Research on the Alienation and Return of the Subject in Digital Games

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Abstract

In the context of the digital age, the issue of human subjectivity has become increasingly prominent. Digital games, as cultural and entertainment products of the digital era, play a significant role in shaping and evolving human subjectivity. This paper discusses the fundamental concepts and conducts a survey on the alienation of the subject within digital games. It focuses on the main manifestations of cognitive, volitional, and emotional alienation among digital game players. Analyzing from the perspectives of developers, users, and regulators of digital games, the paper identifies the root causes of subject alienation within these games. It proposes paths for reintegration of the subject, incorporating moral factors in game design, enhancing self-management for users, and improving legal frameworks for regulation. These pathways aim to address the challenges posed by digital games to human subjectivity in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Games; Human Subjectivity; Alienation; Return.

Digital games, as an emerging cultural and entertainment product of the digital age, not only significantly enrich people's spiritual world but also subtly influence human subjectivity. As the core of personal identity recognition and self-realization in the digital age, the evolution of subjectivity is closely related to social development. By explaining the relationship between digital games and human subjectivity and conducting surveys on the alienation of the subject within digital games, this paper analyzes the fundamental causes of subject alienation from the perspectives of game developers, users, and regulators. It proposes corresponding pathways for reintegration from these three perspectives to address the challenges posed by digital games to human subjectivity in the digital era.

Chapter One: Definition of Basic Concepts

As an important product of contemporary cultural entertainment, the impact of digital games on human subjectivity is multidimensional and multifaceted. By defining digital games and their developmental evolution, and elucidating the concept of human subjectivity and its alienation, as well as the interactive relationship between digital games and human subjectivity, we can better understand the role and influence of digital games on human subjectivity. This understanding also aids in further exploring how to reconstruct and strengthen human subjectivity in the design and development of digital games, thereby promoting comprehensive human development.

1.1 Digital Games and Their Evolutionary History

Digital games are interactive experiences provided through electronic computing devices based on digital technology. The essence of digital games is leisure, entertainment, diversion, and relaxation, with flexible and arbitrary topics, primarily a commercial revenue-generating operation aimed at profit-making or earning online advertising fees. They tend to involve realistic three-dimensional complex scenarios and virtual settings. The developmental journey of digital games can be traced back to the late 1950s. Initially, digital games emerged as a byproduct of computer technology, rudimentary and primitive, merely serving to demonstrate computer capabilities, such as the 1950s "Tennis for Two," considered a starting point in the evolutionary history of digital games. This simple electronic game based on an oscilloscope-like device marked the nascent stage of digital games. Subsequently, from the 1970s to the 1980s, with the popularization of personal computers and home gaming consoles, digital games entered a period of rapid development. Classic games like "Space Invaders" and "Pac-Man" became cultural icons. During this period, games evolved from a singular form of leisure to a medium with social functions, enhancing interaction among players. Entering the 21st century, the rapid development of internet technology paved the way for the diversification of digital games. Online multiplayer games became trendy, the gaming world expanded, and both player interactivity and game immersion continuously increased. Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), represented by "World of Warcraft," became a cultural phenomenon, providing not only a virtual world for players to explore but also a social platform for interaction, competition, and collaboration among players worldwide. As digital technology, particularly in image processing, advanced, games became richer in graphics and content, with increasingly diverse gameplay. With the widespread availability of smartphones and tablets, the mobile gaming market rapidly emerged. Driven by fierce market competition and technological innovation, digital games transcended simple leisure to offer rich narratives, deep character development, and complex interactive logic, becoming a comprehensive immersive experience, as seen in games like "BioShock" and "Cyberpunk 2077." From 2010 to the present, China's gaming industry has gradually transitioned from licensing imports to independent original creation, with domestic digital games such as "Honor of Kings" and "Naraka: Bladepoint" becoming new leisure options in people's daily lives.

