

Les types de pouvoir dans les jeux vidéo

Yan Zhaoxing

Résumé Le pouvoir dans les jeux vidéo est obscur, semblable à ce que Foucault appelle le "micro-pouvoir". Mais il partage la nature et les types de pouvoir. Et les moyens, les buts et les résultats de l'exercice du pouvoir dans les jeux sont les mêmes que ceux du pouvoir traditionnel. La science politique divise le pouvoir en trois catégories : le pouvoir coercitif, le pouvoir de récompense et le pouvoir idéologique. Ces trois types de pouvoir sont utilisés dans le pouvoir des jeux, le pouvoir de récompense étant le plus courant ; le pouvoir coercitif et le pouvoir idéologique jouent tous deux un rôle de soutien. Cependant, le pouvoir dans les jeux vidéo est distinct et multiforme, et il ne peut être assimilé à aucune des sortes précédentes ; il est plus indirect que direct, plus subtil que direct, et plus calculé que contondant.

Mots clés: Jeux vidéo, pouvoir, types de pouvoir, Foucault, micro-pouvoir.

On Types of Power in Video Games*

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Abstract: Power in video games is obscure, similar to what Foucault refers to as "micro-power." But it shares all the nature and types of power. And the means, purposes, and outcomes of exerting game power are the same as traditional power. Political science divides power into three categories: coercive power, reward power, and ideological power. All three types of power are used in game power, with reward power being the most common; coercive and ideological power both play supportive roles. However, power in video games is distinct and multifaceted, and it cannot be equated with any of the preceding sorts; it is more indirect than direct, more subtle than straightforward, and more calculated than blunt.

Keywords: Video games, Power, Types of power, Foucault, Micro-power

The problem of "power in video games" has received insufficient attention from researchers, and according to the author's search, there is no article, let alone books, directly examining power in video games. This paper is simply a starting point for a discussion about the various types of power in video games, with the hope that my crude remarks will elicit more thoughtful responses.

Political science divides power into three categories: coercive power, reward power, and ideological power. Coercive power, also known as punitive power, is the ability to achieve compliance by imposing punishment or the threat of punishment. Reward power is the ability to gain obedience by delivering advantages or promises of benefits. The distinction between coercive and rewarding power is that the former is a negative reward, while the latter is an affirmative reward. The deliberate cultivation of specific beliefs by persuasion or instruction, i.e., the formation of an internal concept that makes individuals feel obligated to obey, leads to the object of power being willingly obeyed, which is referred to as ideological power. The different connotations of the three types of power reflect differences in how they are maintained: the means, methods, and conditions required for the subject of power to maintain dominance over the object of power differ, as do the psychological states and effects of the object of power to obey the subject of power.¹

All three types of power are present in video games, with reward power being the most common, and coercive and ideological power playing a smaller role.

Let us first examine the characteristics of the several sorts of power. Because no one wants to be punished, coercive power makes the object of power submit through punishment by the subject

* Trans by Yuting Wang, research master of philosophy, Radboud University.

¹ Guanghui Zhou; Xianming Zhang. A theoretical analysis of three types of power and their utility. *Social Science Front.* 1996(03), pp.52-57. The translation is the translator's own.

of power, therefore the execution of coercive power is usually the best in terms of results. However, the use of coercive power has specific prerequisites, one of which is that the subject of power has absolute domination and supremacy over the object of power. A parent's punishment of a child, for example, is usually considered reasonable, whereas a school teacher's punishment (especially corporal punishment) is less plausible, and a passer-by's punishment of a child is usually not recognized due to the difference in dominance between them; on the other hand, a parent's punishment of a child is common, but a child's punishment of a parent is almost unheard of because the parent has a dominant position over the child. These two features provide parents with the inherent reason and legitimacy to impose coercive power on their offspring. Furthermore, it is difficult to exert coercive power over power objects when lacking these two conditions. In the coercive power relationship, on the other hand, the object of power is the lowest in acceptance and their experience is the worst, because power is gained by punishment, and no one enjoys being punished. So, if the power subject loses its dominance or superiority over the object, even if it is only temporary, the power object will resist, so as to end the coercive power relationship. On the surface, coercive power looks to be stable, but in essence, it is a highly unstable power relationship, and any change in the relationship between subject and object may result in the disintegration of this power relationship.

The subject of power makes the object of power submit by delivering rewards in a reward power relationship. And, since this power relationship is non-coercive, its ultimate impact is usually less than that of coercive power, because the benefits presented do not always attract everyone, and even if the benefits are accepted, their effect is not always assured. Although the effect may be worse, the conditions for implementing reward power are much lower than those for implementing coercive power, and the subject of power does not need to have dominance over the object or be in a dominant position, so anyone can attempt to exercise reward power against anyone. If the punishment in the previous example is replaced with a reward, it is reasonable for the parents to reward the child, it is reasonable for the school teacher to reward the child, and an unrelated passer-by can reward the child for something; on the other hand, it is reasonable for the parents to reward the child, and the child can reward the parents, for example, by getting a good grade on the next exam in class. For the power object, reward power is preferable to coercive power because they are not forced to accept certain conditions and will not be punished in this relationship, but will only receive rewards and benefits, and if they do not want the benefits, they can always withdraw from this power relationship. As a result, this type of power relation is exceedingly simple to form and equally simple to break.

