

THE SUCCESS BEHIND THE PUBG ERA: A CASE STUDY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Although it has only been on the market for a short period of time, the online game PubG (Player Unknown's Battlegrounds) has become a worldwide commercial success. Although livestream gaming-related research has been pursued in many parts of the world, there is dearth of research that links the interpretation of the kinds of strategy adopted that leads to the enormous success of such games. Approaching the issue from a Blue Ocean perspective, this research provides a critical interpretation of the correlation between the strategy adopted and the success of the online-gaming industry in general, and PubG in particular. Thus, the aim of this study is twofold: (i) to critically interpret the strategy behind the success of online game PubG; and (ii) to explore users' perspectives and opinions towards this game. Our data is taken from multiple case studies that included 33 interviews with random users including both students and employees working in different areas of Kuwait's public and private sectors. Our results showed that investing mobile platforms is one of the main ways in which competitive advantage can be gained as it acts as an excellent substitute for other platforms, including PCs and other gaming devices. Furthermore, PubG users worldwide offer excellent evidence of changes in consumer behaviour towards acceptable marketing tactics. Several factors that contributed to the success of PubG were identified which, based on these findings, may improve the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by the online-gaming industry and relevant marketing agencies.

Keywords: PubG, Blue Ocean Strategy, Online Gaming, Live streaming, Social Network, Kuwait.

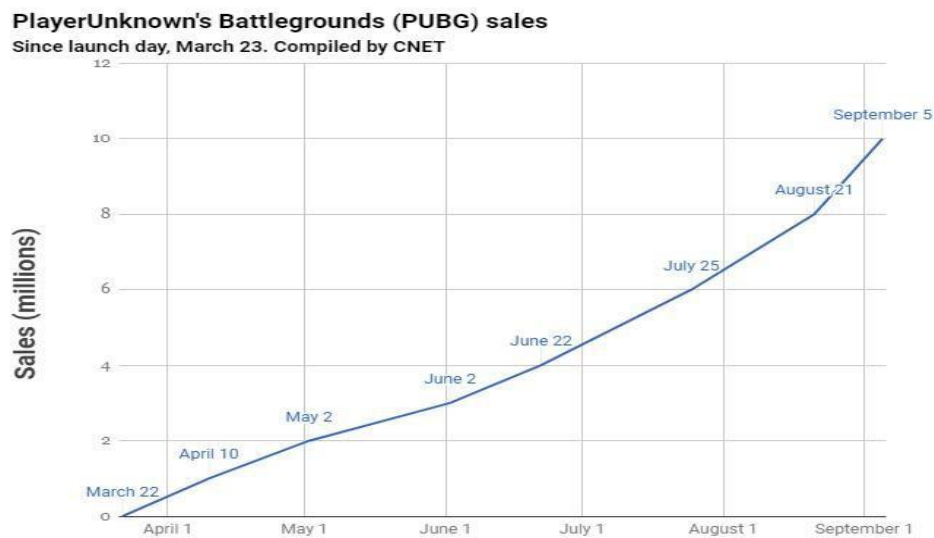
INTRODUCTION

Of the multitude of online games available to users worldwide, only a few have actually been successful in terms of being played for a significant period of time and maintaining strong consumer loyalty. PubG, which stands for "Player Unknown's Battlegrounds", is one of those games which is apparently gaining in popularity on a daily basis. It is a live streaming game that is classified as belonging to the "Battle Royale" sub-genre of first-person shooter video games (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). The game was officially released in late December 2017 and rapidly saw a tremendous increase in terms of popularity and number of downloads (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). PubG is today attracting an increasing number of users worldwide to join and enjoy its live streaming features. One of the related online games studies found that the overseas market for PubG is huge, and indeed the number of downloads is still growing (Sun, 2017). Thus, the aim of this study is twofold: (i) to critically interpret the strategy behind the success of online game PubG; and (ii) to explore users' perspectives and opinions towards this game.

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

PubG Game

PubG was developed and marketed by a small Korean company called “Bluehole” (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). Although it is considered to be a small company, Bluehole has effectively utilised only limited financial resources by investing in social media advertisement to reach as many consumers as possible on such a budget. Due to this strategic investment, PubG generated approximately eleven million USD within three days of its release, and a million copies had been sold within a month (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). Figure 1 shows the sharp increase in PubG sales since its early launch. The growth of PubG has attracted the attention of online gaming operators worldwide as an object lesson in how to be more competitive. However, what makes PubG unique is the awareness of its operators of the need to build game loyalty with its consumers through frequent feature updates. Therefore, considerable credit should be given for the marketing, as well as strategic analysis conducted by “Bluehole” in terms of reaching its target audience.



Source: Egametube, 2019

FIGURE 1
PUBG SALES SINCE ITS EARLY LAUNCH

PubG is a first-person shooter game in which users fight against opponents using various weapons and strategies in order to fulfil certain missions (Molina, 2017). This game starts with one hundred players that parachute from an aircraft onto a pre-decided plot on a particular island. Upon landing in the comfort zone, users and opponents alike begin by collecting weapons and utilise available facilities to devise the strategies by which to kill one another. The strong features built into the game results in very addictive gameplay. Some of PubG’s features include sound, high-definition pictures, maps and the ability to talk to others in real time, operational methods, and so on.