However, digital games are not merely a form of leisure and entertainment; they represent a new mode of interaction between humans and technology, unveiling new pathways for technology to shape human lifestyles and subjectivity. The evolution of digital games is not just a technological leap but also accompanies societal and cultural changes. From the earliest standalone games to later online games, and now to today's social and mobile games, the social attributes of digital games have become increasingly prominent. The development of digital games is not confined to technological advancements and changes in game formats but is also significant in terms of their content and themes, which display diversity and depth. The themes of games have evolved from initial sports competitions and adventure explorations to present-day historical simulations, war strategies, and even deeper themes such as society, psychology, and philosophy, fully showcasing the richness and complexity of digital games as a cultural form. The narrative techniques in digital games have also matured, with many titles weaving intricate plots and character settings, allowing players to experience emotional fluctuations and moral dilemmas similar to those in real life, thereby prompting players to reflect on their own identity and behaviors. The diversification of game platforms, content, and modes of interaction has made digital games a medium connecting different cultures, regions, and even age groups. This mediatory role has led digital games to have a broad social impact globally, not only altering people's leisure and entertainment modes but also, to some extent, redefining people's patterns of social interaction and cultural consumption habits, thereby significantly impacting human subjectivity.

1.2 The Subject and Its Alienation Reflection

The idea of human subjectivity has appeared early in the history of philosophy, but the concept of "human subjectivity" itself first emerged in modern Western philosophy, broadly referring to the attributes of humans as subjects. Descartes, with his assertion "I think, therefore I am" , characterized human subjectivity as self-thinking and doubt, although at this time, subjectivity was still thin due to the lack of experience and substance. Kant expanded on this concept further, emphasizing the capacity of individuals to act according to their own reason and moral self-discipline, showcasing the moral dimension of subjectivity. Feuerbach, starting from human sensibility and desires, pointed out that subjectivity is not just the product of reason and thought but also encompasses human emotions and needs. Modern idealism indeed emphasized the agency of the subject, but it only abstractly developed human agency, inevitably leading to extremes. Meanwhile, the old materialism, including natural materialism and humanistic materialism, unilaterally regarded human subjectivity as a sensory and intuitive trait, without considering it from the perspective of the subject or practice. Marx summarized human subjectivity as the characteristics exhibited by real individuals through concrete practical activities, thereby bringing subjectivity from the realm of consciousness back to the realm of practice, and finding its real foundation. It is evident that human subjectivity is not some fixed attribute of individuals, but rather a dynamic expression that continuously updates and sublimates itself through the spiral process of

"practice—cognition—re-practice—re-cognition." It is the product of real practical activities involving self-development, self-reflection, and self-transcendence, arising from and inseparable from human cognition and practice.　As Professor Guo Zhan from Renmin University of China states in his book "Philosophy of Subjectivity—The Existence of Man and Its Significance," "human subjectivity is the qualitative determination of a person as an active subject, which is developed in interaction with objects and is a characteristic of consciousness, autonomy, agency, and creativity."

The concept of human subjectivity referred to in this article encompasses the characteristics of autonomy, creativity, and sociability of individuals as independent entities. Human subjectivity is not only about an individual's free choice and scientific decision-making regarding their actions but also concerns their position and role within social relationships. The realization of human subjectivity depends on the individual's self-awareness, the fulfillment of self-worth, and their influence on the social environment. Human subjectivity is not static; it changes with different stages of an individual's life and shifts in the social environment. In modern society, the realization of human subjectivity faces various challenges, leading to phenomena of alienation.Marx, in his "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," noted: "Alienated labor takes from the man his object of production, thus also his species-life." "Alienated labor transforms autonomous activity, life itself, into a means merely for existence, thereby turning man's species-life into a means for physical subsistence." He argued that in capitalist society, laborers' labor is alienated into commodities, and people's lives are no longer under their control but dominated by capital. "The alienation of the subject is also manifested in the object's resistance or opposition to the subject. The subject, originally dominating the object, is now dominated by it." This alienation is not only evident in the economic domain but also permeates people's ideologies and social relationships, severely damaging human subjectivity.

The alienation of the subject is not just a result of economic relations but also a product of social and cultural factors. In modern society, people often neglect the importance of spiritual life in the pursuit of material living. The prevalence of mass media and consumer culture leads to the homogenization of individuality and creativity, turning people into followers of consumer goods. Additionally, the development of technology and the rise of the networked society have also exacerbated the phenomenon of alienation to some extent. In the virtual world of digital games, human interactions become increasingly superficial and virtualized, weakening genuine emotional connections between individuals. People lose self-awareness and the capacity to act, leading to addiction among some players, thus causing the alienation of the subject.

