online identity, and that this performance creates an ongoing dynamic process of identity construction in the game world. In this framework, the performativity of identity is not just a simple external performance, but a deep way of confirming and exploring identity. As

players choose a character in the game and interact with other players through that character, they are in effect constantly performing and reinventing their chosen social identity. This kind of performance goes beyond the passive identity formation process described by traditional social construction theories and instead emphasizes the individual's initiative and creativity in forming and expressing their identity. For example, Honor of Kings (an extremely popular multiplayer online battle royale game in China), developed by Tencent Games, allows players to choose from a number of different champions to play as, with each champion having a unique appearance, skills, and backstory. Much of a player's identity in the game is expressed through the character and attributes of the chosen champion, and a player might choose an assassin champion to exemplify the coolness and confidence that he or she wishes to present. In addition, players can further perform their online identities by purchasing and displaying specific skins (champion costumes that do not enhance in-game attributes or abilities). Because skins change a champion's appearance, movements, or sounds, these enhance a player's in-game expressiveness and uniqueness, and the rare and aesthetic nature of skins creates a status and status symbol in social interactions, as some precious skins are to be acquired through huge spending or top-tier in-game achievement systems. However, as Butler (2009) reminds, such performances are not always free or accepted unconditionally, but need to take place within widely accepted norms that are themselves socially constructed and continuously maintained. Just as there are broad norms and expectations within the online gaming community, these norms define which performances are acceptable and which are inappropriate or unwelcome. Players' online performances must take place within the framework of norms to ensure that their identities are recognized and accepted by the community.

3.3 Mediated Identity

In modern society, where media and communication are central elements, it is unsatisfactory to simply assume that people somehow reproduce or borrow their identities from the media (Gauntlett, 2008), compounded by the fact that we are living in a time of constant change. Because, the media has changed, as well as people's

attitudes, the concept of audience has become more complex. The fact that people are online, both as audiences and as creative media producers, means that changes in people's consciousness are likely to lead to changes in the wider society. As a result, several scholars in communication media studies and social sciences on the relationship between media and identity have developed the concept of mediatized identity, a theory that focuses on how the media shapes an individual's social identity and self-perception. For example, David Gauntlett in his book *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* explores how the media affects an individual's understanding and expression of gender identity. Couldry (2012) explores how the media, as part of social practice, influences and shapes an individual's social identity. Livingstone (2009) points out that, with the advancement of technology and diversification of media forms, the media continues to reshape our social practices, modes of interaction, and our perceptions of self and others. forms diversify, media continue to reshape our social practices, patterns of interaction, and our perceptions of self and others. Although these scholars do not use the term mediatized identity exclusively, their work encompasses the core ideas of the theory, which centers on understanding how the media can influence, shape, and even reconstruct an individual's identity and self-perception through its content, form, and usage. For today, with the increasing abundance of digital media, the media is not simply a tool for reflecting reality, or controlling thought, but actively participates in shaping an individual's understanding of reality, and the construction and perception of identity. Going further, Marshall (2015) explores the concept of mediatized identity by stating that in modern culture, individuals are constantly pushed to construct a public image, and that this process of construction no longer occurs naturally but needs to be produced and sustained through mediatization, and that this public presentation of the self gives rise to a mediatized identity for the individual (Marshall, 2015), and that this individually mediatized identity becomes the new vehicle for the information flows.

Therefore, if I apply this concept to the study of identity construction in mobile games, I will first focus on the mediating role of the medium. Mediated identities are

concerned with how media act as mediators between the individual and society. Fornäs (1995) sees mediatization as a growing mediated presence in the construction of identities, and argues that mediatization is a fundamental feature of modern society, which creates a cultural normality through the pervasiveness of various forms of media in the lives of individuals. This means that the medium has become a field of activity for the construction and expression of identity, through which people come into contact with and make sense of a wide range of symbols and messages that are used by individuals to construct and reshape their identities. Identity construction is therefore an ongoing, dynamically interacting process in which media content, forms, usage patterns, and social behaviors act to construct and express an individual's identity, and in which constructing a mediated identity has become a routine and normal experience (Marshall, 2015). According to this view, we can understand mobile games as a cultural tool that intervenes in the process of identity construction, where players can both express their identities through the medium, and at the same time re-construct and re-adjust their identities in the interaction of the medium. As mentioned in the previous section, mobile games are an extension and complement to, rather than a substitute for, traditional video games, with socialization and physical intimacy at their core, in which players can take on different characters and explore different online spaces and lifestyles, but also choose different ways of expressing their identities depending on the type of mobile game.

On the other hand, media technology and socio-culture are also an important perspective in the concept of mediatized identities. Couldry (2012) advocates the view of media as a practice, which implies that media is not only a collection of technologies and contents, but also a collection of cultures, behaviors, and habits, which integrally shape an individual's social life and personal identification. For example, technological advances have enriched the expression of an individual's identity in mobile games, where players can customize the appearance of their avatars, skills, items, and sounds to express their preferences; the VR and AR technologies have made the gaming experience more realistic and immersive, further enhancing the realism and continuity of the player's identity in the online world; and

the integration of social features in mobile games has led to the enhancement of the game's social attributes, further expanding the field of this constructed and demonstrated identity. And on the cultural level, the mobile game Onmyoji offers a great perspective. The game is based on the Japanese and Chinese Yin Yang Master cultures, and incorporates the rich myths, folktales, and historical lore of East Asia to provide players with an extremely culturally-rich virtual worldview. The game adds an introduction to each character, including aspects of its origin, history, and lore, and even reinforces these cultural perspectives by repeating them in game quests, such as incorporating the character's backstory into game missions or making traditional festivals special events in the game, which can potentially shape the player's recognition and understanding of East Asian culture. Thus, this cultural dimension extends identity construction beyond in-game role-playing to cultural identification and self-perception.

3.4 Online Identity Model

In addition, Nagy and Koles (2014) proposed a conceptual model of online identity to discuss the process of constructing an online identity, which they argued could not be built without certain guidelines and expectations. Three levels are included in the construction process: personal, micro and macro. These levels are depicted as different structural elements that work together to facilitate the construction of online identities. Firstly, there is the personal level, when an individual decides to build an online identity, he/she has to decide how to represent him/herself in the online world, in other words, participating in the online space means that the user needs to construct elements that conform to the rules of this space, for example, in social media, the individual needs to construct his/her icons, homepage, and profile, in mobile games, the individual needs to construct his/her avatar image, nicknames, and so on, and in online communities the individual needs to construct his/her communal affiliation and self-categorization. In this process, these elements will essentially reflect the individual's values, goals and beliefs, as well as the true or ideal self.

Secondly, the micro level represents the element of connection between the individual and the community. In other words, this dimension is the field of online identity socialization, where individuals establish social connections and cultural identities through interactions and actions in the online space. Examples include online life stories, intimate relationships, online community participation and digital cultural practices. And third, the macro-level encompasses elements associated with the more global community character of online communities, including global communities and networks. This dimension illustrates how online identities are influenced by larger social structures and global cultural flows.

In general, this theoretical framework views online identity as a multifaceted concept that encompasses three dimensions, all of which simultaneously and continuously interact with each other and are responsible for the evolution of online identity as a dynamic entity. The model implies that the construction of online identities is a continuous interactive process in which individuals' behaviors and choices in the online space are influenced by the inherent or voluntary rules of a particular community, and that as these rules change and individuals accumulate experience, their online identities adapt and evolve accordingly, and that this change in turn continues to shape the environment, which underscores the dynamic and multidimensional nature of online identities. Thus, Nagy and Koles' (2014) conceptualization provides a framework for multilevel analysis, yet some limitations remain. For example, cultural specificities, the social and cultural environment of Chinese youths have an impact on the categorization, and design of mobile games, which also implies that this cultural specificity may have a unique impact on Chinese youths' online identity construction. In addition, as game design evolves, new game mechanics and social features continue to emerge, and these factors may affect online identity construction in ways different from those described by the model. Overall, the above theories and concepts provide a rich theoretical support and research framework for studying identity construction in mobile games. In the next chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology.

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Study design

In this study, I am interested in investigating the process of identity construction and its influencing factors among Chinese youth in mobile games. I would like to refer to relevant literature, discuss the rationale for my methods selection, and detail my study design to ensure the transparency and replicability of my research methodology. As discussed in the previous two chapters, youth's identity construction in mobile gaming is characterized by complexity and continuity and is in a state of constant negotiation. Therefore, this paper utilizes a mixed research methodology of online questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews.

Mixed methods are the collection, analysis, mixing, or integration of quantitative and qualitative data at some point in a study to better understand the research question (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006; Bowen, Rose, & Pilkington, 2017). In this paper, a sequential explanatory design was used, which means that data were collected and analyzed in two sequential stages in this study ((Ivankova et al., 2006). I first collected and analyzed quantitative data through an online questionnaire, and then sequentially collected and analyzed qualitative data to help interpret the quantitative results obtained in the first phase, and the second phase (qualitative phase) builds upon the first (quantitative phase), which are interconnected in the study. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and its subsequent analysis provide an overall understanding of the research question, and the qualitative data and its analysis refine and make sense of these statistical findings by exploring the participants' perspectives in more depth (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Furthermore, I had to deal with issues of prioritization, implementation and integration of quantitative and qualitative methods (Ivankova et al., 2006). Firstly, although the collection and analysis of qualitative data was the second stage of the research process, from the beginning I decided to prioritize it. This decision was influenced by the purpose of the study, which was how youth construct identities in mobile gaming and what factors this is influenced by. Secondly, quantitative and

qualitative data were collected and analyzed sequentially. I first collected quantitative data through an online questionnaire; the purpose of this phase was to collect extensive data to show trends and possible influences on youth's identity construction in mobile gaming, and to select participants purposefully and design interview questions for the second phase of the study. That is, the quantitative data and descriptive analyses provided me with a general understanding of what internal and external factors influence identity construction and what specific aspects of youth's identity construction are manifested. The qualitative data and its analysis provide the necessary basis for explaining why these factors affect identity construction and how identity is constructed. Third, in discussing the findings of the study as a whole, I combined the results of both the quantitative and qualitative phases. In the Findings section, I integrated the results of both phases in order to answer the research questions more fully and to develop a more favorable and meaningful description of the research questions.