The continuous development of attractive game features may trigger a certain loyalty to a particular game amongst users. A study by Teng (2017) of 5,144 online gamers found that certain features, including length of relationship, depth, and breadth positively correlated to goal proximity - defined as the perception that a goal is close-which could be further positively correlated to personal motivation and online game loyalty. Equally, a study of 2,025 online gamers indicated that the expectation of growth is also positively related to perceived skill and perceived challenge, which will consequently positively influence online gamer loyalty (Liao & Teng, 2017). In a similar vein, Li et al. (2018) collected responses from 1,384 online gamers from which it was found that perceived avatar appearance; agreeableness and attractiveness are positively related to avatar friendliness, which in turn is positively related to online gamer loyalty. From these results, it can be seen how a strong investment in marketing such features and keeping the game alive using a dynamic strategy influences user's loyalty will attract new potential users from around the globe.

Blue Ocean Strategy

The history of competition demonstrates that dominant market strategy was based on how to gain the largest market share over any competitors. However, it is not always true that a large market share is indicative of a large profit. Therefore, within a dynamic environment, a world of uncertainty and extensive associated challenges, competitors are required to adopt strategies that best fit their organisational objectives. Organisations need to respond to the market and diversify both their strategies and their tactics. Strategies range from including, for instance, differentiation, low-cost strategies, price-skimming, focus, market-niche, and trial and error strategies, and so on. Such strategies and tactics may fit certain industries; however, the online gaming sector might be a completely different story due to the fact that online and live streaming games depend on user addiction and loyalty to the game in question, and therefore those users act as indirect marketers. Thus, these games will become known to the public through the positive word of mouth from these users themselves who attract and convince other potential players to download the game. Users, in turn, invite others to gain extra advantages within the game itself, such as extra rewards.

A Blue Ocean strategy is that used by competing companies due to its potential to create new market segments and thus maximise profit, where its relevance to the success of PubG as a live-streaming game is quite apparent. A Blue Ocean strategy can be defined as *“a consistent pattern of strategic thinking behind the creation of new markets and industries where demand is created rather than fought for and the rule of competition is irrelevant”* (Kim, 2005). It was developed as a strategy by Professors of Strategy W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne, who used data extracted from over more than 100 years of reports focussed on 30 industries, and representing 150 strategic actions (Kim, 2005; Lindič et al., 2012). The *“Blue Ocean”* strategy was nominally developed from their analysis (Kim, 2005). The strategy has been used in various industries and has been recognised as creating a successful shift in sectors that have adopted it, for instance, the adoption of the Blue Ocean strategy in the food (Dali et al., 2009; Wubben et al., 2012), telecommunications (Hersh & Abusaleem, 2016), hospitality (Yang, 2012), clothing industry (Lv, 2017) and the sports (Vieira & Ferreira, 2016) sectors.

This strategy has also been adopted in the public sector (e.g., Ramli et al., 2016) as well as in the private sector (e.g., Chang, 2010; Čirjevskis et al., 2011). Therefore, a Blue Ocean strategy can be viewed as a means of providing the framework and relevant policy as to how to escape from in intensively competitive area into a new, virgin area where there is less or no competitive tension. This approach was adopted by PubG's developers, Bluehole, and proved to be a tremendous success in the area of live streaming games. The global expansion of the internet

and e-business has created a new market that focusses on customer as well as internet-based logistics (Lee & Lau, 1999). This important shift in business model has also directed attention towards the need for reduced-inventory logistics (Simchi-Levi et al., 2005). Bluehole utilised the ongoing fact of the development of e-business and the potential population that could be targeted as possible PubG consumers leading them to intensively market the game thorough Twitter and by sending large numbers of invitations to potential players across the globe (Dagdee & Philip, 2019).

Live Streaming Games and Related Studies

There are a multitude of online games and live streaming games available including, for instance, Fortnite, Counter Strike, League of Legends, as well as PubG. Indeed, streaming has become more popular in the current era and, consequently, is now considered synonymous with video gaming (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). Equally, live streaming games have been recognised as a mark of professional gamers. The concept of electronic games is also widely known, and is used interchangeably with the term “*e-sport*” games (Johnson, 2017). These digital games have come to represent a major area of entertainment for many people over the last decade, especially with the increase in widespread internet coverage that allows online users to cooperate and/or compete (Herodotou et al., 2012). Live streaming games provide learner-learner interactions which in turn provide users with the ability to clarify, amend, and interpret their social understanding (Kraiger, 2008). PubG users therefore utilised the technology which mediates mutual user-user mutual in a meaningful, as well as effective way (Roehl et al., 2013).

There have been a considerable number of studies into online as well as live-streaming games. For instance, Yee (2006) reported 10 motivational factors that push users to engage with online games, which include advancement, mechanics, competition, socialising, relationship, teamwork, discovery, role-playing, customisation, and escapism. Equally, Dagdee & Philip (2019) found that a number of factors have contributed to the success of PubG, which include the quality of the concept as “*it makes the video game enjoyable to play*”; creative ideas as “*there is a great deal of borrowing and mimicking ideas happening and therefore coming up with creative ideas is becomes a critical issues for online-games*”; being social media-friendly as “*the social media is arguably the most predominant development across the globe*”; the target audience as “*it makes the game developers to adjust the quality and features according to the taste of audience*”; the quality of the digital marketing as “*there is a considerably larger population of potential users through which the information has to be shared*”; the developers themselves as “*they need to follow the trend and update the game features on a regular basis*”; viral trends as “*it is important to follow social media era to gain more and more publicity*”, customer categories as “*it is vital for developers to design features that are suitable for the targeted customer category and just like PubG which is rated PG16*”; realistic experience as “*such experience allows users to live the reality and escape from their real world to another artificial word*”; smartphones as a platform as “*smartphones are considered portable devised which allow the game to be available and accessible at any time*”; streaming media as “*streaming allows the account information and the consequent achievement of the user in the game to be available when every accessed to the game without a need to re-download the game once again, therefore streaming act as a data storage feature*”; and the availability and strength of the relevant internet connection as “*the internet [has] become a necessity in daily human life*”.

