The comparison of online game experiences by players in games of Lineage & EverQuest: Role play vs. Consumption

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ABSTRACT
This study attempted to explore how similar MMORPGs(massively multiplayer online role player game) come to have different meaning and functions by the gamers in the game world. Each game world comes to be perceived as having different experiences by virtue of gamers' perception of the game world. Their experiences are distinguished whether they are presented as consuming a product which has features of fantasy world, or taking a role play that the gamers create their virtual social relationship. The subjects of this study were two MORPGs, 'Lineage' and 'EverQuest'. Two online games are physically similar, but each one has evolved into a different virtual worlds. While Lineage game world has been a part of real world, EverQuest game was experienced as consuming the game product. The differences were expressed by the recognition of gamers and their behavior patterns in the world. Lineage gamers has regarded the game world as a part of their daily living society, while EverQuest gamers has perceived their experiences in the world as a kind of fantasy experiences. Being in EverQuest world was an opportunity to experience a fantasy land, and the game world as considered as a part of product. Although gamers in Lineage & EverQeust were both taking the role play experiences, the differences on perceiving the world has made them to behave differently. They has also showed different gaming behaviors. Different experiences of gamers in similar MMORPGs were expressed by their consuming patterns of digital images or contents.

Keywords
Online game(MMORPG), the recognition of gamers on game world, consuming behavior(game activity), the value and meaning of a product

As an industrial society has changed into an information-oriented society, some new products

like Avatar or online game emerged. In industrial society, we consumed the usability and function of product. And the value or meaning of product was endowed by designer or developer. But in an information-oriented society, we consume images, emotionality and some senses like the sense of belonging, and sense of virtual as well as the usability and function of product [5]. That is, we consume psychological experiences like satisfaction through the product like digital images or digital contents. In this case, the value and meaning of product can be different from consumers; the value or meaning of product endowed by consumers.

As the expansion of internet has made it possible to develop a virtual game world that thousands people can simultaneously participate, the game has became a type of virtual world. This new games have enabled people to link up online together, and play simultaneously [3]. Gaming in online space itself, especially with massively multiple gamers has got the new feature, *Virtually real world*[8]. However, there has been relatively little research how people take the virtual experiences in real world context[2]. Moreover, in spite of the rapid growth of online game industry, there has been little research on how people accept the virtual game world, and how they treat the game product.

Online game is a representative example of digital contents, and digital product. To identify the value and meaning of digital images or digital contents in virtual world, we began to look at gamers' experiences in online game world, especially MMORPGs. In the game world, gamers consume digital images simply by playing the game, and literally they consume the digital images in the game world by using various items such as armors and swords. Those digital images were called 'Game Items'. The game items were created by the game activities and they were transformed by gamers, too[7]. The values and functions of game items and game world itself can be distinguished by the gamers' activities and experiences. [Table 1] shows how a game world comes to have different values and functions by the role of gamers' and their activities.

Table 1: The distinction of game experiences by the recognition of game world

Identity of Game	Game is just game!	Game is another living space!
Function	A product for fantasy experiences	a part of the real world
Role of gamers	consumer	prosumer
Game Activities	Achieving goals and progresses in game (like quest or battle)	Satisfying psychological needs: self-expression & identity development. Create their own lives in the virtual world.
Role of developer	Design game activities and game world.	Maintaining the order of game world with the grace of God

The purpose of this study is to identify how online game is endowed new value, meaning and function and changed into totally different world(or product) in result by recognition and

consuming behavior of gamers. The research questions are as follows.

1. What are the differences between the recognition or understanding of the gamers on two online games, Lineage and EverQuest? This question will be identified through the response to fascination of game, satisfaction on game activities and character.

2. What are the differences in games, such as Lineage & EverQuest in terms of consuming behavior? This question will be identified through the response to social relationship, community activities and item trading.

3. How are two online game endowed its value and meaning by gamers by the nature of recognition of gamers?

METHOD

Subjects
The subjects of this study are famous Internet-based online games called 'Lineage' and 'EverQuest' and its gamers. Lineage has been serviced since 1998 in Korea, 2000 in Taiwan, 2001 in U. S., 2002 in Japan, 2003 in China. Lineage is most popular MMORPG in Korea, the number of paid Korean subscribers has been estimated to exceed 2.5 million, with average number of concurrent players estimated to be over 100,000 on March 2003[8]. EverQuest has been serviced since 1999 in U. S., and the number of players has already exceeded 1 million.