In addition, questionnaires allow for the collection of data from a large number of participants in a short period of time, and this method allows for the efficient collection and comparison of data across different populations (Fowler, 2013). Questionnaires are generally less costly than other methods (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014), especially when using online survey platforms or electronic questionnaires, and it guarantees participant anonymity, which helps to increase participation and reduce social desirability bias (Groves et al., 2009). While questionnaires allow for the collection of extensive player data, in order to explore the research data in depth, I also needed richer and more detailed personal experiences and perspectives, which are important for understanding the complex process of identity construction. In-depth Interview is a qualitative research method that explores participants' perspectives, experiences, and feelings through open-ended conversations that can reveal people's deep-seated motivations and behaviors (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), which may be difficult to capture in quantitative research, and the flexibility of open-ended questions that allow the researcher to adapt the questions at the right time based on the progress of the conversation, to have an in-depth

discussion of the individual cases, and to allow the researcher to extract a wide range of insights and patterns from individual cases, which enables the researcher to understand in detail the perspectives of the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, in this study, the questionnaire provided extensive quantitative data that helped to identify general trends and group characteristics, while the in-depth interviews used open-ended questions to further explain the quantitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2016), enhancing the depth and contextual interpretation of the results. This combination of methods can effectively compensate for the limitations of a single approach, helping to address a wider range of questions and providing a more scalable and creative approach to research (Bowen et al., 2017).

In addition, I need to clarify the categorization of game type and game duration in the questionnaire. First, in the questionnaire, I used a game categorization model that is more in line with Chinese specificities. According to Ip and Che (2016), China has a variety of media channels and platforms for publishing, ranking and evaluating mobile games, all of which classify mobile game types into eight categories, including sports competition, chess and cards, leisure and puzzle, flight and shooting, management and strategy, online games, action and adventure, and role-playing. Secondly, a survey on the frequency of gaming found (Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2003) that the sample of players varied very widely in questions about the number of hours played per week, whereas in Charlton and Danforth's (2007) study, the average number of hours their participants spent playing games was 18.64 hours per week. In this paper, I hope to identify high-frequency players through the metric of game length, which may vary depending on the study, cultural context, and game type. According to Google (2022), mobile game players worldwide spend an average of 5.3 hours per week playing games. According to Iresearch (2022), in China's mobile gaming sector, the average player spends more than 8.3 hours per week playing games. Therefore, when designing the questionnaire, I regarded 16 hours as the criterion for high-frequency players, which can reasonably differentiate high-frequency players because they have more time to move through different mobile

games, and their behavioral patterns and identity construction will be different from others.

4.2.1 Online Questionnaire Survey

The purpose of the online questionnaire survey was to collect extensive data to show the current broad trends in mobile gaming among youth players in China. The questionnaire consisted of two parts (Appendix), the first part collected basic information, which included gender, age, occupation, city of living, hours of play, and frequently played games. The questions in the second section become more specific and personal, such as interaction situations, characterization in the game, emotions, consumption, motivation and other subjective questions. Since I created an online questionnaire, it was important to pre-test it (Dillman et al., 2014) before posting it. This step helped me to test the reliability of the link and the QR code of the questionnaire, as well as to detect possible risks and flaws in the technology.

4.2.2 Questionnaire Production and Distribution

I produced the online questionnaire through a popular Chinese online questionnaire platform, Wenjuanxing (its English translation is Sojump, and the English version is SurveyPluto). This platform offers the ability to create and manage online questionnaires, but the platform is primarily geared towards Chinese Internet users, and its main interface and supporting documentation are in Chinese. This platform supports the sharing of questionnaires on Chinese Internet platforms in the form of QR codes or links, which can be accessed through WeChat and cell phone camera scans.

Furthermore, the questionnaire was distributed via WeChat, Weibo and QQ, three of China's most popular social media platforms, as well as online gamer communities. On social media (WeChat, Weibo, QQ), I sent out invitations as a graduating student, inviting mobile game players who fit the age range to fill out questionnaires. Around December 2023, I then planned to enter some online gamer communities as a regular gamer, which took the form of online chat groups, and access to the communities

required permission from the administrators. Since I am a mobile player myself, it would be easier for me to enter the community, I would interact with the community members, but our interactions were only in-game, text-based, anonymous, and did not involve any level of research, and by doing so, I joined 7 chat groups. I hope that this will reach a wider range of players than players of a single game. When I'm choosing a community of players, I choose groups that include a wide range of game types and users in order to gather diverse data. Around March 2024, I started distributing the questionnaires within the gaming community with the administrator's permission and simultaneously on social media. I ended up collecting 443 questionnaires in 15 days.

4.2.3 Questionnaire Analysis

After the questionnaire collection was completed, I first organized and cleaned the data by removing participant data that did not fit the age range and checking the data for completeness and consistency. After that, I conducted descriptive analysis using the tools embedded in the Wenjuanxing software to describe the basic features of the data for the subsequent part of qualitative data collection and analysis. This included participants' age, gender, length of game play, type of game often played, and so on. These descriptive statistical analyses provide a general overview that helps to understand the basic situation and main characteristics of the sample. I should note that I did not conduct a complex statistical analysis because on the one hand this was not the main goal of this study. The quantitative data were mainly used to describe the basic information and behavioral features of the participants and to provide a background and reference for the qualitative study. Therefore, descriptive statistical analysis has been able to fulfill the research needs. On the other hand, quantitative data is also intended to provide rules and complement the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

4.3.1 In-Depth Interview

I use in-depth interviews to explore the construction of identity and experiences of youth players in games, as well as their perceptions and potential impacts on this

construction. I plan to use a semi-structured interview format, with flexible adjustments and in-depth discussion based on pre-set questions, and audio-recording of the interview process to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the data. The interviews lasted approximately 30-75 minutes. The interview questions (Appendix) covered the individual's character selections, game experiences, social interactions, emotional responses, and perceptions of identity constructions, etc. in the game.

I plan to recruit 10-15 participants on Chinese social media (WeChat, Weibo, and QQ) from a group characterized by Chinese youths between the ages of 25-35 and who regularly play mobile games. First, I created a recruitment advertisement that stated the traits of the participant, informed consent, and the purpose of this study. I posted this advertisement on my personal social media, and I asked my close friends to help me spread the recruitment advertisement. And recruiting in a player community I'm already involved in; I got permission from the admins before recruiting. In the end, I obtained 12 participants who met the criteria; 2 of them were from social media, 7 were from different gamer communities, 2 were my classmates, and 1 was a mobile game live-streamer who I was his fan, and who agreed that he could be a participant after I explained the study objectives and informed consent to him.

4.3.2 Developing Trust

Immediately after a participant agrees, I would have a first communication with them, which would be about 10 minutes, to confirm and reiterate their willingness to participate, informed consent, availability and ways to participate, and to find out what mobile games they usually play. During the first communication, I hope to begin to develop trust. This trust is somewhere between that of a friend and a stranger, not that of a researcher. First of all, language is an important tool for building trust, and I could communicate fluently in Chinese with the participants, which avoided the language barrier. Secondly, it is important to know about the mobile games they play as this contains some information about game play, terminology and culture etc., and I think that learning in advance will avoid some unnecessary explanations in the

interviews as the best way of meaning making is to listen to people talk about their experiences in their own way and in their own language (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). For example, when they're talking about their experiences in their own way, they don't, and don't need to, explain terms and basic playstyles to me, which both keeps the interview flowing and suggests to them that I share their interests, which fosters trust more quickly.

Thirdly, I would like to be able to enter into the participant's gaming world, and since I am also a mobile gamer, I would ask them in the first communication to play a mobile game with me if they would like to do so. I played a total of 11 participants with their favorite games, during which we simply shared our feelings about the game and did not discuss anything related to the interview. However, one participant was an exception to this rule as he did not like to play games with people he knew and he felt that it would affect his game play, which I fully respected and understood. Fourth, the ability to empathize and listen carefully is also important. Having grown up in a traditional Chinese family myself, I am of a similar age to the participants and have experienced the fears and hopes of individuals under the structure of Chinese society, as well as the pressures and anxieties from family and society. The shared social and cultural background allowed me to empathize with the participants. Therefore, I would use these to develop trust between the participant and me to ensure that we discussed their more private truths during the interview.

4.3.3 The Interview Process

Before the interview begins, I would read the informed consent again to make sure they are clear about the purpose of the study, the methodology, the possible risks, the rights of the participants, the confidentiality of the data, and how the results will be fed back. Interviewees were required to verbally indicate that they had read the informed consent and agreed to participate in the interview prior to the start of the interview.

In all the interviews, 2 participants had face-to-face conversations with me, and the location we chose for the interviews was a restaurant. Because they are both my

friends and we share the same cultural background, the restaurant was an ideal location for the interviews, which is in line with the Chinese habit of talking about things at the dinner table and also creates a relaxing atmosphere. But the restaurant was noisy, so I had microphones for recording for the participants. The rest of the 10 were conducted via online meeting, and we chose WeChat and Tencent Meeting because they are the two platforms most commonly used by Chinese people, and because Tencent Meeting offers more than an hour of free usage and faster network response compared to Zoom. They are free to turn the camera on or off as they choose. I will take notes during the interview, but only key words and a few symbols, as careful listening is important to develop trust and make the interview flow.

4.3.4 Data Analysis

There are four steps involved in the qualitative data analysis process. First, I transcribed the audio recordings into text form and integrated the text and notes to categorize the interviews, which included basic information, social behaviors in mobile gaming, consumption behaviors, and the impact of mobile gaming. Second, I coded the text in each category to identify recurring themes and discourses. By reading the text several times, I marked each discourse and assigned it one or more codes that reflected the participant's opinions, emotions, and behaviors. After coding was complete, I grouped similar codes into broader themes to further analyze their inherent connections. Each theme encompassed the perspectives and experiences of multiple interviewees, and these themes included: social interactions in games, consumer motivations and behaviors, the emotional and psychological impact of games, identity construction, and more.

Third, the themes that were identified were analyzed. I interpreted the relevant data under each theme, looking for differences and connections. Fourth, the results of my thematic analyses were compared and combined with the quantitative data to have verified the generalizability of the interview findings, which contributed to the reliability of the study's conclusions. For example, the relationship between participants' identity choices and anxiety in the game, I would combine the descriptive

analyses from the quantitative data to determine the applicability of this relationship to a larger sample.

4.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Security

First of all, in the questionnaire, I had asked the administrator's permission before entering the player community, and before distributing. However, I entered the player community as a graduating student. This resulted in potential participants being initially unaware of the existence of the study, and I needed to handle this with care, explaining it to community members and obtaining their informed consent at the appropriate time to comply with ethical requirements. I continued to participate anonymously in discussions and interactions in the group and sometimes played games with community members. I gradually became part of the community, and this participation-built trust and familiarity between the community members and me, even though we did not know each other's real information, and we were only interacting and playing games in the online space, this trust was an important factor in the proactive participation of the community members. Due to anonymity, community members do not feel scrutinized or judged when participating in the questionnaire, which somewhat reduces the possibility of social desirability bias, as they perceive the questionnaire to have been initiated by an "insider" who understands them and shares their interests. This trust not only increased member participation, but also prompted some members to offer to help me disseminate the questionnaire. During the questionnaire period, about 15 community members expressed their willingness to voluntarily post this questionnaire to their own social circles in order to help me collect data.