1.3 The Interactive Relationship Between Digital Games and Human

Subjectivity

The dual impact of digital games on human subjectivity is mainly manifested in two aspects: On one hand, by providing diverse role-playing and rich situational

experiences, digital games promote the development of individual imagination and creativity, enabling individuals to explore self and realize value through digital games, thereby enhancing their sense of self-identity and self-determination. On the other hand, the design characteristics of digital games, such as fixed game rules and preset plot developments, can subtly lead players to develop a dependency. Players may gradually become accustomed to the rules and reward mechanisms within the games, a habit that can transfer to real-life situations, rendering players passive and dependent in real-world decision-making, thus unconsciously eroding their subjectivity.

Furthermore, the virtual nature of digital games and their immediate feedback mechanisms can lead players to develop a psychological escape from reality while in the gaming world. This escape is not merely a simple avoidance of the real world but becomes a psychological coping strategy when individuals face real-life challenges. Prolonged escapism can impact an individual's ability to solve real-life problems and their willingness to face difficulties, thereby affecting the true realization of their subjectivity. Additionally, although the interactive modes and social mechanisms in digital games can provide a platform for socialization, they may also lead to a degradation of individual social skills in the real world, as real-world social interactions are more complex and unpredictable. This discrepancy can make players feel maladapted in real social interactions, leading them to avoid real-life contacts, thus affecting the development of social skills and the realization of subjectivity.

When analyzing the interactive relationship between digital games and human subjectivity, it is also necessary to consider individual differences. Different players have varying degrees of dependency on games and derive different experiences from them, which means that the impact of digital games on individual subjectivity is also diverse. Some players may gain positive motivation and growth from games, while others, due to personal experiences, may be negatively affected. Therefore, research into the interactive relationship between digital games and human subjectivity needs to adopt a personalized and differentiated perspective, thoroughly analyzing the interactive effects of different types of digital games, individual characteristics, and various socio-cultural backgrounds.

Chapter two: Survey on Subject Alienation in Digital Games

To gain a deeper understanding of the main manifestations of subject alienation in digital games, we conducted research using both online questionnaires and offline interviews. We meticulously developed a survey, which was administered online anonymously via Questionnaire Star. A total of 2,923 individuals completed the survey effectively, including 1,051 males and 1,872 females. The age distribution was as follows: 62 participants were under 10 years old, 1,542 were aged 11-20, 1,250 were aged 21-30, 21 were aged 31-40, 19 were aged 41-50, 15 were aged 51-60, and 14 were over 61 years old. Participants in the survey were spread across all 31 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions of the country, with 1,937 participants from Liaoning and 986 from other provinces. The online survey data overall has a representative significance. Additionally, five digital game players and

regulators participated in offline in-depth interviews. Through both online and offline surveys, we gained a more in-depth understanding of the main manifestations of subject alienation caused by digital games.

The survey data indicated that players invest varying degrees of time and money in digital games, and that the process of subject alienation in digital games is extremely complex. The main manifestations of subject alienation in digital games include cognitive alienation, emotional alienation, and volitional alienation among others.

Table 1: Survey Statistics on Time and Money Spent in Digital Games by Players

Question	Option	Percentage of Respondents
How long do you play digital games each day? (Single choice)	Less than 1 hour	42.22%
	1-2 hours	22.20%
	2-3 hours	14.06%
	3-4 hours	6.91%
	4-5 hours	4.93%
	5-6 hours	4.89%
	More than 7 hours	4.79%
How much money do you spend on digital games in a month at most? (Single choice)	Up to 100 RMB	75.41%
	100-200 RMB	8.07%
	200-500 RMB	5.54%
	500-1000 RMB	4.34%
	1000-2000 RMB	3.49%
	More than 2000 RMB	3.15%

2.1 Cognitive Alienation of the Subject

In the virtual world of digital games, players often achieve a sense of self-realization through various role-playing and task challenges, which provides an immersive experience that serves as an escape from reality. However, this escapism introduces complex emotional and psychological changes in players' real lives, leading to cognitive alienation of the subject, primarily evidenced by a decline in discernment and judgment in real-life situations.