Although there are differences in amount of options and complexity, this study assumed that these two online games are physically similar. Basically, both are MMORPG and community-based games. Moreover, the goal of game activities is to accomplish the task and to make level-up and accumulate cyber money or items through hunting, battling and completing quest or mission. However, these two games become two different kinds of word. While Lineage becomes a cyber society as a part of the real world, EverQuest is consumed game product for experience of fantasy world.

Participants
4786 gamers(male: 94.4%, female: 5.6%) from Lineage and approximately 4000 gamers(male: 84%, female: 16%) from EverQuest participated. The average age of Lineage gamers was 20.6 years old, and that of EverQuest gamers was 25.6 years old. For Lineage gamers, data were collected from online survey. In case of EverQuest, data were extracted from Yee's research[9].
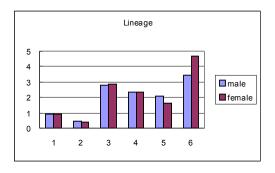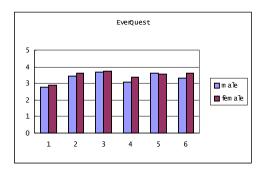
RESULT
This study explored the recognition or understanding of gamers on game world and different consuming behavior pattern(game activity pattern) made by different recognition of online game.

Differences in the recognition or understanding on game world
To identify the differences in the recognition or understanding on game world, this study examined the response to fascination of game, satisfaction on game activities and character. In the fascination of game, above 40% of Lineage gamers answered fascination of game is 'to enjoy the social interactions'. But EverQuest gamers answered fascination of game is 'to explore a fantasy world', 'to get satisfied from achieving goals of game' and 'to enjoy the social interactions'.

In the satisfied activities of game, Lineage gamers answered most satisfied activity is 'to make friends'. But EverQuest gamers answered most satisfied activity is 'to make level-up' and 'to gain rare item'.

1-Killing Mobs/2-Battle(Lineage), Completing a quest(EQ)/3-Level-up/4- upgrade item/ 5-Gaining rare item/6-Making friends

Figure 1: Satisfied activities of game

According to the answer to the fascination and the satisfied activities of game, Lineage gamers feel the fascination and are satisfied through making friends and participating in diverse activities with other gamers, not game activities itself.

In the most important point in character creation, 36% of Lineage gamers answered most important point in character creation is 'character's name' and 33.7% answered most important point is 'game impact(potential ability of character)'. However, 42.3% of EverQuest gamers answered most important point in character creation is 'game impact(potential ability of character)', and only 9.9% answered 'character's name' is important in character creation. Character name is the only thing that gamers can create in the character creation process. That is, it is the only thing that gamers can express their personality or image. To lay more stress on the character name than game impact or ability means that Lineage gamers regard Lineage world as a space they can express their identity or image like real world. This phenomenon of self-expression through character is remarkable in Lineage world. The result from the question about raising character of opposit gender shows above 50% of Lineage gamers(male 65.7%, female 53.9%) have at least one character of opposit gender because of the appearance of character. However, above 60% of EverQuest gamers (male 47.9%, female 76.7%) have at least one character of opposit gender for the experience of role play.
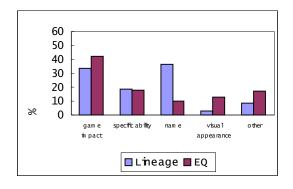

Figure 2: Most important point in character creation

In quality of friendship, 55% of Lineage gamers answered game friends equal real life friends and 5% answered game friends are better than real life friends. But 47% of EverQuest gamers answered game friends equal real life friends and 15% answered game friends are better than real life friends. This result has implication that more EverQuest gamers differentiate between relationship in EverQuest world and in real life.

The result from exploring the differences in the recognition of game world showed Lineage gamers regard Lineage world as another living space or a part of real world they can explore and express psychological need and self-identity(or self-image) and can live through diverse activities. But EverQuest gamers regard EverQuest as a product for the role playing and the experience of fantasy world.