In the questionnaire, I place the informed consent information on the first page so that participants can read it before completing. Furthermore, the questionnaire does not collect personally identifiable information from participants (e.g., name, address, phone number, etc.), and the collected data is only accessible to me to ensure the security of participants' information.

Second, I kept the data of all the interviewees strictly confidential, and since most of the participants did not want to reveal their nicknames, I used code numbers in the analysis section. Males were coded M and females were coded F. The first participant interviewed was a male, and his number was M1, and so on.

4.5 Limitations of The Study Design

While online questionnaires and in-depth interviews can complement each other as a mixed research method, their combined use faces multiple limitations as described above. Online questionnaires often rely on voluntary participation, which can lead to sample bias, and it was difficult for me to control whether participants provided inaccurate information, which could affect the validity and reliability of the quantitative data, which is one of the reasons why I only did descriptive analyses of the quantitative data, as these limitations could lead to a loss of accuracy and reliability when using statistical analyses to infer group characteristics.

Mixed research methods may present challenges of inconsistent or difficult data consolidation during the integration process, which can also affect the validity and wholeness of the results. Although this did not occur in my study, this complexity and limitation is worth considering when using mixed methods.

Further, this study relies primarily on qualitative data, which may have some degree of social desirability bias. As I am a mobile gamer myself, I may have my own opinions and stereotypes about some mobile games. Therefore, this is one of the limitations of the study. Social desirability bias and researcher bias may affect the objectivity and accuracy of the study, and during the research process, the researcher should maintain self-reflection, record and analyze the data objectively, and avoid bias and over-interpretation.

In addition, digital ethnography is a methodology that is well suited to this study. It applies traditional ethnographic methods to research in a digital environment (Murthy, 2008). However, it requires the researcher to invest a lot of time in participant observation and data collection, and on the one hand, I did not have enough time and funds for my research, and on the other hand, I lacked experience in

using this method, and lacked the technical tools for the possible information overload, and the analysis of large amounts of data. Similarly, I did not choose focus groups when collecting qualitative data, partly because this may not reflect the diversity of the wider player base, and partly because social desirability bias is more likely to occur in group discussions, and because participants tend to interact less deeply and authentically in groups than they do in familiar environments.

Findings

1.1 Digital Technology Brings Change to The Game: Three Periods

With the development of digital technology, mobile games have become a part of the daily life of the youths, according to the questionnaire results, about 54 percent of the participants spent an average of 11-20 hours per week on mobile games, and about 85 percent spent an average of 1-20 hours per week (Table 1).

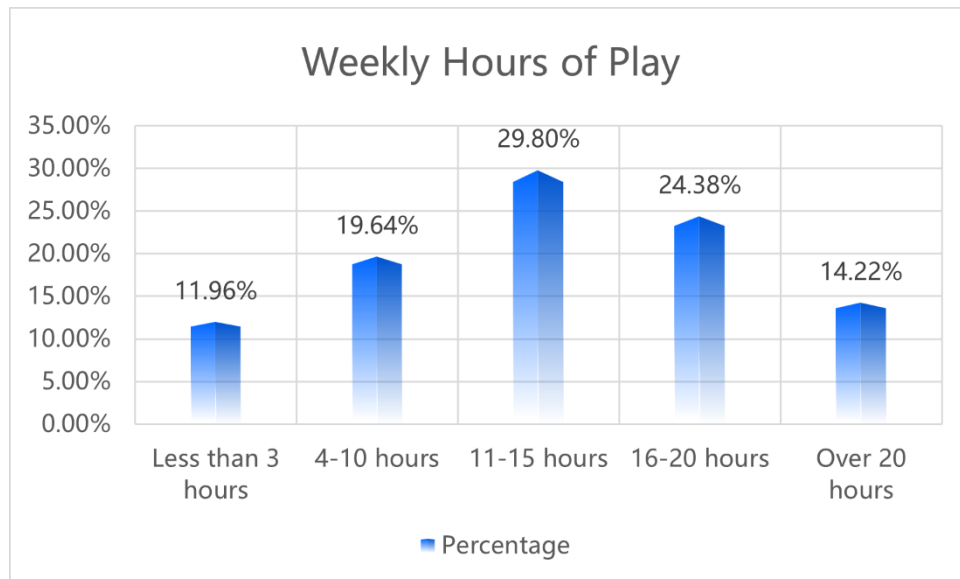


Table 1, Players' weekly playing hours

Further, the experience that mobile games bring to the player is constantly changing. In my interviews with 12 participants, I found that there were three distinct periods in their experience of playing mobile games, in which they engaged,

interacted, and socialized differently, with different implications for the construction of their identities in mobile games. Four of the interviewees said they started their mobile games journey when they got their first cell phone, while five said they started playing mobile games on their parents' phones, and they almost all started with the classic games of Snake and Tetris. Therefore, I see the non-smartphone era as the first period in which almost all mobile games were single-player games that could only be played independently by one player, without the need for an internet connection or the involvement of other players. As interviewee M3 said:

"When I was very young, I would play games on my father's phone, and I totally thought it was fun because I didn't have a console or a computer. My parents would use the phone games as rewards, rewarding me with hours of play after I did my homework, or got good grades on exams."

This period was before about 2011, and the interviewees' student years were spent in this simple gaming experience. In addition to playing games on their parents' phones, as indicated by M3, it was more common for three or five students to take turns using a single phone to play the game, and the person who lost the level was considered to have lost, and he would need to pass the phone to the next person, and they would compare scores and discuss game play. This increases the interactivity of the single-player game, and although the game itself is not interactive, it becomes a medium for social interaction among classmates. In this model, the social function of the game becomes important. The process of playing helps players construct a collective identity and group culture, and this interaction extends beyond the game. This interaction becomes a social event where people build friendships and share skills through common interests. At this stage, mobile games serve more than just entertainment and relaxation; they become part of social interaction and youth cultural expression. As interviewee M1 said:

"My five middle school classmates and I often share a single phone, and we play together after class, or during gym class, although we can only play for a few minutes each in an hour, and most of the time we watch the others play."

The six of us played together so often that teachers and other students thought we were a small group. But that friendship has lasted until now. "

Then, the second period began with the popularization of smartphones and the development of mobile internet in China, which started around 2011. Mobile Internet technology means universal network connectivity and the possibility of multiplayer online gaming, and mobile games are shifting from a single-player model to a networked multiplayer online interactive model. Participant F5 said:

"I didn't play any games before, and around 2011, Temple Run suddenly became popular, and all my classmates around me were playing it. Although I didn't have a cell phone at that time, I would play it on my classmates', and then I found the game so appealing that I promised my mom that I wanted an iPhone, or an iTouch (since Temple Run was only available in IOS at first), but at the cost of me needing to get to the top of my class. "

At this period, mobile games such as Angry Birds, Fruit Ninja, and Temple Run became very popular in China, and although they still had single-player features, they gradually introduced leaderboards and social sharing features that allowed players to post their scores on social media to compare and compete with their friends. The majority of my interviewees, at this period, owned their own smartphones and although they already had their own devices, thus reducing physical device sharing, their collective gaming activities in the offline world still continued to exist, largely due to the fact that the online interactive features of the mobile games of the time were not yet complete. While players could share leaderboards to social media, this level of sharing was limited as many games had not yet been able to fully integrate with a wide range of social media platforms, and the form of sharing by players was limited to text, images, and links, which lacked interactivity. However, at this period, their online identities in mobile games began to take shape as personalization and customization emerged in mobile games. In Temple Run, for example, players can choose either a male or female character to play as, as the game progresses and gold

coins are accumulated, players can unlock two other characters. This provides an option for self-expression and exploration, and players can not only choose a character, but also showcase their gaming achievements in a wider social network.

Although players began to try to construct online identities within this period, Chinese players did not have a strong sense of recognition for mobile games because of the incomplete online socialization features in mobile games and the fact that most of the popular games were foreign games. Thus, the third period, roughly from 2015 to the present, has seen a major explosion of Chinese-designed mobile games as digital technology and mobile device performance have further improved. Of all the interviewees, all male interviewees mentioned the games Honor of Kings and Game for Peace, and all female interviewees mentioned the game Happy Elimination. Although questions about the alleged copycat nature of these games have persisted within the player community, they have not affected the popularity of these games in China in any way. This is because these mobile games generally offer sophisticated gameplay, add voice communication features within the game, and are directly linked to players' social media outlets, which strongly enhances players' social interaction and identity construction experience. Players' social interaction experience has been enhanced like never before. For example, in-game voice communication allows players to communicate strategies or just chat in real time while playing the game, and such communication greatly enhances the immersion and social immediacy of the game. In addition, players' gaming accounts are their social media accounts, and they can check the status and achievements of their friends in the game, which not only enhances the game's social function, but also connects players' online identities more closely with their offline identities. However, with this trend of complex gameplay, Happy Elimination offers an alternative perspective. It can be said that Happy Elimination is the Chinese version of Candy Crush Saga, whose gameplay consists mainly of eliminating adjacent candies by swapping them to form a row or column of three or more candies of the same color to eliminate them. It offers a simple and engaging gameplay that doesn't require too long of a commitment and doesn't have high intensity competition, but the leaderboards have expanded to the outside of the

game. In other words, leaderboards connect social media and circles of familiarity, and individuals can view their own rankings and those of their friends, whether in the online or offline space. F5 puts it this way:

"The game is just very simple to play, but it can correlate your social media and I want to be on the top of the leaderboards as much as possible, so sometimes I'll spend to get through the levels quickly. "

According to Jiguang (2020), there are a total of 170 million elimination game players in China, with the proportion of female players reaching 68.5 percent. The popularity of these types of games suggests that the mobile games market is becoming more diverse in terms of gender, and that game designers are beginning to take more account of the needs and preferences of different players. Overall, this period of mobile games is not only a leap in technology, but also an advancement in culture and social interaction. The social elements and gameplay of mobile games have become richer, effectively contributing to the construction of players' identities and making mobile games a part of the lives of modern Chinese youths. This finding confirms Hongladarom's (2011) view that our social interactions and identity expressions are increasingly dependent on information technology and online platforms. These technologies and platforms constitute the external conditions for identity expression.