Ideological power is used to persuade or educate the target of power into believing in the subject, and this power relationship is not coercive, yet it is usually more effective than reward power. The most significant distinction between ideological power and the previous two is that the former two compel the object to obey through external punishment or external reward, and once the object loses the external stimulus, the object quickly leaves the power relationship, whereas ideological power internalizes the power relationship by changing the mind. So, even if the subject of power is no longer present, the object is likely to remain faithful to the relationship for a long time, giving this power relationship the maximum level of loyalty and durability. Ideological

power relations appear to have no prerequisites, and they can be established between anyone. However, ideological power relations are the most difficult to establish, requiring the power subject and its agents to have extremely strong persuasive ability and patience, as well as to propagate and persuade the object for a long time and even for years. The success rate is determined by the subject of power's vision, doctrine, and persuasive power, as well as the object's situation and requirements. And once this power is established, the more difficult it is to build, the greater its loyalty and stability. Even if the object of power is controlled and defenseless, it will never readily abandon the power connection. Even though the subject of power no longer exists, the object may nevertheless demand devotion to the subject. The historical cases of Bo Yi and Shu Qi starving to death, as well as Wen Tianxiang's patriotic poetry, are all examples of this.

Coercive power is rarely employed in video games, and it is mostly utilized to preserve the regular flow of the game or to safeguard other players' gaming experiences. Coercive power is most often utilized in single-player games to ensure game flow. Some games feature more open sceneries, and players will frequently try to visit locations that are not yet accessible by the current game process, necessitating the use of coercive techniques to keep them from crossing. Sometimes the game may install barriers or NPCs to hinder players from passing, and other times the game will use so far unbeatable adversaries as an impediment to keep the player from progressing because players who enter the region that they should not access would produce confusion in the game's flow. As a result, the storyline and role, as well as the game logic, may be disrupted. As a result, the game will almost definitely find a way to prohibit players from entering areas they should not visit, and as a result, coercion is frequently used. Coercive power is mostly employed in online games to penalize players who engage in poor behaviors or wrongdoing in order to safeguard the gaming experience of other players. Some online gamers consistently engage in harmful conduct, ranging from overly aggressive comments to cheating. The most immediate and significant consequence of these activities is that they impair other players' gaming experiences, which is precisely the most undesirable for game companies. Game businesses invest a lot of money and manpower into creating games and doing their best to deliver a positive experience for players, and it would be unacceptable if they failed due to the misbehavior of a small minority of players. As a result, an online gaming corporation pays close attention to the control and punishment of undesirable and prohibited game behaviors. So, while coercive power is not the most common sort of power used in games, it plays a significant role.

Reward power is the most common sort of power in video games, and the game itself is the best template for implementing reward power. This power dynamic and video games appear to be a natural match. The subject of power gives benefits to make the object of power obey, and the game also keeps players by giving benefits; there is no compulsory power relationship in reward power, and any player can disengage at any time; the reward power relationship can be established between any two power objects, no matter how big or small, strong or weak they are. The game may be created and played by anybody. The use of reward power in video games is fairly common and begins as soon as the player enters the game. Regardless of the game type, when the player enters the game, he is typically assigned a role. As the player progresses through the game, the game continues to provide resources like new abilities, equipment, or champions while notifying

the player that there are more prizes ahead, dangling the player like a carrot on a stick dangling a horse, and keeping the player in the game. From the perspective of the player, the game's process is a continuous process of earning rewards. In real life, effort does not always pay off, but in the game, it always does. There will not only be predicted gains, but also numerous unexpected rewards. Although there may be some dissatisfaction, because the cost is virtually low, such as losing coins or doing re-tries, there will be no bad experience, and the gaming process is nearly entirely positive, which is why the game is so appealing to players.

Empathy is frequently used to apply ideological power in games. Some games (particularly role-playing games and interactive fiction) provide the story and represent the characters in a manner akin to novels and movies. Deep in a game with a good plot, players will naturally empathize with the character, and this emotion gradually deepens as the plot progresses, and eventually, it is likely to transform into an almost faith-like emotion, a near fanaticism towards a certain character, which the ACG circle (formed by Animation, Comic, and Game fans) calls "Chu." Character X's "Chu" is "X Chu," and the degree of affection is termed "Chu power." "Chu" is a regular occurrence in the ACG circle. "Chu" will not hesitate to acquire a range of peripherals and products about their favorite characters due to their affection for them and their sense of faith, and will seldom worry about the price. They will hang posters of the character in their houses and purchase any game, anime, or manga in which the figure appears. The game's ideological power is similarly tough to develop. It takes very good characters and narratives that suit the player's taste to develop the power connection, but once established, it is so strong that the power object never easily abandons the power relationship, but stays in it for a long time.