In a similar vein, Billieux et al. (2015) conducted a study of 1057 online gamers to identify the problematic involvement in online games - as it causes severe addiction and might result in a negative impact on users - found several motives behind the addiction to online games including

impulsiveness, immersion, achievement, social affiliation, and feelings of self-esteem. Furthermore, Bae et al. (2016) found that apart from the cognitive factors that encourage users to engage with online games, there are additional motives that increase users' interest in online games. These motives include stress, pleasure, and arousal with regards to the intention to play online games.

Although these studies, and indeed others, have shown that gaming can promote certain benefits including, for instance, therapeutic, medical, health, cognitive, and educational (Nuyens et al., 2019), online games can still be problematic for other groups of users as they may result in various negative impacts that include, for instance, mental disorder problems (Pontes & Griffiths, 2014). Even with such extensive information about the factors that contribute to addictive engagement in online games, there has been no explicit explanation as to why the strategies and tactics adopted resulting in the success of online games, specifically in this instance for PubG. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to this under-researched area, and also to explain the strategic alignment between how strategy theories helped PubG to recognise such remarkable success. Such an understanding should help reveal the reasons behind the boom in live streaming games, and the consequent results will therefore act as a guideline for the live streaming games industry for commercial, as well as sustainability purposes. It is also our intention to explore users' perspectives and opinions towards this game.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

Due to the fact that this research is explanatory in nature, focussing on the relationship between Blue Ocean strategy and the remarkable success of the PubG online game on the one side, and exploring users' perspectives and opinions towards this game on the other, it was felt that a qualitative approach was most appropriate to fulfilling these objectives. Data were gathered from multiple case studies, more specifically from random users including both students and employees working in different areas of the public and private sectors in Kuwait. Our sample was based on users who currently own a smartphone, iPad, or personal computer on which they have installed and consequently play PubG on a regular basis. As argued by Saunders et al. (2016), selecting a specific audience with certain key qualities is believed to allow the acquisition of the view of individuals with the relevant knowledge, experience, and skills to provide relevant answers to the research queries. Furthermore, adopting multiple case studies is believed to strengthen the results of the research by replicating pattern-matching scenarios, thus increasing the degree of confidence in the robustness of the theory (Tellis, 1997).

Our sample constituted 33 interviewees who were recruited through both purposive and snowballing sampling techniques to provide adequate answers to the research queries (Roulston, 2010). The rationale behind the choice of the number of users and the combination of the public and private sectors was to target participants who reflected different geographical backgrounds, thus providing certain richness in the interpretation of users' behaviour regarding PubG. An interview protocol was designed prior to starting the fieldwork to ensure the effective coverage of the phenomena under investigation. This included, for instance, time spent in PubG to determine the credibility of the users' answers; trust and loyalty to understand the level of engagement in the game; addiction to online games to understand how easy it would be to switch to another similar game; social networks to understand the relevance of this feature in terms of the advantage this offers compared to other similar live-streaming games; time

management to explore how users prioritise their other life duties; and application process to explore whether the facilities offered by the game are easy and user-friendly in use, or otherwise. Furthermore, all interviewees were asked the same questions to ensure the satisfactory representation of responses in relation to PUBG practices. The total time taken to conduct and finalise the interviews process was approximately four months.

Before starting the interview process, four pilot interviews were conducted to ensure clarity, and consequently two questions were revised and rewritten to ensure understandability with regards to the technical terms used in the interview protocol (Saunders et al., 2016). Upon completing the pilot phase, an additional 29 interviews were conducted, giving a total of 33 interviews. Table 1 reports the interviewee's profiles along with the respective data. The official language used to conduct the interviews was the Arabic language as all the interviewees without any exception preferred to communicate in Arabic. In terms of ethical considerations, ethical clearance was granted prior to the interview process to ensure compliance with research ethical guidelines; hence, all interviewees, along with the organisations in which the data were collected, were assured of their anonymity.