5.1.2 Mobile Games and Anxiety

In previous researches, there are many researches proved that mobile games can make players feel relaxed and entertained (Grieve et al., 2013; Yue, 2016; Chen, 2021). However, in the results of my questionnaire (Table 2), the number of people who usually feel anxiety in mobile games reached 90 percent, and 73 percent of people felt that the interactions in the game sometimes lead to conflict and stress (Table 3).

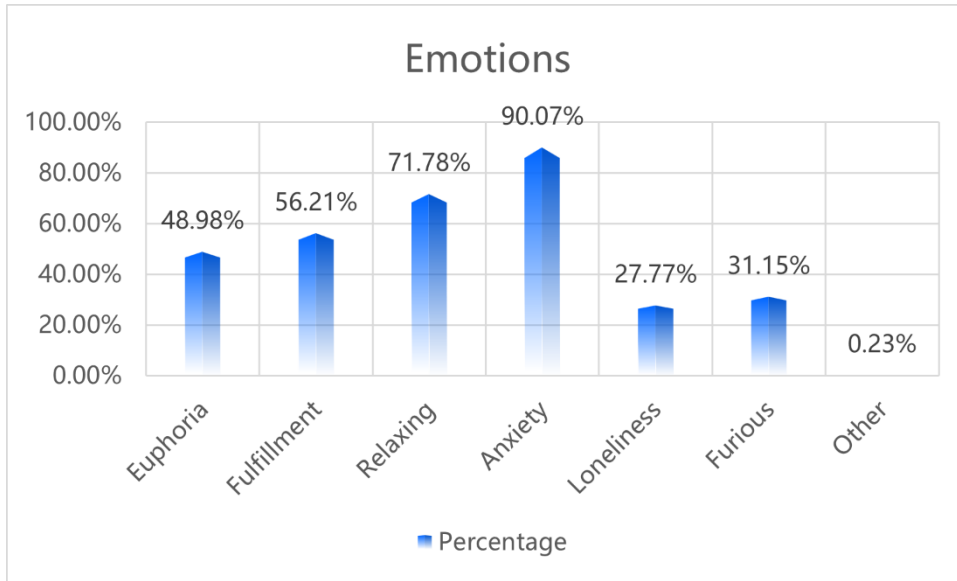


Table 2, which emotions players usually feel in mobile games

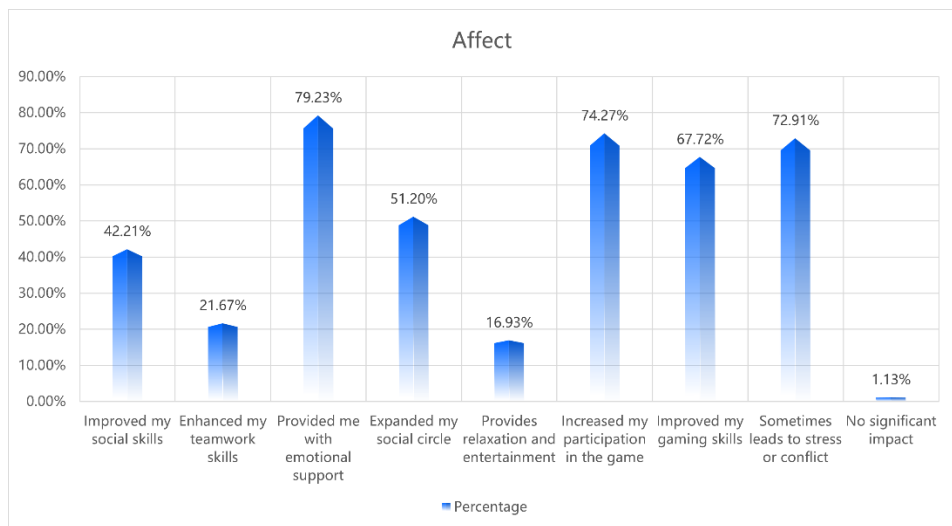


Table 3, Impact of friendships/interactions in the game as perceived by the players

In the in-depth interviews, everyone mentioned that they developed varying degrees of anxiety while playing mobile games, even though they felt relaxed and entertained during the game. Overall, these anxieties are caused by three main aspects. First, there is the mobile game itself, including game design and cheaters. For example, mobile games set up complex characters and strict time limits in order to increase player engagement and the challenge of the game. As M3 said:

"If I win, I feel happy and full of fulfillment, but most of the time it's me

losing and I can't win no matter what, and at these times I'm especially anxious, I'm in denial, I feel like a loser, and after getting stuck in this cycle of emotions, the more I lose the more I want to keep playing until I win. "

M3 enjoys playing KartRider, a game that has a monthly event called the Arena. Within this event, players need to constantly challenge other people's achievements while their own achievements are constantly being challenged by other people, and if the player loses the challenge, the player will not be able to receive rewards. This emotional anxiety, while boosting player participation, also makes the player very miserable. In addition, cheaters also complicate players' emotions; on the one hand, players lose interest in some games because of the large number of cheaters, and on the other hand, players are very dissatisfied with the attitude of the game company, M4 said:

"After the release of PUBG Mobile (the predecessor to Game for Peace because its Chinese name violated censorship rules), there were too many cheaters. I initially played the PC version just because there were too many cheaters and then came to play the mobile version. The result is still the same, but I love the game so much I get anxious every time I play it and I have to play it again. Reporting cheating players in the game doesn't help at all. "

According to Dataeye (2023), the number of mobile game cheaters increased by 84 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, with over 810 million cheater accounts detected. Even though the existence of cheaters is widely known, players have to endure them because they love the game. Although gaming companies are cracking down on cheating, all they can do is to block cheating game accounts, and cheating players can still sign up for new accounts and start playing. Although cheating behavior is not within the scope of this study, it is still one of the causes of player anxiety.

Secondly, the disharmonious gaming environment and player anxiety caused by abusive discourse is another important factor. All interviewees mentioned experiences of being verbally abused in games, and because of the excellent online interaction features within games, although it improves the efficiency of in-game communication and socialization, it also makes abusive behaviors more likely to occur. As long as players avoid the restricted words, they can still interact by sending abusive texts and sounds in large amounts. It is estimated that in 2023, a total of 14.67 billion abusive messages were detected in mobile games (Dataeye, 2023). This condition poses a significant negative impact on the mental health of players, with the experience increasing anxiety and leading to active avoidance of online interactions. Interviewee M12 said:

"Getting verbally abused in game is a regular thing, and I usually choose to shut down chat to deal with it. Everyone seems to be so sensitive and emotionally impulsive nowadays that the slightest thing can cause verbal abuse. "

Normally, verbal abuse triggers a larger scale of verbal abuse towards each other. F11 puts it this way:

"My gender in the game is female, and every time I play poorly, I get insulted, most often by people who say that women shouldn't play the game, and that women should go home and raise their children. Usually, I'll find a male player I'm close to join me in abusing the person who insulted me. "

M3 mentioned a trend of a changing Internet environment in China:

"Let me give you an example that may not be appropriate. I started playing online games when I was about 6 years old, the online environment was very good at that time, I was still an elementary school student, and my gaming skills were not good, but the people I played with, even strangers, would encourage me and teach me how to play the game, and sometimes even though my gaming skills were really terrible, they would at most laugh at me in a joking tone but

not verbally abusive, even though I didn't show that I was a primary school student. After about 2012, there was a massive explosion of abusive behavior on the internet. Whether you play games or browse social media, this behavior is very common. At first I would fight back after I was verbally abused, but then I realized that the online environment was so bad that I started to avoid socializing in games because I subconsciously felt that they were not nice people."

Meanwhile M3 says it seems to be an Asian specialty:

"I really enjoy playing the game and the mobile game has different servers in different countries. When I play on European servers, I observe that players most often use words like useless to express their dissatisfaction, but they give some reasonable advice like: you're useless, you should do this. Whereas on Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese servers, insults turn into personal attacks, curses on family members, shaming players into sluts, and other words like that."

Players may be subjected to verbal abuse for failures, poor decisions or simple misunderstandings in competitive games, and this is even more prevalent in team-dependent games, where a single failure often leads to blame and verbal abuse. This disharmonious gaming environment leads to generalized anxiety among players and has an impact on their construction of identity in mobile games. Because of anxiety or emotional problems, players are more likely to make mistakes during gameplay that can affect their performance, especially in multiplayer team games, where mistakes can affect their reputation and sense of belonging within the gaming community, and be perceived as unreliable, uncooperative, or emotionally weak by team and community members. Hence, there is a segment of players who will tend to choose characters that feel safe or familiar in the game, as it reduces the chance of mistakes and errors, thus maintaining their sense of belonging in the social circle. Like M3 said:

"I only play the tank character in Honor of Kings. Because I'm afraid of being abused by others after making mistakes. Because the tank role doesn't require good gameplay skills, it just requires standing in front of everyone. I actually want to try playing other characters, but usually I only dare to do so when I play with my friends in the offline world, because they are all friends who know each other well and won't scold me for playing badly. "

In addition, M7 provides another reason for being abused:

"Sometimes you get abused when you play too well. Because I need to interfere with the other team in a match to win, the person who was interfered with will humiliate me after the match is over, some people say I use cheaters, some people abuse my family just because I won the game. It even happened when I was live streaming."

The example of M7 shows that an excellent performance may not only trigger appreciation from teammates, but also hostility and verbal abuse from opponents. This hostile and insulting behavior not only affects players' gaming experience, but also negatively impacts their mental health and recognition of identity. And, in anonymous gaming situations, abusive behavior is more prevalent among players, who can assume less or no responsibility or risk at all, even on publicly broadcast platforms. This hostile environment not only makes players more cautious in choosing their game characters, but also affects their game performance and game experience.

Third, anxiety will also originate in the offline world, but it will be reflected in the online world. F8 is a casual mobile player who enjoys elimination and management games. She put it this way:

"I also feel anxious when I play elimination games. I actually play them to relax after work or study, but every time I play them, I can't concentrate, I think about the stresses of daily life, I work overtime a lot and I have to pay the house loan, and every time I play the game, I think about all these trivialities and I become anxious. "

And M6's answer offers another perspective:

"I often abuse people in the game because it's cool. In fact, I just want to release my real-life stress and anxiety, and I go offline right after I insult people so that they don't have a chance to abuse me. If my account gets blocked, I just register another account and go back to the game to release my stress. All of my information in the game is fake, name, birthday, associated social media accounts, so no one can find me after I abuse someone. "

Although their anxiety does not come from the game, but is reflected in the online world, life stresses and anxieties from the offline world may make individuals more sensitive to social interactions in mobile games, allowing them to find new avenues of expression for their online behaviors and identity construction. Thus, anxiety comes from three main dimensions, all of which affect the construction of the player's identity to varying degrees. Anxiety can significantly affect an individual's self-esteem and self-identity, which manifests itself in gameplay in the form of effects on character choice and gameplay style, where players may choose fewer challenging characters or gameplay modes due to anxiety in order to avoid gameplay scenarios that lead to greater anxiety.