The survey revealed that 44.75% of players feel a sense of achievement in self-realization within digital games, while 77.66% use gaming as an escape from reality and to pass idle time. When players become engrossed in the digital gaming world, they invest substantial time and energy into it, which gradually blurs their perception of their actual roles in real life, often leading to neglect. This blurring of

roles is not limited to the dilution of real-life roles but also includes deviations in players' self-awareness and self-positioning, all indicative of diminished discernment and judgment. For instance, in digital games, a player might become a brave warrior, a wise mage, or a wealthy merchant, but these roles are typically based on the virtual world and rules constructed by game designers. According to the survey, 64.66% of players invest time in building their virtual identities. As players devote more time to constructing and maintaining these virtual identities, their professional, familial, and social roles in the real world tend to be relatively neglected. This shift marks the onset of subject alienation. The survey data shows that 55.76% of digital game players unknowingly immerse themselves in their roles, leading to blurred life goals and unclear motivations and directions in life. In digital games, the identity shift to a game-defined role, while providing a liberating experience, also challenges players' real-world identity recognition, causing a gradual blur in role awareness and social responsibility in the real world. This, in turn, diminishes their discernment and judgment, further exacerbating cognitive alienation of the subject.

Table 2: Survey Statistics on Individual Experiences and Virtual Identity Construction in

Digital Games

Question	Option	Percentage of Respondents
What experiences do digital games bring to you? (Multiple choice)	A sense of achievement in self-realization	44.75%
	Can make friends in the game	38.80%
	Escape reality and pass idle time	77.66%
	Other	1.88%
Do you invest time in building a virtual identity in digital	Invest a lot of time in virtual identity	19.02%
	Do not invest time in virtual identity	35.34%
	Invest a little time in virtual identity	45.64%
Do you immerse yourself in digital games while	Often immerse in the game	19.26%
	Do not immerse in the game	44.24%
	Occasionally immerse in the game	36.50%

From a psychological perspective, as Daniel Pink points out in his book "Drive," "Autonomy, a fundamental human quality, is central to self-determination theory," and "the feeling of autonomy can exert a strong influence on an individual's performance level and attitude" . Digital games provide a virtual sense of achievement which can, to some extent, replace the intrinsic motivation found in the real world. When this substitution becomes the norm, players' ability to discern and judge in real life is impaired. Over time, their self-identity in the real world becomes increasingly blurred. In this context, it becomes challenging for an individual's subjectivity to be fully expressed and utilized, and may even lead to cognitive alienation of the subject,

resulting in a decline in discernment and judgment abilities in the real society.

2.2 Alienation of the Will in Digital Games

The clear goal-setting and immediate feedback mechanisms in digital games have a significant impact on players' cognitive processes. In digital games, player decisions are often based on game rules established by the designers, not independently created or controllable by the players themselves. The rules, narrative constructions, and player interactions in digital games effectively shape and constrain the player's subjectivity. While players may appear to have freedom in their in-game identities, behaviors, and social interactions, they are actually guided by the game designers' preset rules and narrative logic. This guidance limits players' creativity and has a profound impact on their cognitive patterns and value systems. Relying on game rules and feedback systems can diminish players' creative and decision-making abilities in real life. For example, when players complete a game task and receive in-game rewards and points, this immediate positive feedback can condition players to repeat similar behaviors in similar situations. However, real-life problems and decisions are often more complex and variable, lacking immediate and clear feedback to guide actions. If players become too accustomed to the cognitive patterns in games, they may exhibit an over-reliance on these patterns when facing real-life challenges, lacking the ability to be creative and make scientific decisions.

