

# Game as a Marketing Tool of Library

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**Abstract:** As a valuable means to attract users, there are not many game service cases in China, and only a few of previous studies on game program as marketing tools. Based on the method of literature research, we studied several cases and try to analyze how American libraries use game program to marketing themselves at three levels, in order to provide some advice for libraries that need to reach more patrons.

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## 1 Introduction

The contemporary library has a strong demand for serving readers and self-marketing, so the library is seeking innovative service programs. Among them, game is one of the most noticeable. Because China as a big country of game import and export<sup>[1]</sup>, the development of game industry is fast, and game users are increasing year by year. However, there are not many cases of game practice in the library, and there are not many libraries participate in the International Game Week every year when comparing with libraries in the United States. The number of game practices in the United States is huge and they have gone through the process from probing to the maturity period in practice, which has a strong reference for us.

The terms “game” in this paper is the definition of large game, including desktop board game, video game, role-playing game, console game and many other types. The application of game program includes game events, circulation of games, gamification of traditional library service and information literacy game, etc.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Research and practice in China

Compared with the United States, the research on game service in Chinese libraries started late. Until 2009, the topic attracted the attention of scholars in China initially because of the publication of several articles by Han Yu, Pei Lei and other scholars. After that, Wu Jianhua<sup>[2]</sup> introduced gaming as scaffolding tools in information literacy instruction, Han Yu analyzed the reason why public library in US began their game program, and Ming Juan<sup>[3]</sup> studied the International Game Day @ Library. The researchers have gradually expanded their interest from the introduction of previous experience of game programs including the theory, design, evaluation, case comparison and other aspects of Library games these years. For instance, Bao xueying<sup>[4]</sup> etc. discussed the design elements of Library game and the strategies of improving the user participation in information literacy game, and Hong yue<sup>[5]</sup> analyzed and compared the domestic cases with abroad ones.

The Effectiveness of gaming on information literacy instruction, library branding and content construction was gradually accepted by a couple of libraries in china, and soon Tsinghua University and several other libraries applied game in information literacy instruction successfully(Tsinghua University, Beijing University, Taiwan University, Wuhan University and Huazhong Normal University applied game). Recently, although several libraries don't refuse to insert quiz, prize draw and lucky red envelop in their event, and have made some attempt on retrieve contest and shelf arrangement competition. Generally, we have made progress, but it is not enough to make a break through on marketing

ourselves. So it is quite necessary to study the cases in United States.

## **2.2 Backgrounds of American libraries introducing game into their program**

Early works on game of scholars of library quotes a lot from papers in pedagogy and psychology. Over the past few decades, educators came to realize that using games to learn is the inherent nature of animals and people. With the help of video game technology, educational games have developed rapidly at the end of the 20th century. Games have entered the classroom in various ways and become an important topic in the field of education. In recent years, Horizon Report discussed about game, Gamification and game based learning several times which shows that game is one of the technological trends of the school and library in the next few years. Gee proposes that game promotes students to “hypothesize, probe the world, get a reaction, reflect on the results, reprobe to get better results”. Many scholars study games and try to embed them into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools, as well as university, in order to increase engagement of students. Inevitably, these studies encouraged the practice of academic Library and public library to apply game to innovate their service.

At the beginning of 21st century, libraries in US were suffering from transformation. The improvement of technology upgraded the hardware of the library, but let libraries encounter the biggest crisis ever. The generation growing up in the information age is facing an overloaded information environment. Library is not their only choice, nor is it their first choice. Especially after the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, American public libraries were struggled with shrinking funds and declining readers' entry ratio year after year, so they must rebuilt their position in the community.

The academic library was not easy either. In the new era, the self-position of academic Library deviated from that given by users. A study showed that college students associate academic libraries with books, rather than the expected terms such as quality, trust, and authority. Furthermore, students highly rely on Google and other search engines to complete their research, so the position of Library campus information center is no longer stable.