Further, social anxiety particularly affects players' team interactions and collaborations; players with high levels of anxiety may exhibit avoidance behaviors in team games, which can affect their social identities and sense of belonging within the gaming community. In addition, anonymity in mobile games leads to a lack of responsibility; the use of fake information and identities in games provides a cover of anonymity that allows players to act without direct consequences. This anonymity reduces responsibility and allows players to feel free to express negative or offensive discourse without fear of facing social or legal consequences. This pattern of behavior may lead to an increase in negative interactions in the gaming community, disrupting the social and gaming environment. This behavior has a dual effect on the construction of player self-identity.

On the one hand, while such behavior may provide temporary relief from the stresses of the offline world, it may exacerbate an individual's negative self-image, as persistent aggressive behavior and negative social interactions may become internalized as part of an individual's self-perception. On the other hand, such behavior affects the victims' experience and perceived identity, which may lead them to feel excluded, victimized, or discriminated against, affecting their engagement and identity construction in the gaming community.

5.2.1 Constructing an Online Identity

Mobile game player identity formation is a complex psychological and social process involving how individuals understand themselves in games and how they are perceived by other players. This process is not only influenced by the individual game experience, but is also related to social interactions, cultural contexts and technological environments. Players can often choose or create avatars in games that have different appearances, skills, and backstories, and this process of selection and customization is the initial stage of identity formation through which players explore themselves and achieve self-expression. Like M1 said:

"It's that I like to play (in Honor of Kings) tanks and support (characters). I think they are like my personality, stoic, able to give support to others and a reliable person. I like the strong male characters because I grew up with masculine characters, like Marines. "

M1 believes that his choices in games are consistent with his personality and that he has enjoyed playing shooting games since he was a child because he considers the characters in such games to be manly, in his words, like "marines". M2, however, offers an alternative perspective:

"I prefer to play role-playing games. Usually, the character's appearance I randomly generate. I usually like to use a female avatar with short white hair, I really like that look. And there's another important reason, because female characters have slimmer models in shooting games, which are less noticeable to

enemies during gameplay. "

M2 has low self-confidence about his appearance, and even in the game he doesn't want to face the process of customizing his avatar, so he chooses to randomly generate his avatar appearance. And he prefers to use female characters, not only because they provide a better gameplay experience, but also because he likes female characters with distinctive features (short white hair).

The cases of M1 and M2 reflect the complexity of identity construction in mobile gaming, where the player's character choices reflect the player's personality and self-traits in the offline space, as well as being influenced by the game mechanics. M1's choice of characters in the game that matched his personality and that were masculine reflected his recognition of traditional male roles, a choice that increased his self-efficacy and allowed him to feel more empowered and in control in the game. For M1, the game characters became a way for him to demonstrate and practice his ideal of masculinity. While M2's choices are more complex, he prefers to use female characters in shooting games due to the fact that female characters are modeled with a certain degree of gameplay advantage, which suggests that he seeks to be strategically successful during gameplay, and he will prefer kind and positive characters in role-playing games, reflecting a certain degree of avoidance of anxiety directly related to his offline identity; this preference is a self-protection mechanism to escape from his offline self-image, allowing him to explore different gendered roles in a safe environment. However, M3 provides an example of the spontaneous formation of an identity during play:

"I don't know when it became a symbol of a game expert to wear this kind of cap. During my gaming sessions, I noticed that expert players wore these caps, and when I watched gaming videos and live streams on video sites, I realized that almost all game experts possessed this trait."

M3 observed a phenomenon in KartRider. Many game experts would choose a specific character dress up, no matter what the character was, they always chose a

black or white cap.M7, as a game streamer, also mentioned this matter, he said that he wouldn't use this kind of dress up during live streaming because he didn't want to give himself an identity of a game expert by dressing up, he was worried that his mistake would cause the audience to ridicule him.



Figure 1, the symbol of an expert player. Source: Author



Figure 2, Game expert video in the Chinese video website Bilibili, Source: Bilibili

This is a spontaneous process of identity formation within the game and is an interesting social and cultural dynamic. This choice is both an expression of personal style and an important marker of identity and belonging; for the player, if my character wears a cap, then other people will think I'm an expert.M3 puts it this way:

"While I am not an expert, I do choose to put a cap on my character because it is not a very expensive accessory, it is simple to obtain by redeeming only a small amount of gold earned within the game. I find that most players wear

these hats. But not everyone who wears a cap is an expert, I've met people who are not as good at the game as I am and they wear caps as well."

Wearing a cap is seen by players as a sign of a high level of skill, and this symbolic dressing allows players to quickly recognize the experts in the game, which to a certain extent affects players' expectations of the game. For example, players will have expectations of what level of players they are encountering before the game starts.

Although, this style of dressing is spontaneously generated by players during gameplay, when a particular dress-up becomes symbolic of a specific group, it prompts other players to emulate the style in order to express the player group's desire for identity. The popularity of this symbolization even changes the social dynamics within the game. M3 stated that within his community, cap-based groups have formed, with a dynamic relationship based on symbolic dress-up between players. This becomes a kind of social capital that divides the social circles within the game, and even the community. Overall, the formation of player identity in mobile games encompasses aspects of personality expression, character choice, and social interactions that demonstrate players' attempts to construct or change their online persona in the game and how this affects players' social interactions.

Additionally, for youth to exist and interact in the online space, they must construct an identity to assume a specific online presence (Koles & Nagy, 2012), which is the role that an individual plays in the online space or the self-image that is presented, such as an icon, homepage, and profile, which initially existed on social media platforms and were crafted by the user. However, due to the prevalence of social media in mobile games, this means that part of a player's social media presence is transferred directly into the mobile game, allowing the player to tailor their online identity to their needs, both in the game and on social media. In the questionnaire results, 82 percent said that their nicknames, avatars and introductions are well-designed, and 58 percent said that they change the visual elements in the game frequently (Table 4). This means that players have a positive attitude in the process of

constructing their identity, and they want to express their self-identity through the content they show to other people.

Do you change nicknames, avatars, game characters, costumes, and other things on your visual system often?

■ Always ■ Sometimes ■ Hardly Ever Change

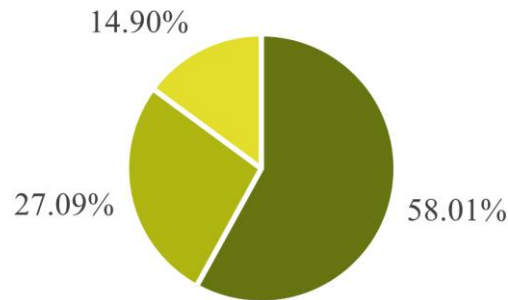


Table 4, Players' attitudes toward replacing the visual system of game characters

This also implies a convergence between the player's offline and online identities, where the individual's behavioral patterns, social identity, and self-presentation in face-to-face interactions in the offline space are also reflected in the individual's interaction and self-presentation in the online space (Hongladarom, 2011). By constantly adjusting and optimizing their online presence, players are actually learning and adapting to be more effective in their social interactions and self-expression. As a result, players demonstrate activism and dynamism in constructing their online identities. This process is not only necessary for individualized expression, but also an important part of social interaction and cultural engagement. In this way, players are able to find their place in the converging environments of gaming and social media, shaping an online identity that meets their personal needs while adapting to the social environment.

5.2.2 Convergence of Online and Offline Identities

The convergence of online and offline identities implies that there is continuity and consistency between individuals' behaviors in the offline and online worlds, which allows for more fluid interactions between the two spaces and for behaviors in the offline world to be influenced by online behaviors. In the results of the questionnaire, 81 percent felt that the sense of achievement gained in the game boosted their self-confidence in the offline world, and 85 percent felt that they learned skills useful in real life through the game. F11 mentioned one thing about herself:

"I've never been in a relationship; my teachers didn't allow it when I was a student and my parents didn't allow it after I went to university. I've always wanted to fall in love once, but this virtual feeling of falling in love was found by me in a game. I've been playing for about a year and a half, and during that time I didn't want to be in a relationship with a real person at all, I just wanted to find emotional solace in the game."

F11 is a loyal player of *Mr. Love: Queen's Choice*. The game is a female-oriented romance simulation and visual novel game that puts the player in the role of a young television producer who develops romantic relationships by interacting with four distinctive male characters while managing her career. Players need to move the story forward by choosing different dialog options and making decisions. These choices not only affect the player's relationship with in-game characters, but may also influence the game's ending. On the one hand, players explore different types of romantic relationships by interacting with different in-game male characters, which not only provides players with an avenue for emotional release, but may also help them understand and express their real-life emotional expectations, and players construct their identities by interacting with their virtual characters, who can either interact with them as she really is, or as she would ideally like to be. The player can repeat these steps to see the different outcomes of different interaction styles, and even experience scenarios that the player has not experienced in the offline world, an experience that will help the player to understand their own unrecognized values and emotional expectations. On the other hand, start with F11's answer:

"The relationship experience in this game is pretty realistic, for example I can call, text, and use social media in the game, which are all first-person perspective interactions with a great sense of realism. Also, I followed discussions on Weibo and met people who played the game together. Even though we couldn't play the game together, we would talk together about the game's plot and personal favorites."

While the core gameplay of this game is a one-player experience, its social elements focus more on the exchange of information and social interactions between players. For example, the game stimulates the identity and emotional recognition of the player community, which gathers on social media and forms a community representing a specific game, where they call themselves "Mrs. Li, Mrs. Bai, Mrs. Xu, and Mrs. Zhou" (which corresponds to the surnames of the four male protagonists, respectively). This special word is a kind of cultural symbol, which expresses the players' emotional recognition of their characters and the virtual relationship they build inside and outside the game. Through these special words, players express a sense of belonging within the community and deepen their connections with other players who share the same interests. This role-playing extends to online social activities and offline worlds, where players take on the role of a male character's couple in mobile gaming and social media, enhancing players' emotional investment in their in-game characters, and leading to more enthusiastic participation in gaming community activities, which in turn strengthens their social connectivity and sense of communal belonging. Meanwhile, they also identify with their game character's couple in the offline world, such as offline parties and role-playing activities, which give players the opportunity to show and celebrate their online identities in reality, further reinforcing the influence of game culture in players' lives. Such collective activities and shared cultural practices promote solidarity and interaction within the community. This is also in line with Butler's (1990) theory of the performativity of identity, where every choice and interaction of a player makes a performance of his or

her identity, which creates an ongoing dynamic process of identity construction in both the online and offline worlds.