Table 1
INTERVIEWEE PROFILE AND RESPECTIVE DATA

S/N	ID	Age	Gender	Time Spent on PubG	Time Range	Purpose of Playing	Other Attractive features	Loyalty and Addition	Money spent on the game
1	US-1-M	28	Male	3 Hours	Daily	Killing time/ Enjoyment	Updated Game/ Attractive Graphics	Highly Loyal Highly Addicted	Yes
2	US-2-M	34	Male	2-3 Hours	Weekly	Killing time/ Trying Something New/ Enjoyment	Action in the game/ Respective Challenges	Low loyalty Low Addiction	Yes
3	US-3-M	36	Male	1-2 Hours	Daily	Attractive game/ Challenges/ Interaction with others/ Competition among players	Updated game/ Live streaming/ Easy to control/ comprehensive advantages/ Seasonal levels which makes you build yourself from the beginning/ Continuous development	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	Yes
4	US-4-F	18	Female	3-4 Hours	Weekly	Killing time/ Rewards in the game/ Various Events in the game	Advertisement in YouTube/ Live streaming/ concepts behind battle games	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	Yes
5	US-5-M	34	Male	6-7 Hours	Daily	Boredom/ Killing time/ Friendship/ No other activities to do within the day/ availability of Smartphone and its availability all the time/ The internet is very fast	Concepts of competition/ Challenges/ Camera base/ the story behind the game/ the various modes/ the online chatting both voice and written/ great Graphics/ Easy to control/ Integration with Facebook and twitter/ Safety for people under 18 years to take a break after long time playing	High Loyalty High Addiction	Yes
6	US-6-F	25	Female	7-8 Hours	Weekly	Enjoyment/ Playing with friends	Updated features/ Friendship/ social communication	High Loyalty	Yes

									High Addiction	
7	US-7-F	28	Female	3 Hours	Daily	Killing time/ social ties/ Playing with friends/ Enjoyment	Online Communication through voice/ the ability to speak with friends while playing	High Loyalty	High Addiction	Yes
8	US-8-F	26	Female	7-8 Hours	Daily	Enjoying action games/ unique battle games/ high interaction with others on the battle ground	Ability to drive the car/ choosing the weapon we need/ various tactics used to survive and win the game	High Loyalty	High Addiction	Yes
9	US-9-F	22	Female	6 Hours	Daily	Chatting/ I like war- based games/ Action	Communication and social networks/ Making friends/ Easy one	Low Loyalty	High Addiction	Yes
10	US-10-F	25	Female	7 Hours	Weekly	Killing time/ boredom	Update game with respect to mobiles	Moderate Loyalty	Moderate Addiction	Yes
11	US-11-M	27	Male	1 Hour	Daily	Killing time/ enjoyment/ boredom	Easy to control/ continuous update and features	Low Loyalty	Low Addiction	No
12	US-12-M	29	Male	4-5 Hours	Daily	Killing time/ enjoyment/ boredom	Various Actors/ the way to find opponents	High Loyalty	High Addiction	Yes
13	US-13-M	22	Male	5 Hours	Daily	Nothing else to do/ I find it enjoyable	Action/ Ware based/ Killing opponents	High Loyalty	High Addiction	Yes
14	US-14-M	35	Male	30 Min.	Daily	Joking with friends/ Joking with other players/ Killing time	The chatting feature both verbal and written	Low Loyalty	Low Addiction	No
15	US-15-M	31	Male	2-3 Hour	Daily	Enjoying with friends and other strangers/ Wasting time	The teamwork/ The concept of thinking together as one mind	Low Loyalty	Moderate Addiction	No
16	US-16-M	25	Male	4 Hour	Weekly	Wasting time	Teamwork based game/ Ability to lead others	Moderate Loyalty	Moderate Addiction	No
17	US-17-M	23	Male	1 Hour	Weekly	The desire to beat opponents	The idea of teamwork	Moderate Loyalty	Moderate Addiction	No
18	US-18-M	26	Male	2 Hours	Daily	Wasting time	Ability to playing with friends against others	Moderate Loyalty		No

									Low Addiction	
19	US- 19- M	29	Male	6 Hour	Weekly	Leisure/ Killing time	Strategic thinking/ teamwork/ connection with many friends	Low Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No	
20	US- 20- M	28	Male	30 Min.	Daily	Enjoyment/ Nothing else to do	Game design/ features/ Animation used/ Military tactics	High Loyalty High Addiction	Yes	
21	US- 21- M	20	Male	1 Hour	Daily	Severe boredom	All features	Low Loyalty Low Addiction	No	
22	US- 22- F	23	Female	5-7 Hours	Daily	Wasting time	Focusing on targets/ Analytical thinking	High Loyalty High Addiction	Yes	
23	US- 23- M	16	Male	5 Hours	Daily	Killing time	New updates/ Like war-based games/ New update like black ops	Low Loyalty Moderate Addiction	Yes	
24	US- 24- F	25	Female	8 Hours	Daily	Boredom/ Wasting time	Chatting/ Dispose of negative energy/ Learning tactics of war/ Violence and aggression	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No	
25	US- 25- F	24	Female	4 Hours	Daily	Enjoyment/ Wasting time	Everything	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No	
26	US- 26- F	31	Female	6 Hours	Daily	Wasting time	Various features	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No	
27	US- 27- M	23	Male	14 Hours	Daily	Wasting time/ Boredom	Chatting/ Teamwork/ War-based game	Moderate Loyalty High Addiction	Yes	
28	US- 28- F	25	Female	3-4 Hours	Daily	Wasting time/ New Trend	Teamwork/ Challenge/ Game based on accomplishing objectives	Low Loyalty Low Addiction	No	
29	US- 29- F	19	Female	2 Hours	Daily	Wasting time/ Boredom	Teamwork/ Meeting new friends/ Chatting	Moderate Loyalty Low Addiction	No	
30	US- 30- F	26	Male	5 - 6 Hours	Daily	Boredom/ Wasting time/ No other activities	Chatting/ Making new friends from different countries/ Teamwork/ Game design/ Attractive features/ Graphics/ War-based game/	Moderate Loyalty High	No	

							Suitable for male gender	Addiction	
31	US-31-F	7	Female	6 - 12 Hours	Daily	Boredom/ Wasting time/ No other activities	Enjoyment/ Challenges/ Teamwork/ Different weapons	High Loyalty High Addiction	No
32	US-32-F	10	Male	1 Hour	Daily	Entertainment	War-based game/ Available rewards	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No
33	US-33-F	23	Female	1 Hours	Weekly	Boredom/ Wasting time	Enthusiasm/ Challenges	Moderate Loyalty Moderate Addiction	No

Note: US-M: Male User; US-F: Female User

Due to ethical considerations and at the request of the users, the job functions of the interviewees have been removed.