Some domestic researchers studying the addiction to online games among adolescents have found that "in online games, the reward experiences brought about by game-related stimuli and behaviors are real-time, frequent, and direct, thus the individual's reward experience is continuous and intense, reinforcing the gaming behavior" . Both our survey and in-depth interviews have shown that players' behaviors and decisions in games are driven by strong external incentives, thus overlooking intrinsic values and long-term interests.Survey data indicates that 72.80% of players believe that because the tasks and challenges in digital games often have clear goals and reward mechanisms, playing digital games can lead to varying degrees of addiction and dependency. This over-reliance on immediate gratification and external incentives can influence players' values in real life. During in-depth interviews, a veteran player mentioned, "People who play games frequently often pay insufficient attention to long-term goals and deep value systems in real life, preferring instead to pursue short-term satisfaction and quick achievements." This frequent reinforcement of immediate gratification not only affects the quality of individual decisions but also causes changes in individuals' real-world behavior patterns and psychological traits, leading to alienation of the will, gradually creating a dependency on thought patterns and even addiction, thus gradually eroding their capacity for self-creation and scientific decision-making as subjects. Therefore, recognizing the excessive shaping and potential impacts of digital games on players' cognitive processes, we must acknowledge that an over-dependence on game rules and feedback mechanisms can weaken players' creativity and decision-making abilities in real life, thereby further deepening the alienation of their will.
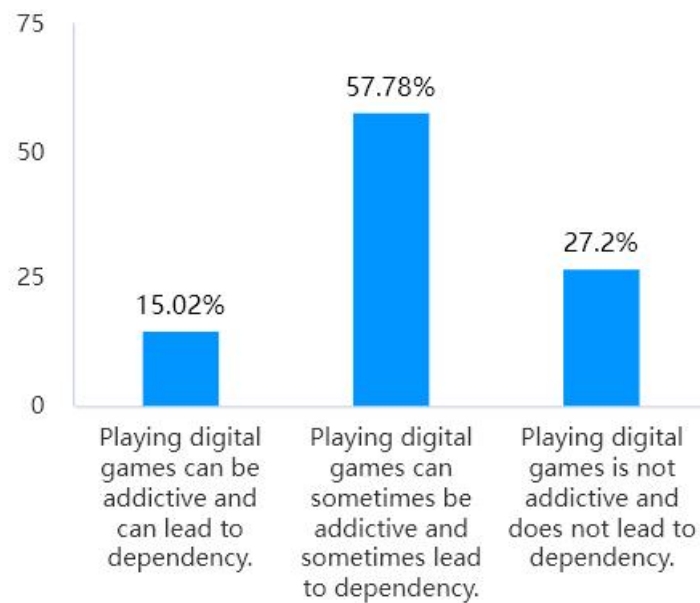
Figure 1: Pie Chart of Survey Results on Players' Addiction and Dependency While Playing Digital Games

2.3 Emotional Alienation of the Subject

Digital games provide players with an immersive social environment where they can interact and collaborate with other players from around the world. However, social interactions based on games significantly differ from interpersonal communications in real life. Communications within games are often centered around game objectives and tasks, rather than based on personal emotions or deep social relationships. This task-centered communication model can influence players' real-world social habits. In the social settings of digital games, interactions often occur under anonymity, which alleviates the need for players to take on significant social responsibilities or ethical obligations. Once accustomed to this low-risk social model, the necessity to be accountable for one's words and actions in real-life social activities can seem overwhelmingly stressful and risky, making players more cautious or negative in real-life social behaviors. This, in turn, affects their ability to improve social interaction and communication skills and hinders the establishment of interpersonal relationships in real life.

Survey data shows that when asked about their preferred mode of social interaction, 29.73% of players indicated a preference for online over offline socializing, enjoying the virtual interactions within digital games and preferring to socialize through online platforms without the pressure of face-to-face interactions; 9.96% of players preferred neither online nor offline socializing, indicating a reluctance to engage in real-life social activities. This can lead to a reduction in real-life social interactions, a more pronounced cold and isolated demeanor among individuals, and limited development of players' social and communication skills. Moreover, social interactions in digital games are often instantaneous and convenient, allowing players to communicate with