What matched this phenomenon was the attitude of the library on marketing themselves. Traditionally, advertising is considered to be inappropriate, so that the impression of reserve and coldness often appears in the feedback of public reputation survey

of library. It increased users' anxiety about face to face communication with librarians. Users did not ask librarian for help, which widened the gap between resources and people. And the target users tagged the library with “books” and “boring” meant that libraries need to change.

In the year of 2008, when it is the time for American libraries had to think and change, game was the most popular cultural phenomenon, and the number of audiences increased year by year. According to the Pew survey of that year, the number of 18-30-year-old youth and young players in the United States were not less than 80%, and more than half of the adults are game players.

The rapidly developing game industry was one of the most energetic industries in the creative cultural industries, and games had a profound impact on people choices in daily life. Many librarians had also observed players in the library. Therefore, several academic and public libraries first incorporated games into their service in various ways, which produced an eager response from users. The urgent requirement of the transformation period drove libraries to focus on the games that can bring more participation.

## **3 Game as an effective marketing tool**

As a good marketing tool, game program solves the libraries marketing issues in at least three levels.

### **3.1 Using the game to directly break the distance with users, meet a large number of new faces, and increase the entry ratio is a great inspiration for more libraries to begin game programs**

Attracting users to the library is the most intuitive role of the game in practice, and also the primary goal of most library game program. In the first practice of several public library cases, represented by Ann Arbor district library, which tried small-scale game programs. Games with simple equipment and low cost brought libraries crowds in such great quantity that it was necessary to limit the volume get through the entrance, which far beyond the best imagination. The results of large-scale events are even more impressive. In 2013, the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire's McIntyre library hosted the welcome event of game night for orientation, involving nearly 1000 students. And at the most influential events in history of gaming organized by American Library Association, 14,000 people participated in National Game Day in 2008, which astoundingly increased to over 31,000 in 2009.

The successful marketing outcomes encourages many libraries to use regular game events to build their own brand, so as to continuously attract users' attention and let potential users aware of the existence of the library. For example, Lawrence University Seeley G. Mudd Library use Super Smash Bros tournaments to reach out students, and it hosted 9 events from 2009 to May 2012.

Since many of the participants of game events never came to the library before, it is not difficult to reach new people who are not regular patrons of library. Noticing the fact that freshmen had no aware of the library's services and refused to ask librarian for help, the library of Wake Forest University (WFU)<sup>[6]</sup> planned two large-scale ARG Capture Flag and Human vs. Zombie and held four times in 2010-2013, the number of participants increasing from more than 100 at the beginning to nearly 600, accounting for 8% of the total number of students in the University. It successfully encouraged those students who are afraid of the library to come to the library for the first time, helped them to get familiar with the layout of the library and feel comfortable to the environment of the library.

### **3.2 Game program also increase the patrons' realization of other services of the library**

Participants of game program would realize the functions of the library when they played in the environment of academic resources and services. The number of books borrowed by teenagers in the Guilderland public library increased by 4% every year before the library began to circulate video game collections, this data became 20% after that.

In addition that the video game circulation service leads to a better circulation of paper books, some libraries initiative to use games to guide the players to become regular patrons, and to guide them to become good readers, so that teenage players could be a part of library and participate in other programs of the library. The John C. Fremont Library District Using game tournaments attracted 60% of the local residents, including children and adults, to issue for library cards. Benton harbor public library provided multiple game projects since 2007. In the following five years, it had completely changed the Youth Department of the library. Those children who participated in the game afternoon became members of the Teen Advisory Board and the Youth Reading Club of the library, and also volunteered for children's activities. Not only had they used game program to reach teenagers but promoted paper reading to them. The teenagers who applied for the library reader card to play the game registered for

the summer reading program with the encouragement of the librarians. The number of teenagers who participated in the summer reading program increased from 50 to 100. In 2006, library of Pocahontas high school in Virginia successfully used the game to promote students to participate in the local reading project Virginia Readers' Choice. These examples show the potential of using games on many other services of library.