Data Analysis and Coding

Upon finalising the interviews, the written transcripts were translated from Arabic to English language and the translation was then verified to assure accuracy in translating technical terms and sentences to avoid any potential bias. The transcripts were further given to an independent language expert to re-assure accurateness and a rigor verification process. As for the analysis process, the data gathered from the fieldwork were analysed manually. Although the advancement of technology has supported researchers in the analysis of data through such programs as NVivo, ATLAS, QDA Miner, and MAXQDA, such software is considered more in the nature of supportive tools and thus is not a substitute for manual analysis. The analysis and coding process was started by allocating open themes to the interview questions which were subsequently broken down to sub-themes in order to create a meaningful interpretation. With regards to the open codes, we coded all the sentences given by the users as parts of their answers to the questions asked. Thus, a number of phrases and key words given by the interviewees were coded to include, for instance, statements about openness, ethical behaviour, social networking, isolation, boredom, attractiveness, reward and proof of authority, cooperation, and strategic thinking. Table 2 reports the commonalities between themes and sub-themes across the entire set of interviewees.

Serial	Theme	Relative Codes	Respondents	Similar Words	Interviews
1	Live-streaming game loyalty	Social network Strategies and tactics Strong features	28	Friendship ties, international network, communication aspect, strategic joining, strategy changes, strategic priorities, updated features, quality pictures, tactical choices	1-5, 7-14, 16, 18, 21-33

2	Online games addiction	Resolution and graphics User-friendly application Challenges and leadership	25	Personal decisions, different mindsets, professional practice, one-man show, line of command, authority to lead, enforce opinions, influence the team, good tactics, amazing interaction, high quality images, easy to control	2-7, 9-16, 18-21, 24-28, 30, 32

The analysis of the interviews was guided by the six stages to thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is widely understood to help make qualitative research results available to a wider audience (Braun et al., 2019). It also helps researchers to simultaneously compare theory and practice (Hudson et al., 2001). Based on the analysis, a large number of sub-themes were attributed within the interview transcripts, where it was important to consider all possible sub-themes to ensure consistency as well as accuracy. The total number of interview transcripts analysed was 33, which accounted for seventy-two pages of notes generating more than 24 potential sub-themes. Besides the data analysis process, this procedure was also considered to be part of the data reduction process. Within the data analysis and reduction process, commonalties between sub-themes were linked together and irrelevant codes were consequently excluded, though they were kept to allow them to be utilised for future related research. The data reduction process resulted in only two main themes that could be reported narratively. These are live-streaming game loyalty and online games addiction. Figures 2 and 3, respectively, represent a sample map of the associated data coding and the final two main themes as associated with their respective sub-themes.