others at any time without considering the real-world constraints of time and space. This mode of communication shapes players' expectations for social activities, making them accustomed to quick social feedback and efficiency-first interaction models. However, real-life social activities often require time and effort and involve navigating complex interpersonal relationships. When players' expectations do not match the social environment in real life, they may feel uncomfortable in real social settings, reluctant to engage in heartfelt, face-to-face communications, and even experience anxiety and withdrawal. Thus, the social models in digital games can significantly impact players' ability to interact and communicate, thereby affecting their real-life social relationships and the manifestation of their subjectivity. This shift in social patterns, leading to weakened real-life social and communication skills, is another manifestation of the emotional alienation of the subject in digital games.
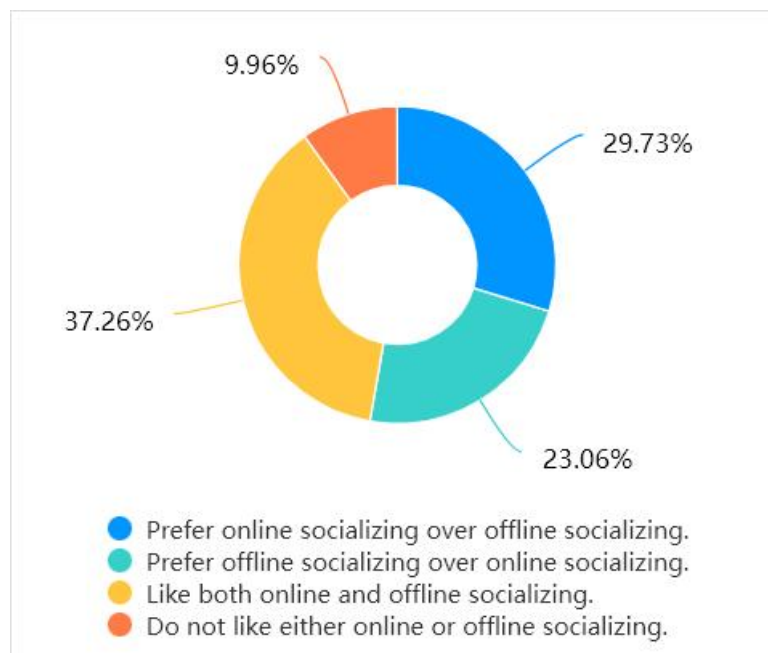

Figure 2: Donut Chart of Survey Results on Preferred Social Interaction Methods of Digital Game Players

Chapter Three: Analysis of the Causes of Subject Alienation in Digital Games

The reasons for subject alienation in digital games are multifaceted. Based on survey data, we delve into the fundamental causes of subject alienation in digital games from the perspectives of game developers, users, and regulators.

3.1 Factors from Digital Game Developers: Manipulation by Capital

For digital game developers, the various choices made during the game design process are linked to their economic interests and directly influence players' experiences and behavioral patterns. As reported by the China News Service on

December 19, 2023, the "2023 China Game Industry Report" was officially released at the 2023 China Game Industry Annual Conference. The report indicates that as of December 10, 2023, the actual sales revenue of China's domestic game market reached 302.964 billion yuan, an increase of 13.95% year-on-year, surpassing the 300 billion yuan mark for the first time; the user base reached 668 million people, an increase of 0.61% year-on-year, reaching a historical high [Li Jingxuan, Xu Ping. Domestic game market actual sales income surpasses 300 billion yuan for the first time [N]. China News Service, 2023-12-19(003)]. The survey data show that 58.60% of players believe that developers and other stakeholders adopt a series of business models and marketing strategies, including in-game purchases, advertising placements, and the sale of virtual goods and services, to maximize economic returns. These business models stimulate players' consumer desires, leading some to exhibit weakened self-control and invest heavily in games. The survey found that 24.59% of players spend over 100 RMB monthly on digital game top-ups, and 6.64% spend over 1000 RMB. Additionally, 61.34% of players consider the manipulative mechanisms in game design as another significant factor affecting player subjectivity. Developers use control mechanisms such as task rewards, achievement systems, and leaderboards to continuously reward players' progress in games, strengthening their gaming behavior and encouraging sustained investment of time and energy in the game world. Survey data show that 57.78% of players play digital games for more than one hour daily, and 14.61% play for more than four hours. Furthermore, the game's feedback loop design, such as instant feedback and delayed gratification, subtly shapes players' behavioral patterns. The alternating use of these two feedback mechanisms not only increases the game's appeal but also leads to reduced agency, as individuals gradually lose control over their behavior in the well-designed game mechanics, investing significant time and money, which diminishes their self-awareness and autonomous decision-making capabilities, leading to subject alienation.