### **3.3 Unique social experience refreshes the image of library and librarian**

The game as a content is interesting and surprising for patrons, and makes young people think that library is cool. But more importantly, the social experience provided by game events is unique and impressive. When players interactive with each other friendly in a recreational atmosphere of game events, they refresh their previous concept of Library and create a new image that library is kind and sincerely providing what they need. This kind of image is the foundation of the library to attract users. As Eli believes that the biggest gain of AADL's five-year game practice is not their 200 events and thousands of players, nor how many people have been brought into the library and how many people have read books, but their fame has changed the impression and feeling of patrons about the library.

The face to face interaction also changed patrons' impression of Librarians. The library of University of North Dakota uses a web-based board game to reach students in the outreach project. Even though their booth was simple, students attracted by the new interactive form were always queuing up, and the amount of interaction with librarians is 30% more than expected, in sharp contrast to the previous events. "The library successfully demonstrated her kindness and understanding in the activity."<sup>[7]</sup> They could expect better results in the next year. From 2010 to 2015, the annual library sleepover named "Lights Out" held in JFK Library of East Washington University changed the image of the library as a "manager" and "monitor" that had been restraining students in many ways, and gained the freshness and enthusiasm of students<sup>[8]</sup>.

### **3.4 The amazing social environment that games could build between players is irreplaceable**

The interactions between game program participants show the core value of active social interaction in the non-commercial environment of library services, which brings a consistent experience with other library's services. Because maintaining users in a social way is common

in library, such as reading clubs and storytelling is also the transformation of reading that can be completed by a single person into a multi person social activity, and the essence of game events such as game night is the same. For example, in the “play it loud” and go projects of the Richland Library in Northeast regional branch of the South Carolina<sup>[9]</sup>, librarians observed that multiplayer games have the potential to create positive interactions between players, parents and children, teenagers and other adult players. The parents appreciated that it was much more beneficial to see children play in a safe environment and receive all kinds of positive information from their playmates than to let children play alone at home or with their families. Gullett of Bloomington public library also said parents appreciated and even drove for two hours to bring their children to the event. Old Bridge Library also witnessed the young volunteers’ enthusiastic guidance to the seniors in the use of Wii game systems to play bowling and Guitar Hero. Besides, during the International Game Day in 2012, several libraries still hosted the event after the hurricane, which maintained the connections between people in disasters.

Whether library would like to build a community or a campus cultural center, the unique experience is the core competitiveness of the libraries self-marketing. It is economical to spend an average of more than 260 US dollars to provide games as entertainment resources and marketing tools.

### 3.5 Sponsors support gaming in library

ALA has the ability to organize large-scale game projects, which could attract sponsors to broaden its influence. The most convincing example is International Game Day. The original intention of launching the National Game Day was that ALA would like to re-associate with the community through the educational, entertainment and social value of the game. Levine said in her briefing at the first meeting of the game interest group that on the 2008’s Game day, Hasbro donated 16000 copies of PictureKa games to public libraries, with 1500 people playing the same board game at the same time. It is almost impossible for a single library or institution to achieve such huge influence.

## 4 Conclusion

According to the survey after the Game Day in 2015, more than half of the librarians thought that the game activity increased the reputation of the library, compared with only 0.95% who thought that the

reputation decreased. Why game could be so effective in library marketing? Except its interesting nature and its social interaction between patrons and library what we discuss in the previous part, game program be able to reach so many new patrons because game is the potential patrons’ choice. Only by providing what the patrons need can library become what the patrons need. After all, what people need on entertainment and content is more and more close to real life, from text, photos to audio and video, to games integrating multiple media, and even the latest AR and VR technologies. As content providers, libraries cannot reverse the trend of the times. The reality requires Libraries to develop user-friendly and social oriented services with strong interaction. Libraries no matter where they are need continuous improvement and always follow the times. Taking the library of University of Shanghai for science and technology as an example, the traditional reading sharing activities usually have less than ten students to participate; and film appreciation activities can fill the activity room; while the shelving competition for learning the shelving rules and classification standards, brings students’ enthusiasm and laughter.

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