The nature of Game activities: Consuming images or Participating in living world
To identify the differences in game consuming behavior(game activities), this study examined the response to social relationship , community activities and item trade. In the community activities, while 57.3% of Lineage gamers belong to 'Blood Pledges', a kind of community for castle seizing, battling and hunting, 81.8% of EverQuest gamers belong to 'Guild'. In the degree of participating in the events of Blood Pledges or Guild, above 40% of Lineage gamers often participate in the online events of Blood Pledges and 12% always participate in the online events. In case of EverQuest, about 50% of EverQuest gamers often participate in the online events of Guild and as many as 20% of them always participate in all online events. Blood Pledges and Guild are public community for accomplishing task or mission of game and good performance. Therefore, this result can be interpreted that the degree of participation in Guild of EverQuest gamers are faithful to game itself is higher than that of Lineage gamers.

This study also explored private social relationship. We asked the degree of agreement about two question, 'It would bother me if my romantic partner role-played being in love with another character in game' and 'Would you feel guilty if you role-played being in love with someone else?'. In the partner's romantic relationship in game, about 80% of Lineage gamers answered it would bother them if their romantic partner role-played being in love with another character in game. But in case of EverQuest, only 36.6% of them would be bothered in that case.

In the gamer's romantic relationship in game, about 70% of Lineage gamers answered they would feel guilty if their role-played being in love with someone else and 32% of EverQuest gamers answered they would feel guilty in that case. The result from the romantic relationship in game shows that Lineage gamers regard relationship with other gamers in same value as relationship in real world. Moreover, it shows that they fill up their psychological need for social relationship like romantic relationship through diverse activities in Lineage world and endow value and meaning to these activities.

This study also explored the item trade with real money in Lineage world. According to the result, 43% of Lineage gamers have experience of item trade with real money. Although the stipulation of game company prohibit the item trade between gamers, 96.2% of Lineage gamers think that game items they obtained belongs to them or their character, not game company. That is, They think that they have ownership on game items and can trade it freely. In the reason of item trade with real money, 40.2% of Lineage gamers answered they trade items for enjoying game more satisfactorily, 5.9% of them for a kind of investment, and 3.2% of them for showing
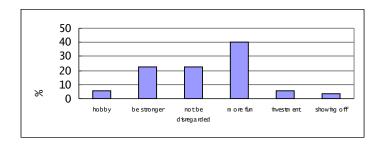
off.

Figure 3: Reason of item trade with real money

The result from comparing the game consuming behaviors(game activities) shows that different recognition of game world make the differences in the game consuming behavior. The result from comparing community activities as a part of game consuming behavior shows that EverQuest gamers are more active in community activities, but Lineage gamers endow more value and meaning to activities in Lineage world like romantic relationship than EverQuest gamers. The result from item trade with real money supports that Lineage gamers regard Linage world as another living space or a part of real world and endow same value and meaning to economic activities in Lineage world as in real world.

CONCLUSION

We have explored how gamers in online game endowed new meaning and function by their perception of game world through their game activities. As the previous studies have showed similar phenomenon[1, 4, 6], the result showed that gamers of Lineage and EverQuest enjoy the virtual life through diverse activities, such as social relationship, community activity, economic activity as well as hunting or battling. The results from comparing of experience of Lineage gamers and EverQuest gamers showed that different recognition on game world has created different game activities and values on digital images by gamers. Through those processes, the identities of game worlds become quite different though their original design and physical features were quite similar. The experiences of the game come to be quite different consuming behavior. They have transformed the value and meaning of game worlds and have changed the fate of game. Lineage and EverQuest become quite different by the activities of the gamers.

Lineage gamers regard Lineage world as another living space or a part of real world they can explore and express psychological need and self-identity(or self-image) and can live through diverse activities. But EverQuest gamers regard EverQuest as a product for the role playing and the experience of fantasy world. And these results support that the meaning and value of digital images or digital content like online game are endowed by its consumers. The result from comparing the game consuming behavior(game activities) shows that different recognition of game world make the differences in the game consuming behavior. And present Lineage world and EverQuest world show that same or similar product can be changed into totally different world by different recognition or understanding on it and different consuming behavior.

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