As a result, mobile games not only provide players with an online entertainment space, but also become an important tool for players to construct and adjust their identities. However, players' online and offline identities are converging, and at the same time, players' social behaviors in games are also becoming converged. In addition to the Mr. Love: Queen's Choice example, many player identities are seeing convergence in games such as Honor of Kings, League of Legends, Game for Peace, and, more importantly, the convergence of players' gaming and social behaviors both online and offline. M1 put it this way:

"Although I play the game alone most of the time, I like to play with my friends the most, it's nice to have online voice calls together, it's not important to win or lose with them, it's important that we all have fun together."

In my interviews, players have stated that they enjoy playing with their friends. By friends, they mean a network of acquaintances in offline social circles and people they have known for a long time on the internet, which means that even though these strangers on the internet never interacted with the players in the offline world, their friendships were maintained for a long time. M2 put it this way:

"The people I play Call of Duty with now are partly good friends from life, and partly people I met a long time ago, we met when we played the online game together, and even though we've never met in person, our friendship has lasted in the game."

M3 put it this way:

"I don't like to play with strangers, including people I know in the game, at least I don't play together with voice calls on, usually I have to either play alone or with real friends. Playing with them, no matter how many games we lose, we don't have anxiety, even though it's a little bit unhappy, but when we all play together, apart from in-game communication, we talk, just like when we were in

high school, in university."

Mobile games and online interactions have become part of players' daily lives. The player's social network contains both a circle of acquaintances in the offline world as well as online friends met in the game, which means that social bonds between the offline and online worlds are intertwined, and the player's social interactions in the offline world expand to the online world and vice versa. Despite players' desire to highlight certain aspects of their personalities in their online identities (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013), the framework of front and back stage (Goffman, 1959) is obscured because of the convergence of social interactions, which exemplifies the coherence and continuity of online and offline identities. In other words, players' gaming social networks integrate the offline and online worlds, and this convergence not only extends their social reach, but also obscures the ways in which they present themselves in different environments.

Both M3 and F9 mentioned the case of chat groups. They stated that they joined a certain club in the game, and almost all clubs force their members to join WeChat or QQ chat groups in order to facilitate the management to strengthen community cohesion and detect players' game participation. This cross-platform interaction promotes the continuation and deepening of players' social relationships, making the boundaries between online and offline more blurred. Players continue to confirm and adjust their gaming identities and social roles in this blurred line, making their social experience richer and helping them find balance and coordination between the offline and online worlds. For example, because of game anxiety, M3 and M1 do not choose unfamiliar characters in games with strangers, and they choose social avoidance to some extent in situations where there are all strangers, whereas they dare to try and explore new characters in their circle of acquaintances because they feel safer.

Consequently, the convergence of mobile gaming and online interactions has changed the way players' social behaviors and identities are constructed. Cross-platform social interactions not only extend players' social scope, but also enhance their identity and social experience. This convergence blurs the boundaries between

front- and backstage roles, making players' performances in different environments more consistent and authentic. At the same time, this convergence of social interactions also positively impacts players' offline lives, further enriching their social networks while alleviating in-game anxiety.

However, while this convergence may seem like an irreversible trend, there are some types of games where players express a certain level of opposition. M12 puts it this way:

"I don't like to play with people I know well because we know each other so well that when we play together, everyone's identity can be guessed. The game is not fun all of a sudden.

M12 is a social reasoning player whose favorite mobile game to play is Werewolf. This game usually consists of 8 to 18 players. The game is divided into two phases: day and night. In the night phase, the player playing the werewolf secretly chooses a player to kill; while in the day phase, all players discuss and vote to try to find the werewolf and execute him. The game continues until all werewolves are identified (villagers win) or the number of werewolves equals or exceeds the number of villagers (werewolves win).

Players generate a great amount of discussion during the game, constructing their own identity in the game through acting to confuse their opponents or to secretly support their teammates. Hence, the convergence of identities is not always welcome in social reasoning games, especially with game techniques that require a high degree of stealth and strategy. M12 believes that playing with a familiar person makes his identity performances completely ineffective, and that the slightest change he makes regarding his expression, voice or even verbal logic will be detected by the familiar person. Even though familiar people do not face each other in mobile games, familiarity makes the game less fun and makes the player's online identity performances useless. Thus, the convergence of online and offline identities presents unique challenges and implications in social reasoning games, although this convergence can enhance social interactions and identities in many game genres.

5.3.1 Multidimensionality of Gender Differences

The representation of gender differences in the construction of gaming identities is a complex and multidimensional topic, and in the results of questionnaire, the influence of gender differences on the way of interaction within the game and on the preference of game genres was not significant, with more than 70 percent of the male players and 80 percent of the female players loving flying and shooting games, as well as more than 50 percent of the male and female players also enjoying the categories of both casual and strategic games. The impact of game genre preference was not significant. In addition, there is a convergence in the roles that players typically play in the game, with all three options - Commander, Warrior and Healer - exceeding 60 percent (Table 5).

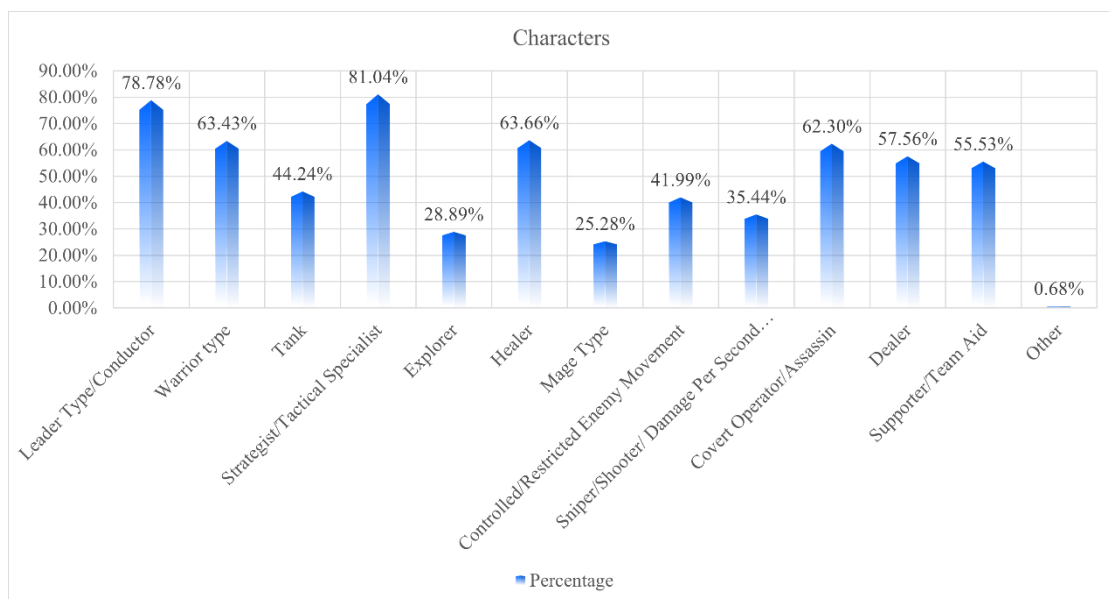


Table 5, What kind of personality does the player usually play for their character in the game?

Thus, this suggests that the game choices and role-playing of Chinese youth players are converging towards greater gender balance and diversity, with players' gaming interests no longer divided according to traditional gender roles. One reason for this may be that modern mobile game design is increasingly focused on diversity

and inclusiveness, providing a rich gaming experience that appeals to different genders of players, e.g., modern games offer a diverse range of character choices and storylines, with socialization and competitiveness intertwined within the game to satisfy the preferences of different genders of players. However, while gender differences are not evident in gaming, it is becoming complex and multidimensional. In the in-depth interviews, only two female players (F9 and F11) usually play multiplayer online competitive games such as Honor of Kings and League of Legends, and F9 said that she often feels preferential treatment in such games:

"When I first started playing this game, I would ask my teammates to help me in-game through voice messages when I couldn't beat someone, and they would take special care of me probably because they realized that I was a female, such as letting me get more resources and protecting me from being killed. Through this way, I've gotten to know a lot of people in the game."

F11 discussed a similar situation, but she said:

"I've met this kind of preferential treatment, but it seems to depend on how many female players are actually in the team. Because in the eyes of the male players, we're just poor at the game and have to call for help, and if there's more than one female player within a team, their enthusiasm to help us goes down because they don't want to lose the game because of us."

F9 has her own regular team of teammates who met in-game and have since expanded into a social network of acquaintances who are also friends with each other on social media, and whose interactions are not limited to within the mobile game, but also include chats and even offline gatherings. While F11 did not have regular gaming friends, so she observed more stereotypes. However, the same thing is that F9 and F11 preferred to choose supportive characters in the game, which means that their characters were not the key to win or lose the game. They chose safer roles because they thought their gaming skills were not good enough and because they were afraid of being verbally abused in the game.

This concern remains with M1 and M2, two male players who also tend to choose safer roles to avoid making mistakes, but who are not treated similarly favorably. This suggests that their identity construction in the game is more focused on safety and collaboration than dominance and competition. F11 doesn't really approve of this preferential treatment, she thinks it's a bit of discrimination, and that it makes her feel objectified, as if she's the team's mascot, but then again, she has to admit that it has led to more victories, and the feeling of winning the game makes her feel satisfied. F9 does not, because she actually plays in a network of acquaintances, and this preferential treatment is based on social friendships, which allows her to experiment more with other types of characters in the game without being blamed for it. In contrast, F11, who plays in unfamiliar online environments, has a much more pronounced self-protective mechanism, and never tries out any other types of characters when she plays games with strangers.

Thus, despite the tendency for gender differences to converge in the representation of certain game genres, gender stereotypes still exist and influence player behavior and identity construction. Female players may choose safer characters in games for fear of gender discrimination, limiting their self-improvement and identity display.

5.3.2 Consumer Behavior in Mobile Games

In the results of the questionnaire, only 6 percent of the players said that they never spend money in mobile games (Table 6).