3.2 Factors from Digital Game Users: Self-Indulgence

From the perspective of digital game users, subject alienation is largely related to individuals' weak self-control and psychological dependence. "Games satisfy people's spiritual needs, but once people become addicted to these needs, they can develop a new form of illness, hence games are also called 'electronic opium,'" [Hu Penglin. The origin, operation mechanisms, and business ethics of cloud gaming [J]. Journal of Tongji University (Social Science Section), 2021, 32(03): 65-72]. The survey revealed that players aged 11-20 make up 52.75% of the surveyed gamers. This age group, with relatively weak self-control, easily develops psychological dependence on digital games. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, "the fifth level of human needs, also considered the highest level by Maslow—self-actualization needs, such as the acquisition and satisfaction of competence and achievement, primarily pertain to the realization of one's self-worth" [Hu Wanzhong. Discussion on human value and self-worth from Maslow's theory of needs [J]. Nanjing Social Sciences, 2000(06): 25-29]. When digital games become a significant channel for fulfilling these needs, players gradually develop psychological dependence on games. For example, the

leveling system, honor titles, and social features in digital games can satisfy players' psychological needs for achievement to some extent; the immediate gratification and ongoing challenges provided by digital games constantly drive players to seek higher achievements and deeper social connections in the game; these settings further intensify players' dependence on digital games. Survey data indicate that 72.80% of players believe they have developed psychological needs and dependencies on digital games, and some players stated in in-depth interviews that when facing real-life pressures and challenges, they often regard digital games as a means to escape reality. This escapism not only fails to resolve real issues but exacerbates individuals' psychological dependence on digital games. Dependence on digital games not only affects individuals' quality of life but also leads to subject alienation.

3.3 Factors from Digital Game Regulators: Lack of Regulation

The role of digital game regulators is to formulate and implement policies and regulations that standardize the digital game market to protect consumer rights and promote a healthy gaming environment. Zou Fan from the Criminal Law School of Northwest University of Political Science and Law also pointed out in the study "Government Regulation Issues of Online Games" that there are three major issues in China's game industry: "an imperfect legal and regulatory system, unclear regulatory authority, and an inadequate dynamic regulatory mechanism" [Zou Fan. Study on Government Regulation Issues of Online Games [J]. People's Forum, 2019(23): 124-125]. Our survey data show that 67.84% of players believe that government departments should strengthen regulation of the digital game industry. Through in-depth interviews, it was found that regulators often face challenges of an incomplete institutional framework and mechanisms needing improvement during the enforcement process, which may indirectly prevent effective resolution of subject alienation in digital games. For example, regulators may face industry pressure when formulating policies, leading to overly conservative or one-sided policy-making that fails to comprehensively address issues. From the perspective of regulators overseeing developers, regulators guide the behavior of game developers by setting a series of standards and requirements. However, these standards and requirements may not always keep pace with the rapid development of the gaming industry, allowing some new game designs to evade regulation. Moreover, regulators often adopt relatively general regulatory strategies, failing to delve into the details of game design, thus unable to effectively identify and resolve specific issues. For instance, regarding mechanisms in games that lead to addiction, regulators might simply require developers to set health prompts or time limits, without thoroughly researching and addressing the root causes of addiction. From the perspective of regulators overseeing users, regulators promote game literacy education and provide psychological health support to reduce subject alienation. However, due to individual differences and the diversity of social environments, the effectiveness of these measures may vary considerably. For example, players of different ages and backgrounds may respond differently to game literacy education, and regulators are yet unable to formulate differentiated regulatory strategies based on the characteristics of different groups.

Chapter Four: Pathways for Reintegrating Subjectivity in Digital Games

From the analysis above, it is evident that the fundamental causes of subject alienation in digital games are multi-faceted and intertwined. To effectively address this issue, it is necessary to approach from multiple perspectives including game developers, users, and regulators, and to formulate effective implementation strategies. Developers should integrate ethical considerations and assume responsibility for the psychological health and social responsibilities of players. Users should enhance self-awareness, strengthen self-management, and proactively use psychological interventions to improve their self-control and social adaptability. Regulators can ensure the content of digital games is monitored through robust legal systems, thus supporting the optimization and upgrade of the digital game industry. These strategies are crucial for the healthy development of the digital game industry and for reconstituting the subjectivity of players.