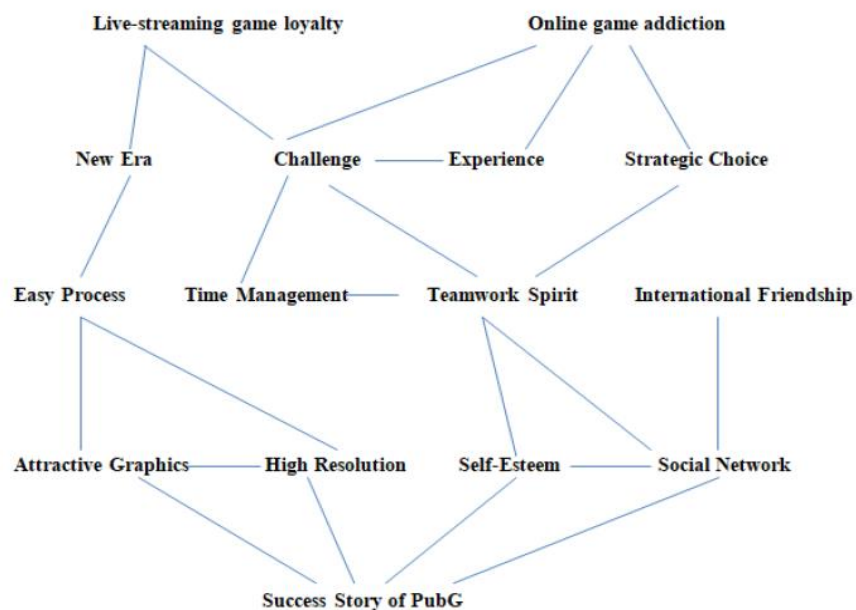
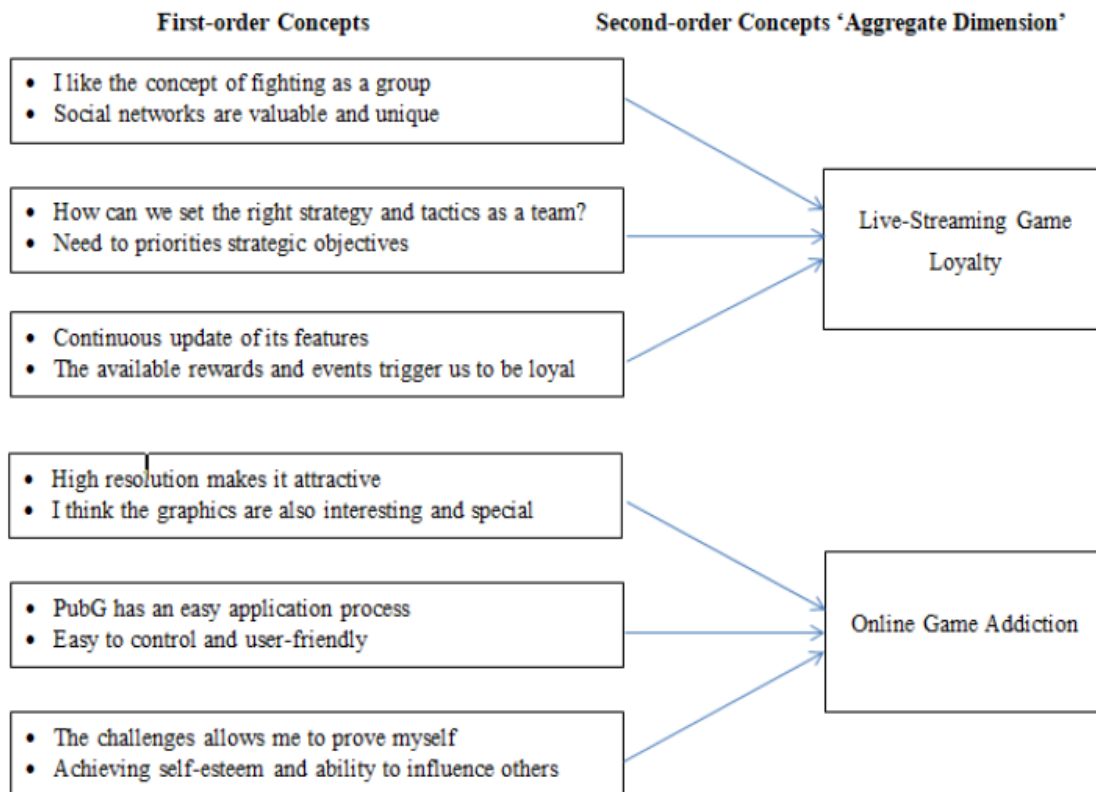


FIGURE 2
MAIN THEMES ALONG WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE SUB-THEMES



Source: Adapted from Corley & Gioia, 2004

FIGURE 3
FINAL TWO MAIN THEMES ALONG WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE SUB-THEMES

Empirical Data and Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate that the loyalty and addiction to PubG is increasing across users of various different age groups, bearing in mind that the game is rated PG16 (Dagdee & Philip, 2019). The findings of this research also revealed that the Blue Ocean strategy and associated tactics have contributed to the spread of the game amongst these various age groups, and consequently to the remarkable publicity the game has gained worldwide and indeed within only a short period of time. Furthermore, the social interaction between PubG players seems to be one of the key characteristics that make the game “*come alive*” compared to the many previous online games that have arisen both before and after the launch of PubG. In this sense, the PubG developers regulate the social interactions between the game’s various international users by utilising appropriate tools (i.e., online chat, audio communication, ability to invite friends and play the game with them, ability to play with other players, and so on) to communicate the organisation’s intended strategy. It has therefore been observed that the intensive interaction between the players and the extent of the communication among them plays a critical role in the extent to which formulated PubG strategy is realised.

This finding was common across representative quotes from 28 of the 33 interviewees. Below are some samples of direct quotes given during the interviews that illustrate how social communication between game users made a considerable, as well as an attractive contribution

towards users' enjoyment of the game and, consequently, helped with the publicity of the game as well as creating a relevant competitive advantage for the game developers. These quotes represent the free-narrative responses of the selected interviewees.

"Well.... the most things I like about the game are the way I communicate with my team as and how we try to encourage each other to take the right actions!" (US-2-M)

"We can clearly communicate with each other, jokes, exchange opinions, and socialise... we make friends out of it!" (US-7-F)

"PubG helps us to make international friends; I have personally known more than six friends from different countries and have exchanged social contact beyond the game!" (US-21-M)

The above quotes reveal that social networking is an integral part of the game and a key feature in the potential success of live-streaming games. It seems that the time users spend communicating with each other influences their desire to sign in and be available online, therefore increasing the frequency at which they are available on-line. Interviewee US-7-F also made a very interesting point by arguing that the communication allows users to exchange thoughts and opinions, which can be an important aspect of the continuous development of user strategies and tactics, which therefore forces them to sign in regularly to analyse and rectify their previous approaches to fighting their opponents, thus developing the team's skills through the experience curve, and obviously the more times a team wins the more rewards they receive and the more attractive the game becomes. The game also triggers users to join in order to connect with international friends and to be open to different cultures, as per the point raised by US-21-M.