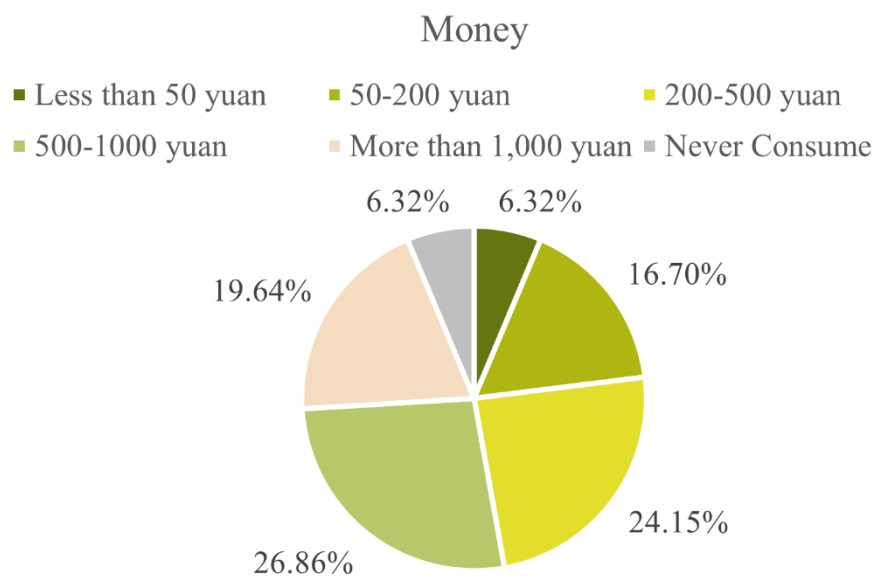


Table 6, The amount of money players spends on mobile games each month

As for the other players who do spend, they do so respectively to buy better item and virtual objects related to their character's appearance but without actual function. Virtual items have become an important symbol of a player's status. Owning rare or premium virtual items, whether or not they will give a boost to gaming prowess, these items can enhance a player's status in the gaming community. m3 is a seasoned collector:

"There are over 1,500 skins in League of Legends and I have over 1,300 of them, and I own over 100 cars in KartRider. I buy every new race car after it's released, and on top of that I buy costumes for my characters. The cars can actually improve the game because the old ones will be obsolete in new releases, but the costumes and skins are completely useless, but I just love collecting them. "

M3's in-game avatars always wear rare costumes. This is a perfect reflection of his status as a collecting enthusiast, as rare costumes are few in number throughout the game. He is often asked by strangers in the game how he got his costumes, and he is very fulfilled by this. This constant spending makes him feel like a veteran player at

the game because he always has the newest, rarest items, and on the other hand he thinks the character dresses up to show off what he thinks is a really cool online character. In KartRider, a system exists whereby the player with the highest scoring costume will have the honor of displaying themselves before the game begins. Although this display only lasts a few seconds and only shows the highest scoring player's character's costume to all players, it still provides players with a sense of self-confidence and fulfillment, and motivates them to continue to invest in the purchase of virtual items. The same is true for F9:

"All you can spend money on in this game, Identity V, is just skins, without any gameplay enhancements. But I do like to show off my well-dressed character. I don't have as many clothes in real life as my game character has. I often dress up my game characters and post pictures on social media."

F9 sees mobile gaming as an ideal space to escape from stress, and her in-game avatars become part of her offline life. She never posts real pictures of herself on social media; she uses pictures of her game avatars to express her online identity, which is a way for her to display her personality and aesthetics, as well as a way for her to gain psychological satisfaction and self-identity. The examples of both M3 and F9 show that this kind of fulfillment needs to be consistently consumed in order to be obtained. And M2 does not share this notion of consumption:

"Equipment and items I hardly ever buy, I think it destroys the fairness of the game, even though there are some mobile games nowadays where if you don't spend money, you can't play because you can never beat anyone else. I'll buy monthly subscriptions, or skins that I particularly like."

M2's spending habits are based on his preferences, which can be a reflection of the player's personality and preferences. Although he is not an avid collector, he does want to show off his online identity through his favorite skins. Because the avatar implies his self-presentation in the online space, he wants to demonstrate his distinct

style and aesthetic through the appearance of his avatar's features, which also makes him feel more recognizable in the game.

Although M2 is slow to play the game because he rarely consumes items related to the game's content, he still insists on what he considers to be fairness in the game. However, he wanted his belief in fairness to be reflected in his online identity, and he chose to change his nickname for a period of time to "零充(Lingchong)", a slang term in Chinese for not spending a dime on the game. This practice also brought him troubles and conflicts, as he thought he wanted to display a distinctive fashion style, but also wanted to show his identity characteristic of never spending money. In the end, he compromised by saving some virtual gold coins in the game to change his nickname and continue to display his fashion style.

Therefore, consumption behavior has a multifaceted impact on the construction of player identity, which is not only reflected in in-game performance and social interactions, but also in players' pursuit of self-identity and psychological satisfaction. Virtual items become an important symbol of player identity, and by purchasing and displaying these items, players not only enhance their gaming prowess, but also gain a higher status and sense of identity in the gaming community.

6.0 Conclusion and Discussion

6.1.1 Conclusion and Answering the Research Questions

Overall, this study explored the identity construction process of Chinese youth in mobile games and the influencing factors through online questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The study reveals that in mobile games, players' identity construction is a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic process that involves multiple dimensions of self-perception, digital technologies, gaming experiences, social interactions, consumption behaviors, socio-cultural, and emotional responses. Meanwhile, there is continuity and consistency between youth's online and offline identities in mobile games, and they are converging, a convergence that promotes youth's identities in

both online and offline communities and reinforces the influence of gaming culture in players' lives.

Further, the convergence of online and offline identities and social behaviors blurs the boundaries between front and back stage, and the self-presentation of youth in different environments. However, while this convergence is an irreversible trend, it is being avoided as much as possible in some specific types of games where players are looking to establish distinct boundaries between online and offline identities for a better gaming experience and are trying to explore more diverse identities in an anonymous environment. In addition, gender stereotypes and players' consumption behavior have some degree of influence on identity construction.

6.1.2 Key Findings

Firstly, that digital technologies and gaming experiences have a significant impact in youths' identity construction, a finding that echoes the arguments of Hongladarom (2011), who argues that new digital technologies and platforms constitute the external conditions for the expression of identity. This study divides three periods of the development of mobile games in China. With the development of digital technology, mobile Internet and mobile game design, youths' identity construction in mobile games has become complex and multidimensional, on the other hand, as mobile games are becoming diverse in terms of gameplay and social interactions, they are not only attracting a large number of players, but also influencing their identity construction in the course of player's gameplay.

Secondly, anxiety, conflict, and stress in mobile games are growing and affecting players' identity construction in mobile games. These negative emotions come from three sources: the game itself, the disharmonious game environment, and the stress in the offline world. These growing negative emotions significantly affect players' self-esteem and self-identity, and players still prefer "safe" characters even in anonymous environments. Anxiety affects players' teamwork and interactions, and even shows social avoidance behavior, which to some extent affects their social identity and sense of belonging in the game community. In addition, the lack of responsibility due to

anonymity not only exacerbates player anxiety to a certain extent, but also leads to a significant increase in negative interactions in the game, which damages the game and social environment.

Third, the process of identity construction by players in mobile games is a complex and dynamic one. Player identity construction involves how individuals understand themselves in the game and how they are perceived in the game. Gaming avatars and characters are a preliminary stage in the construction of identity, but players begin to explore themselves and achieve self-expression from the moment they choose and customize their avatar. On the other hand, identity construction is related to identity recognition. Players strive to construct or adapt their online identities in games in pursuit of a group identity, and in their pursuit of identity, players are actually learning and adapting how to interact socially and express themselves more effectively. This effort leads to the popularity of symbolization and even changes the social dynamics within the game.

Fourth, in the field of mobile gaming, a convergence of online and offline identities is taking place. On the one hand, digital technologies and social features in games expose players' gaming behaviors to networks of acquaintances, and in semi-anonymous gaming circles, there is a need for continuity and consistency between players' identities and social behaviors in the offline and online worlds. And it's in the anonymity that the player's desire to explore different identities becomes stronger. Additionally, players' online identities can extend from extending into the offline world, and offline social events held by players, gaming communities, and gaming companies reinforce the fluidity of such identities, allowing players to display and celebrate their online identities in the offline world, further reinforcing the influence of gaming culture in players' lives, and fostering interactions and recognitions within the community. In other words, social bonds between the offline and online worlds are intertwined in mobile games. However, this convergence is also opposed by some players of specific game genres, as it negatively affects the gaming experience and identity construction.

Fifth, consumption behavior has a multifaceted impact on player identity construction. Virtual items became important symbols of player identity, and players could obtain higher social status and identity through them. In addition, the impact of gender differences on game preferences and in-game interaction styles was not significant. However, gender stereotypes still exist in the online space and affect players' social behavior and identity construction, limiting their self-improvement and identity display.

6.2.1 Research Contributions

This study attempts to extend the application of identity construction theory by analyzing Chinese youth mobile game players, expanding theories related to identity construction to online spaces and mobile games, and attempting to demonstrate the new features and dynamics of identity construction in the digital age. Player identity construction is a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic process involving multiple dimensions. It helps to understand how Chinese youth shape and express themselves in mobile games in a variety of ways that interact and merge with offline identities. I hope this study can provide new perspectives for the study of identity construction in digital culture.

6.2.2 Limitations

First, due to the limited sample size, which includes the questionnaire's reliance on voluntary participation and the inability to infer broad group features, the generalizability and reliability of the findings need to be further verified; future research could expand the sample size to include more players from different cultural backgrounds and game types, and further refine the questionnaire questions and add verification questions to measure whether participants provided accurate information.

Second, this study relied mainly on qualitative data, which may have some degree of social desirability bias and researcher bias; future research could combine behavioral data and empirical studies and remain self-reflective in order to obtain more objective and comprehensive conclusions.

6.2.3 Further Discussions

In future research, I hope that by combining larger samples and behavioral data, on the one hand, cross-cultural comparative gaming studies can be explored to further analyze the influence of socio-cultural factors on youth gaming behavior. On the other hand, it may be possible in the future to use the perspective of the convergence of online and offline identities to consider the impact of mobile gaming on offline behaviors and identities, such as how in-game skills and strategies transfer to offline life and how they behave.

Further, in China, game streamers and eSports players have more complexities when it comes to identity construction, how gaming experience affects players' career choices and development, how young eSports players construct their identities through gaming and escape from the pressure under the expectations and pressures of their families, societies, and clubs, and how they construct their identities proactively and passively, all of which are interesting and meaningful topics for discussion.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the claim that digital technologies constitute the external conditions for identity construction. This is because with the popularity and development of VR, AR and AI technologies, players have become more deeply invested in character and identity construction and have further blurred the boundaries between online and offline spaces, giving identity construction a dual reality base. Therefore, under the role of new technologies, new perspectives on identity construction are bound to emerge, and the boundaries between online and offline spaces may be further blurred, and I have reason to expect that the future process of identity construction will be more diversified, dynamic and complex. This not only provides new theoretical challenges and opportunities for identity research, but also brings rich application prospects for practical fields (e.g., game design, education and training, psychological counseling, etc.).