4.1 Design Pathway Integrating Ethical Factors

In addressing the dissolution of subjectivity in digital games, it is essential for developers to proactively integrate ethical factors into game design and assume ethical responsibilities. Game developers, while creating engaging game experiences, should also consider players' psychological health and social responsibilities. This requires game designers to actively incorporate positive values and educational significance into the development process, rather than solely pursuing commercial interests. Digital game developers should "combine the entertainment functions of games with the dissemination of scientific knowledge, enhance public welfare, serve the personalized science education needs of the new era, and convey positive, progressive values." [Fang Zhou. Exploration of the high-quality development path of China's science fiction game industry. Journal of Wuhan University (Philosophy & Social Sciences), 2024, 77(02): 21-29.] In the design phase of digital games, developers should consider the long-term impact of the conveyed values and behavioral patterns on players. For instance, designers can convey positive values such as teamwork, responsibility, and moral judgment through game narratives, character development, and task settings. Additionally, challenges and reward mechanisms in games should be carefully designed to prevent inducing excessive player investment or dependence, while encouraging independent thinking and decision-making in gameplay. Developers should also take responsibility for monitoring and guiding during the game release and operation phases, regularly reviewing game content and player feedback, and promptly adjusting and optimizing game mechanisms to ensure the health of digital game products and the protection of player subjectivity. In terms of digital game promotion and marketing, it is important to avoid overstating the positive effects of games and to present game features objectively, reminding players to be mindful of their time and financial expenditures on gaming.

4.2 Usage Pathway Strengthening Self-Management

While digital games provide entertainment and relaxation, they also influence users' cognitive assessments and value judgments, subtly affecting individual subjectivity. To address this, game users must enhance their own literacy, raise self-awareness of the potential risks associated with digital games, and take active measures to maintain their independence in thinking and decision-making. Individual players need to enhance their self-management and self-control, properly schedule their gaming time, and prevent becoming immersed in virtual worlds at the expense of real-life responsibilities and duties. Strategies such as setting personal gaming schedules and using screen time management tools can be adopted. Moreover, players should enrich their real-life experiences through social activities, reading books, and learning new skills to reduce their over-reliance on digital games. These activities not only improve social and life skills but also enhance subjectivity in the real world, promoting comprehensive healthy development. Additionally, players should be mindful of their physical and mental health and seek professional psychological consultation and treatment services when necessary. For example, players can participate in group discussions, workshops, and counseling sessions to experience firsthand the differences between the instant gratification and virtual achievements obtained in digital games and the lasting achievements in real life. With the help of psychological experts, players can establish more rational gaming behavior patterns, thereby enhancing their decision-making abilities and sense of responsibility in real life, and strengthening their subjectivity.

4.3 Regulatory Pathway Improving Legal Systems

In the strategic study of addressing the dissolution of subjectivity in digital games, government departments, as regulators of digital games, should improve related legal systems to ensure the healthy development and upgrading of the digital gaming industry. Given the popularity of digital games and their potential negative impacts on individual subjectivity, government and regulatory bodies must take active steps to build a policy system that can effectively regulate game developers while ensuring that players' subjectivity is preserved. First, digital game content requires stricter scrutiny and monitoring to ensure that it not only complies with laws and regulations but also aligns with societal ethics and value norms. Additionally, mechanisms within games that may lead to player addiction or excessive immersion need to be curtailed, such as by setting online time limits and spending caps, to reduce potential negative impacts on players' lives. Moreover, relevant departments should enhance guidance and support for the digital gaming industry, encouraging developers to improve the quality and cultural content of games from the outset. By implementing a series of incentive policies, such as tax reductions and financial support, the government can support projects that incorporate positive values and promote the development of player subjectivity. Furthermore, the government should collaborate with industry experts and academics to develop a series of standards and tools for assessing the impact of digital games on player subjectivity. This would facilitate regular

assessments and categorizations of games on the market, providing clearer guidance for players. In terms of establishing laws and regulations, related laws should clearly define the responsibilities and obligations of digital gaming enterprises, stipulating the codes of conduct they must follow in game design, operation, and advertising. For example, game companies should be required to regularly publish user data and behavior analysis reports to increase transparency, allowing the public and regulatory bodies to stay informed about the actual impacts of digital games on player behavior and psychological states. Additionally, regulations should increase penalties for violations that diminish player subjectivity, ensuring sufficient deterrent effects.

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