PubG is also considered to be unique in terms of the strategies and tactics available, as well as those adopted by users. This view was reflected in the experiences of users 16 and 33, respectively:

"Honestly, the game make me think and re-think and develop ways to manoeuvre and reach the desired objectives...I feel I need to develop myself and train my mind all the time". (US-16-M)

"What is really interesting about PubG is that it puts you under pressure all the time, so you really need to adopt the right tactics along with the other members in the team to survive and win the game!" (US-33-F)

The above interviewees raised an important issue with reference to how they end the game successfully. Their argument is that the strategies and respective tactics make it attractive for users to exchange opinions and develop thoughts about the game on a regular basis. The continuous learning of various skills and the development of approaches forces users to stay in touch with the game and to access its various learning materials on an ongoing basis. Some of the interviewees noted that such resources may include, for instance, chat rooms, YouTube channels, and directly seeking help from more experienced players. The intensive features and terrains available in the game are probably amongst the issues that helped the game to grow so dramatically, as users of multiplayer games will almost inevitably seek support from each other in order to overcome such circumstances.

It seems also that the various strong features of PubG give it the advantage over other live streaming games. The financial investment made by the developers to strengthen the game-related features in order to make it attractive to end users gave the game a unique position of its own within the industry. This view was shared by some of the interviewees, as follows:

“In my opinion, the game has fantastic options and features, including communications options, quality of photos and video, and the continuous updates such as the introduction of zombies!” (US-10-F)

“I have tried other war games, however, this one is different as I always find new updates, frequent changes, and also once the season ends... the players need to start from the begging which make it a challenge!” (US-18-M)

“I think beside the amazing features the game has... it availability in smartphones which we carry all the time make me check the game frequently!” (US-21-M)

The above quotes confirm that the introduction of new features makes the game in some sense come alive. Users find it interesting that there are always new challenges to find and continuous updates to experience. Users accordingly find themselves more attached to the game, and the increase in its perceived importance will thus create the feeling that they need to frequently access it, just as with other important apps. Interviewee US-21-M has noted a critical point behind the success of PubG when he linked the frequent access to the game to its availability on smartphones. This point further explains why PubG is at the top of the live-stream gaming industry. Its focus on smartphones and the associated logistics make it easy for users to gain access to the game at any given time, unlike other games which only have better quality versions for the iPad and other smart devices, which are considered different – and thus distinct – devices in terms of the computational resources they require.

When asked about the features of the game that make it unique, interviewees emphasised the high definition of the game, quality of images, clear resolution, selection of colours, and the effects of the graphics on the game simulation. These views are further illustrated in the following sample quotes from interviewees US-5-M, US-28-F, and US-32-F, respectively:

“Mmmmm... what make is really especial is the quality of its images and the colourful themes!” (US-5-M)

“Well... no one can deny the how beautiful the quality of graphics is and its animation, and this attracts me and makes me happy all every time I play it!” (US-28-F)

“I think everyone can recognise the special features of PubG including the graphic design, the motion, the speed, and colours, and the clarify of the it... and a lot more!” (US-32-F)

The fact that these views support the perception of quality does not mean that the game’s strategy is only bounded by such features; rather, the developers considered other tactics to ensure that the game would spread worldwide. However, the quality itself is considered one of the principal features that increase users’ attachment to the game. The game design affects the player experience, and consequently increases user loyalty to the game. The game design and structure further allow users to live a social experience and stimulate the kind of emotional responses that will remain in their minds for a considerable time. The users also found PubG’s control system to be one of the easier and more intuitive amongst live streaming games in general. A considerable number of interviewees noted that the game is easy to control, and represented a user-friendly application with an easy application process for the game (i.e., an intuitive set of controls, the game instructions are clear, and it is easy to send invites to and speak with others). Such additional features make it exceptional in comparison to other war-based games. The following quotes by US-9-F and US-24-F confirm such views:

“Besides the actions it has, the most think I like about the game is that its easy process and smooth control!” (US-9-F)

"I like PubG, it's easy, the control buttons are clear, and I don't find obstacles to learn the control process... It is also never complicated application!" (US-24-F)

Besides the ease of use and straightforward control method, users also noted another interesting point about PubG which is more related to self-esteem, leadership, and available challenges. The game players argued that PubG forces them to act as a team and to lead each other in order to overcome the various challenges it presents. The interviewees took the view that the success of any action was reliant on the collaborative efforts of the relevant individuals. Their views confirm that social connection and ties of friendship play a significant role in facilitating game communication and mitigating cultural differences. Unlike other games where each player plays alone and other teams are "Demo" members assigned by the software, PubG has gained considerable success by linking the success in each battle to the entire team rather than to a particular individual. This feature in itself encourages players to challenge each other, exchange respective opinions, and develop their skills by repeatedly accessing and playing the game, and joining with other, more experienced players during gameplay. With such intensive interaction, the game developers have ensured its popularity by letting users themselves market the game indirectly through positive word of mouth and by inviting other people to try the game. Therefore, players who are unaware of the game will subsequently become entirely, or at least partially, aware of what PubG actually is. The challenge and friendship features are reflected in the following sample quotes taken from the interviews with US-19-M and US-30-F, respectively:

"PubG is a teamwork game, and this makes it popular among people of a similar age as people need to unify their efforts in order to win the respective challenge!" (US-19-M)

"I'm a team worker and I consider myself somewhat a leader who accepts different tasks and who is willing to accept different challenges... I personally prefer teamwork games... the reason are that these games are not boring, and you always need to communicate with others!" (US-30-F)

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of this research as based on the rich responses gained from the various research participants. Although responses varied between PubG users according to their own subjective perspectives, the findings revealed that the addiction for PubG and the way users view the game is a step in the right direction in terms of the success of the strategy adopted. Our findings suggest those new trends in consumer behaviour and how to market relevant products seems to represent an extremely complex process within the context of the overall strategy. What was of interest was not the complexity itself, but rather how consumers-users of PubG in our case-follow the strategy process by communicating the developers' strategy-related objectives.