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8.0 Appendix

8.1 Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire on Mobile Gaming Behavior and Preferences of Chinese Youths

Dear Participants:

Hello!

I am currently conducting a study on the impact of identity construction in mobile gaming among Chinese youth. I would like to invite you to participate in this survey to help this study better understand how current mobile games affect youth's online and offline identities.

The purpose of this survey is to collect data on the behavior, preference and experience of Chinese youth aged 25-35 in using mobile games. It is expected to take 5-15 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

I hereby commit myself:

Your participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you can stop completing the questionnaire at any time without any negative consequences.

This survey will not collect any real information such as your name, phone number, etc. All data will be processed anonymously.

The data collected will be used for academic research purposes only.

By continuing to complete the questionnaire, you are indicating that you have read these instructions, understand the purpose and content of the survey, and agree to provide information as a respondent.

I greatly appreciate your participation and contribution. If you have any questions about the survey or need further information, please contact me at:

nnnd2007@outlook.com/457302800@qq.com

1. And your gender is?

Male

Female

Other

Unwilling Disclose

2. Your age?

___ years.

3. Your current occupation?

Schoolchildren

Office Staff

Managerial Staff

Civilian Support Staff

Craft and Related Trades Workers

Elementary Profession

Service and Sales Staff

Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers

Freelancer

Other (please fill in)

4. What is your highest level of education?

Less than high school

High School/Specialized Colleges

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree or Above

5. What city do you currently live in?

_____.

6. Approximately how long do you spend playing mobile games per week?

Less than 3 hours

4-10 hours

11-15 hours

16-20 hours

Over 20 hours

7. What type of mobile games do you usually play? (Multiple choices allowed)

Other (please fill in)

Sports

Chess

Leisure & Puzzle

Flying Shooter

Business Strategy

Online Game

Action Adventure

Role-Playing (genre)

8. Please fill in the name of the cell phone game you often play.

_____.

The second part is the impact of mobile gaming on individuals.

9. Who do you usually interact with while playing mobile games? (Multiple choices possible)

Never Interacted

Friends in Reality

Family Members

Strangers on The Internet

8.1 If you had an interactive behavior in the game, please select your specific interactive behavior (multiple choices allowed)

Chat and Message Exchange (text or voice calls)

Exchanging, Buying, Selling or Giving Virtual Items

Team Games

Participate in Competitive Multiplayer Events

Join or Be Active in a Club/Community

Complete Missions that Require Cooperation with Other Players

Participate in Voting or Decision-making (participate in voting, decision-making, or other forms of group choice within the game)

Watch or Share In-game Live Streams

Participation in In-game Events and Activities (participation in special events or ad hoc activities organized by the game developers or the community)

Utilize Social Media Features (use the social media features integrated within the game)

10. In games, do you tend to create or play characters that are similar to those in real life?

Always

Sometimes

Occasionally

seldom

Never

11. What kind of personality do you usually play as in your in-game character?

(Multiple choices allowed)

Leader type/Conductor

Warrior Type

Tank

Strategist/Tactical Specialist

Explorer

Healer

Mage Type

Controlled/Restricted Enemy Movement

Sniper/Shooter/ Damage Per Second (DPS)

Covert Operator/Assassin

Dealer

Supporter/Team Aid

12. Do you believe that you're in-game character influences your behavior in the real world?

Agree Strongly

Agree with

Inconclusive

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

13. Has the sense of accomplishment gained in the game affected your self-confidence?

Thoroughly

There are some implications

Few

Not at all.

14. Do you think you can learn real-life useful skills through gaming?

Always

Sometimes

Occasionally

Seldom

Never

15. What emotions do you usually feel during games? (Multiple choices allowed)

Euphoria

Fulfillment

Relaxing

Anxiety

Loneliness

Furious

Other (please fill in)

16. How do you think the friendships/interactions that arise in gaming affect you?

(Multiple choices allowed)

Improved my social skills

Enhanced my teamwork skills

Provided me with emotional support

Expanded my social circle

Provides relaxation and entertainment

Increased my participation in the game

Improved my gaming skills

Sometimes leads to stress or conflict

No significant impact

17. Do you spend money on mobile games, and if so, how many dollars per month on average?

Less than 50 yuan

50-200 yuan

200-500 yuan

500-1000 yuan

More than 1,000 yuan

Never consume

18. If there are consumption behaviors, what are these usually for? (Multiple choice possible)

Better gear, new items

Game skins, and virtual items that are related to appearance but do not have actual functionality

Monthly card or Monthly minimum spend

19. Does your internet nickname, avatar or homepage introduction have a special meaning?

Yes, these are handpicked

No

20. Do you change nicknames, avatars, game characters, costumes, and other things on your visual system often?

Always

Sometimes

Hardly ever change

21. Is this the same as what you are used to in real life?

Changing cosmetic features is a routine matter

Changing cosmetic features is not a routine matter

There is a slight correlation that the frequency of replacement in real life is less than on the web

There is a slight correlation that the frequency of replacement is greater in real life than on the web

22. Do you engage in social behavior during games? For example, meeting strangers, leaving contact information for each other, or joining specific clubs or gaming groups?

Yes, but passive

Yes, socialization is an active behavior

No

23. What is your primary motivation for playing games? (Multiple choices possible)

Recreation and Relaxation for Stress Relief

Socialize

Athletic Challenges

Learn New Skills

Escape from Reality

Transitioning from Computer games to Mobile Games

Mobile Gaming is More Convenient and Shorter Game Duration

Else

24. If you are willing, please describe an experience in a mobile game that stood out to you and how it impacted your personal or social life. (Optional)

_____.

8.2 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Informed Consent

Dear Participants

This interview is an important part of a study to discuss people's understanding of identity construction in mobile games. Therefore, before you participate in this interview, you will need to read or be told some information in advance. The interview is conducted with your consent.

1. Participation in this study will require approximately 30-75 minutes of interviews, which can take the form of face-to-face or telephone interviews, depending on your requirements.
2. This interview will be audio recorded. The author promises that the audio file and the interviewee's personal information will not be disclosed, and that you have the right to ask the author to refer to you how you want to be referred to in the interview and in the paper, as well as the right to refuse to answer questions you do not want to answer.
3. The interview process will include answering questions and even playing games

together, if some of the questions make you feel otherwise, you can refuse to answer them and we can stop the interview at any time, but you need to explain the reason to the in writer.

4. Some of the content of this interview may appear in the paper, but of course, you can ask the writer to hide that information in the paper, such as name, gender, position, and other information.

Once you have read the informed consent form, you need to indicate to the author that you have read it and agree to it, after which we can begin the interview.

Warming up/opening the conversation

1. What are your favorite mobile games
 - a. Which one is your favorite and why?
 - b. What's your favorite game?
 - c. When did you start playing mobile games?
2. What games do you play a lot?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How long does it usually take per week?
 - c. What time do you usually play mobile games
3. Where do you usually play mobile games?
 - a. Where do you prefer to play in public vs. at home and why
 - b. Do you think this portability is important?
4. What emotions do you often experience in mobile games?
 - a. What behaviors do negative emotions cause you to have?
 - b. Where do these emotions come from?

Talking about the game

5. What do your family, friends or partner think about you playing mobile games?

- a. Will they join you?
 - b. They don't understand?
6. What do you think is the emotional inclination to play mobile games in your social circle?
- a. Why?
 - b. Do you not want people to know what you play?
7. How do you feel about the whole socializing in mobile games thing?
- a. Do you engage in social behavior?
 - b. Why?
8. Why do you want to play mobile games?
- a. What will mobile gaming bring you?
 - b. Has it changed you in some way?
9. What kind of games do you think would appeal to you?
- a. concrete aspect
10. Is there a game that you enjoyed playing at first, but then stopped playing?
- a. Why?
 - b. Are there any types of games you don't play at all? Or don't want to try at all?
 - c. Can you describe the process?
11. Are you someone who always tries new mobile games?
- a. From what source did you find out about the new mobile game?

Identity Construction

12. Do you consider yourself a mobile player?
- a. Do you consider yourself a player, or a fan of the game? Why?

- b. How would you position yourself?
 - c. How do you feel about these two words, or these two identities?
13. Do you get involved in the gaming community?
- a. Game information on social media platforms
 - b. In-game clubs or societies
 - c. Focus on eSports competitions
14. Do you prefer to play games alone or with others
- a. With real friends
 - b. With Network Friends
15. Do you have any close friends you know from the game?
- a. Is this friendship important to you?
 - b. How do you like the new social relationships?
 - c. Do you like this kind of socializing?
16. Does your character in the gaming community match your real-life personality?
17. Can you describe a gaming experience that changed your view of the real world?
18. Do you think your own cultural background affects your performance in the game?
- a. Behavior in the game
 - b. Identity construction in games and in reality
19. Is there anything you want to share with me, anything about the game
- a. Why do you want to share this?

Consumer Behavior

20. Do you spend money in mobile games?

- a. What to consume
- b. Why consume/why not consume

21. How do you feel about consumer behavior in mobile games?

8.3 List of interviewees

Number	Nicknames	Genders	Age	Occupation	Current City	Frequently played games
M1	GH	male	25	student	Uppsala	Honor of Kings, Game for Peace, Call of Duty
M2	稻草人夜行	male	34	student	Uppsala	DreamStar, Honor of Kings, Call of Duty, Space Hunter3
M3	Windranger	male	28	student	Lanzhou	KartRider, Honkai Impact 3rd, EA Sports 《FC》
M4	unwilling to disclose	male	29	Office staff	Lianyungang	Teamfight Tactics, League of Legends, Dot Arena
F5	unwilling to disclose	female	27	nurse	Beijing	Craz3 Match, Happy Landlords, Mahjong
M6	unwilling to disclose	male	30	salesman	Tongling	League of Legends, Honor of Kings
M7	小陈老师	male	31	game streamer	Hangzhou	Teamfight Tactics, KartRider, Honor of Kings
F8	unwilling to disclose	female	29	English teacher	Xiamen	Ant Forest, Ant Farm, Werewolf
F9	unwilling to disclose	female	32	Freelance	Huludao	Subway Surfers, Honor of Kings, Identity V
F10	幸运星	female	27	Office staff	Chifeng	Snake Off 2, Mahjong
F11	unwilling to disclose	female	26	student	Lanzhou	Mr. Love: Queen's Choice, Light and Night
M12	unwilling to disclose	male	31	graphic design	Nanning	Legends of The Three Kingdoms, Werewolf