CONTENT CULTURALIZATION IN GAMES

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Abstract: *This paper explores the pivotal role of culturalization in video games, highlighting its significance beyond translation and localization. The study examines the key cultural variables: history, religion, stereotypes, and geopolitical imaginations, which are essential in adapting games for global markets. Case studies include the adaptation of "Animal Crossing" for American culture and the controversy surrounding Nintendo's renaming of Pikachu in Hong Kong. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for effective culturalization in the gaming industry.*

Keywords: *culturalization, video games, localization, global gaming market, cultural sensitivity*

Introduction

In the era of globalization, video games have developed as a gigantic medium which doesn't need any exclusive geographical place. But this is very much bound up in terms of cultural sensitivity and usefulness. This paper will focus specifically on the more complex process of culturalization in video games, differentiating it from the more commonly ascribed concept of localization. Localization where the developers concentrate mainly on translation of text and dialogue between different languages, games culturalization extends to changing game content in a way that is respectful while still reflecting the wide variety of cultural norms and values of players. According to Terra Translations, [1] "Culturalization helps make sure the right choices are made when launching a video game in a new market" by ensuring [2] "that any political, cultural, or religious references don't offend." Especially so because video games are not just products of entertainment, they also act as cultural ambassadors that articulate, bracket and translate other themes across borders.

Cultural Variables in Game Culturalization

Historical Context and Sensitivity

History takes a considerable part of any culture. Any misrepresentation of the historical facts would provoke objections from the consumers against the strategic relevance of the historical lineage they so cherished. For instance, as declared by CS Agents [3] "even a small altered history can provoke strong reactions from its own people". Strong sensitivity of this subject often becomes an occasion for paying serious attention to research and the representation of historical topics stipulated in games. By taking into consideration the historical context, developers will be able to establish a better sense of place in the game world. Once a player is able to identify history within the context of the game, they are therefore able to have a sense of attachment that makes their experience really worthwhile. Secondly, proper representation signals that a company has a willingness to respect players and their heritage.

Religious Considerations

Religious consideration in video game culturalization is sensitive. Indeed, religion has deep roots in the context of cultural identity and personal values. In light of this, it presents one of the most challenging elements of game design and form of content development. Mistakes made in this area would generate controversies and offend the players and maybe even hurt reception and the success of the game around different markets. Religious symbols, stories, and practices can vary considerably between cultures and even between religions themselves. Therefore, for this

context in video games, these aspects need to be carefully handled and portrayed properly. A perfect example of such insensitivity to religious beliefs through gaming can be found in the "Kakuto Chojin" incident, where the game included a chanted portion of the Islamic Qur'an in its audio track. This inclusion is viewed as disrespectful and though unintentionally led to extreme formal protests and the backslash was so much that the game was withdrawn from the market. This case reflects on the importance of vetting game content for religious appropriateness in the strictest sense possible.

Stereotypes and Discrimination

In video games, stereotypes are always presented as an oversimplification, generalization or exaggeration that pertains to a particular group, either based on ethnicity, nationality, gender, or culture. The most effective way of addressing and removing a stereotype in the video games is through representation. This implies that the game should be inclusive of a wide range of characters, with diverse backgrounds, different perspectives and experiences like those which are gained by people in real life. Different games have received a lot of criticism on how they portray stereotypes. For example, a few games have been criticized for showing cultural groups with stereotypical characteristics or perpetuating negative ethnic stereotypes. These examples show that it is necessary to become more conscious and delicate in terms of developing video games. For example, in "The Last of Us Part II," protagonist Ellie's character stands as a testament to the power of inclusive representation in video games. Ellie is a young, capable, and independent woman who defies traditional gender roles. Besides that, getting even deeper, the attitude of Ellie being a lesbian is also developed in the game. This representation received praise from both players and critics for its authenticity and inclusivity, setting a new standard for LGBTQ+ representation in video games.

Geopolitical Sensitivities

Geopolitical sensitivities play a big role in setting up the culturalization of video games. It involves understanding and dealing with the complexities of international relationships and territorial conflict. Representation of such elements must be treated with the highest level of awareness and sensitivity in video games to avoid offending players and possible international incidents. In a world in which digital media are possible all over the place, the video game often finds itself at the geopolitical/entertainment crossroads. For instance, games with maps or territorial representation can become politically controversial in places where borders are in question or where there's 'trouble' related to the question of sovereignty. According to Altagram, even for different nationalities with quite similar culture and using the same language, adapting a game with each culture is still important especially for geopolitical tensions area. An illustrative case is the renaming of Pikachu in Hong Kong by Nintendo, which brought to light the complex relationship between China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The change from "Bei-Ka-Ciu", which aligns with Cantonese pronunciation, to "Pi-Ka-Qiu," more akin to Mandarin Chinese, was seen as a dismissal of Hong Kong's distinct cultural and linguistic identity. This decision by Nintendo, intended to standardize the character's name, inadvertently became a source of geopolitical tension.

Case Studies in Game Culturalization

There is probably no better example of the depth and breadth of culturalization than what Nintendo did with its game "Animal Crossing" for the American market. Nintendo, one of Japan's biggest gaming companies, had to localize into a playable, understandable, enjoyable game one of its flagship titles, which proved that even sometimes what's on the surface isn't everything when it comes to simple or easy. "Animal Crossing" went through significant modifications to meet the expectations and be relatable to the American game player. It was more than just translating the game's language, this had to do with creating a transformed content of the original game to match with what one would find in the majority of the American games.

- Item and Event Localization: Some items and in-game events had been very specific to the Japanese, so they either changed them or replaced them with similar ones in

America. For example, traditional Japanese holidays were repealed by American ones. This accounted for the relation between the cultural aspects of the country where the genesis of the game occurred and those of the foreign American one.
- Alteration in Character and Dialogue: Modifications were also made to the characters of the game and their dialogues. The developers ensured that the speeches and mannerisms of the characters embraced American colloquialisms, as well as social customs, so as to enhance the ability of the in-game environment to appeal to a typical American audience.
- Visual and Audio Modifications: Visual appearances such as the colors and designs painted in the game were modified to fit the American taste. The game's soundtrack was adjusted to include music that appealed more to Western tastes, reflecting the cultural differences in musical preference.

The culturalization attempts towards "Animal Crossing" got very successful within the United States. The localized process brought refined and personalized change within the game that appeased the players, thus provided the opportunity for the company for marketing the product within a larger segment of the audience. This success demonstrates how potent a thoughtful culturalization is in affecting the degree of acceptance of the game in the international markets.

Conclusion

Culturalization in video games is not essentially a marketing expansion strategy, rather an imperative methodology that is required to be adopted to maintain the respect and inclusiveness in a world interconnected globally. This needs to be thoughtfully crafted, being exceedingly familiar with cultural, historical, and geopolitical environments of its target audiences. If culturalization is integrated into game development, it will help protect creators from making the cultural misstep and ensure games are enriched according to the needs of a large gaming audience across the world. The discussed examples and case studies elaborate the need of cultural sensitivity in game design which will thus not only reap positive results in acceptance of video games at international level but also in accordance with its commercial success.

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