The PubG developers have succeeded in creating a "Blue Ocean market" by adopting a successful Blue Ocean strategy to shift the consumers' behaviour towards a live streaming game which simulates reality. The most effective and interesting features include the engineering of the game itself and the wide range of options available to users that makes PubG one of the top live-streaming war-based games which is seeing both an increasing number of downloads and subscribers. Our findings also demonstrate that the majority of the customer base for video games is older than 25 years of age, and therefore such games are no longer limited to teenagers,

and its attractiveness – especially with PubG - even appeals to older users. This finding is contrary to those of Dagdee & Philip (2019), who claimed that the overwhelming majority of video game users consists of individuals aged between 16-25, as this research found that the game is also popular amongst those aged above 25, and is not merely limited to younger players. The findings of the research also indicate that several factors were behind the addiction to the game and loyalty felt by its users which include, for instance, the continuous updates to the game features, the concept of the social networking aspect of the game, the strategies and tactics that users are required to adopt, the quality and resolution of the graphics, the easy control method of the game, the spirit of challenge and the ability to lead other players in the game, and the availability of the game on smartphones. From a strategy perspective, companies which face intensive competition are said to work in the “*Red Ocean area*” and, as noted by Kim (2005), these companies will in turn typically attempt to mitigate the various competitive pressures they experience by cutting costs and increasing their marketing efforts. Therefore, they technically transit from a “*Red Ocean strategy*” to a “*Blue Ocean strategy*” in order to gain first-mover advantages. Bluehole’s story indicates that they followed this exact path and utilised the concept of social communication to overcome its limited marketing budget and, consequently, drag all the potential users to a virgin area of competition, defining the Blue Ocean strategy.

The Blue Ocean strategy is not a unified recipe that can be adopted to achieve particular objectives; rather, it is rather a dynamic process due to the fact that investing in the creation of creative ideas and strengthening the value of the products, services, or ideas is considered the most important factor in the Blue Ocean strategy. As stated by Chang (2010), it is clear that Bluehole invested heavily in creating multiple values for PubG including, for instance, creative ideas, attractive features, the quality of the game, and so on, in order to keep the game competitive, compatible, and alive. Strengthening the facilities for online communication between team members has added a unique feature to the game, but one that is consistent with the recent trend of social networking. This finding also echoes that reported by Dagdee & Philip (2019), who argued that social media and video gaming represent a perfect fit with each other as this harmony generates a platform that encourages mutual communication, analysis, feedback, and offering opinions to others. This point is further applicable to PubG; as the game developers utilised the trend towards social media and word of mouth to market the game, it technically used its earlier subscribers to market the game and save the company the effort of doing so themselves, providing them with the room to focus on other areas of its development.

One of the most significant factors that have made PubG extremely successful is its investment in the smartphone platforms. Unlike other games, Bluehole has developed PubG’s features to work well with smartphones in order to give the game the exact same qualities as are available on other electronic devices. This represented a competitive advantage that Bluehole were able to add to those the game already possessed. The qualitative findings of this research provide strong evidence that the availability of the game on smartphones was one of the main drivers in why it became so well-known between different age groups. Consequently, the investment in smartphone platforms is one of the fields in which various companies compete. Smartphones, in conjunction with the availability of high-speed internet worldwide, has further promoted the concept of live streaming and social connectivity. Although live streaming as a concept and a practice has been shared across various applications, including for instance Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, video gaming in particular has encapsulated and acquired the majority of this practice (Walker, 2014; Dagdee & Philip, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to critically interpret the strategies that led to the success of the online game PubG, and to explore users' perspectives and opinions towards this game. Based on the above, this research can be said to have extended our understanding of Blue Ocean strategies and success story behind live-streaming games (in this instance, PubG) in four ways. Firstly, this research has demonstrated the importance of adopting a Blue Ocean strategy to aid live streaming, as well as benefitting digital game companies in terms of generating profits and changing the consumer behaviour within a short period of time. More specifically, this research has shown that a Blue Ocean strategy is a key to fostering the success story within organisations in the same industry, and this therefore provides a critical interpretation of the dynamic success of their product. Secondly, this research provided qualitative evidence about consumer behaviour, namely the desire for a realistic experience and social practice relationships. That is, this research has demonstrated that Bluehole's massive success was in no way accidental; rather, it was the result of social interaction and multiple value creation (as mentioned earlier) as the main drivers of the appropriate Blue Ocean strategy. Thirdly, this research introduces a vital contribution to the under-researched area of online gaming-for PubG in particular, and strategy disciplines in general. More specifically, this research is unique in the sense that it combines and interprets the current trends of live streaming games and the workable strategy behind the remarkable success of such games. Fourthly, this research was able to identify the factors that make PubG users loyal, and indeed addicted, to the game, which include the continuous updates made to the game's features, social communication between players in real time while playing the game, the strategies and tactics one must adopt in order to ensure success, the quality and resolution of the graphics of the game, easy control and clear game instructions, the spirit of challenge to other players to accomplish the required missions in the game and consequently develop tactics for reaching higher game levels, and PubG's availability on smartphones.

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