The aforementioned three classifications of power types in macro power science, however, do not fully summarize power types in games. A type of power in video games differs from the others in that it is more indirect than direct, more nuanced than straightforward, more calculated than blunt, and by which the game producer manipulates the players in the palm of their hands, also known as manipulative power. The subject of manipulative power utilizes the fewest resources to make the object of power eager to put up the most effort to meet the subject's expectations, and in this process, the subject of power benefits far more than the object, but the object is unaware of it. The foundation of manipulative power is reward power, but its essence is not the benefits supplied to the object, but how to manipulate the object through these benefits in order to generate an effect that resembles ideological power. This type of power resembles the power technics described in Foucault's micro-power theory and Byung-chul Han's "psychopolitics" more than the simple and violent power defined in classic macro-power theory. In the past, "power commands highly different modes of appearance. Its most direct and immediate form finds expression as the negation of freedom. This enables power-holders to impose their will against the will of those subject to power - by violence, if need be." But today, "power is assuming increasingly permissive forms. In its permissivity - indeed, in its friendliness - power is shedding its negativity and presenting itself as freedom... Power that is smart and friendly does not operate frontally - i.e., against the will of those who are subject to it. Instead, it guides their will to its benefit. It says 'yes' more often than 'no'; it operates seductively, not repressively. It seeks to call forth positive emotions and exploit them. It leads astray instead of

erecting obstacles. Instead of standing opposed to the subject, smart and friendly power meets the subject halfway... Today's crisis of freedom stems from the fact that the operative technology of power does not negate or repress freedom so much as exploit it."² Byung-Chul Han's comment refers to today's neoliberal regime, but it may also be applied to video games, as game makers employ similar techniques to manipulate players. One of the most common implementations is the card draw (Gacha) system, which is currently the most popular among free-to-play mobile games. This technique has been used in the gaming industry for so long that a well-established system of card draws has long existed. To begin with, drawing cards requires resources. There are normally two forms of card drawing. In the game, you can draw ordinary cards using gold coins gained without spending money. Premium cards necessitate tokens (such as diamonds, platinum, and so on) that can only be obtained by paying. The former gives out bad cards, whereas the latter gives out good cards. Friendship points can also be used to draw cards at times. Friend points are free points that can be offered to game friends on a daily basis to encourage players to add additional friends to the game so that they can encourage and remind one other to avoid abandoning the game. Premium cards are generally only drawn with bought tokens, but every day or two players get a chance to draw for free, which encourages some players to take advantage of the situation: They get a chance to draw premium cards for free and feel that they have "earned" it. The game company acquires "logins" and "daily active users" (DAU, an important indicator of success in the game industry) from players as a result. Furthermore, some games will purposefully modify the probability of this free premium card draw to be the same as the standard card draw in order to deceive players. Each card in the card pool has its probability, and the greater the level, the less likely the card will appear. To encourage players to spend impulsively, the game periodically introduces new cards and also holds a limited-time "UP" event for the probability of new cards, during which card draws have a larger probability of receiving new cards. Some "conscientious" games will additionally have a guarantee mechanism; if the player has not been able to draw the desired card, he will receive it after the nth (n is usually large, at least 100) draw. A Japanese gamer once spent 700,000 yen on the game "Granblue Fantasy" and still did not receive the needed card. To avoid this problem, some games have implemented guarantee measures. However, as a result, gamers increased their spending on the game, and the game firm benefitted. Because they exchanged extremely few resources for the player's spending. There are several more applications of manipulative power other than the most common card draw. For example, in games, the typical quest system allows players to receive rewards with little effort. Game resource reuse can also be characterized as such. Color-changing monsters, for example, may be found in "God of War 4" and "The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild." Also in "Devil May Cry 4", in the second part of the "Dante process," when the process returns to the original route, it entirely duplicates the prior scenes. The guild system in World of Warcraft allows players to establish their groups, administer themselves, and form a feeling of collective honor, saving the game corporation a lot of maintenance expenditures. The stamina system in free mobile games allows

² Byung-Chul Han; trans Erik Butler. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. London & New York: Verso. 2017, pp.13-15.

players not to consume all of the game content too quickly; it also encourages players to come online to avoid wasting when the stamina is restored to full; and it also encourages players to pay for stamina after consuming it, effectively killing three birds with one stone. Manipulative power is incredibly concealed and requires extremely complex tactics to exercise, as well as considerable attention to detail, and even minor errors can result in utter loss. The expert game designers have nearly fully grasped this power technology, and the player will be manipulated, as Buddha did with the Monkey King, which is a regular phenomenon in the field of game power today.

Game power is a sort of power that is not immediately apparent, but it contains all of the features and kinds of power, and the means, purposes, and outcomes of exerting game power are the same as those of traditional power. Although it cannot be argued that game power is a form of power itself, because its nature and types are identical to traditional power, it can be considered a sort of quasi-power. In this way, we may at least begin to investigate the relationship between games and players, connecting game design and player psychology rather than considering them independently. The proposed game power in this work is designed to attract more capable academics to this area and game-related research.

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