Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) in Malaysia:
The Global-Local Nexus

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This thesis titled
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The Global-Local Nexus

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ABSTRACT

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Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) in Malaysia: The Global-Local Nexus

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Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) are online entities that are truly global and borderless by nature, but in smaller countries like Malaysia, they are licensed by global developers to local publishers to be localized for local players. From a globalization perspective this appears to be a one-way, top-down relationship from the global to the local. However, this is not the case as the relationship is interchangeable, known as the Global-Local Nexus, as neither of these forces has control over the other, but at the same time they have great influence over one another. This thesis examines the Global-Local Nexus in MMORPGs industry in Malaysia between global developers and local publishers and players. The research was conducted through a series of personal interviews with local publisher representatives and local players. The results indicate that the local is well represented in this nexus from both local publishers and local players.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my loving and wonderful fiancé, Vila.
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I'd like to thank, first and foremost, my fiancé, Vilashini Somiah, who has stuck with me through thick and thin. She has been my rock throughout and for which I would probably not have been able to complete this thesis if I didn't have her by my side. I will love you always and your role in this paper is invaluable.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG) industry is truly global as their reach crosses national borders and cultural and ethnic divides. Despite their borderless nature, some global developers of these games choose to license their games to local publishers around the world to be localized for their local players. This thesis examines this relationship between these three groups and to understand the Global-Local Nexus that forms as a result.

Classic globalization literature has framed globalization to be driven by Western and American companies or “Westernization” or “Americanization” which aim to homogenize all other cultures to conform to one global one (Schiller, 1976). The revisionist's view on globalization is more moderate as it looks at how local forces interact with international forces to form a nexus in which both sides add and take from each other (Friedman, 1999). Based on the global developer and local publisher licensing agreements, it does appear to be a top-down form of globalization, but that is not the entire picture as local publishers are still able to make the local their own through their localization efforts. In addition to that, local players in both localized and international MMORPGs are (re)shaping their local spaces both offline and online.

Considering how the literature on MMORPGs tends to be focused on larger markets around the world such as North America, Europe and China, the literature review for this thesis would be very limited as there is a lack of academic coverage on the MMORPG market in Malaysia. In addition to that, local game companies and local
media do not keep proper archives or records of past events, making local literature very sparse with information.

Fortunately, due to my own personal interest in the local game market in Malaysia and my involvement in the local MMORPG market, I am in a position to provide information that is sorely unavailable and with my own personal insight. I have been keeping abreast with the local and international gaming scene for the last 15 years. This interest includes playing these games and involving myself with the local community through local forums. My interest extends further than just playing these games as I have been following news reports and game release schedules which include the founding years of the first MMORPGs in Malaysia. I have gained further inside by becoming a member of the local MMORPG industry as I was employed by one local MMORPG publisher for 3 years, giving me an insider view into the workings of the industry and a broader look at how these companies operate. Leveraging the academic literature on the Global-Local Nexus with my own personal experience has placed me in a unique position to conduct research on this subject.

This thesis aims to make a contribution to the greater discourse on the Global-Local Nexus. This case study supports the Global-Local Nexus and serves as an example of it within media cultures. In addition to that, this thesis will serve as a pioneer research for MMORPGs in Malaysia.

Research Objectives

A clear dichotomy has been observed among Malaysian MMORPG players. Neither international nor localized MMORPG have claimed the majority audience and
underlines the struggle between global and local which is the focus of this study: In order to better understand the market structure of the Malaysian MMORPG industry, it is necessary to examine the interplay of global game developers, Malaysian publishers and Malaysian players. Thus, the research questions posed by this study are: 1) How has the global MMORPG industry expanded into small markets such as Southeast Asia? 2) How have Malaysian publishers localized these globally developed online games toward local markets? 3) How and why do Malaysians players select specific games to play, and how online game communities have helped to (re)shape the Malaysian online game market? In short, this study seeks to find if global developers exploit local publishers and players and challenge that with the actions and stances of local publishers and players.

The significance of studying the relationship between international developers, Malaysian publishers and local game players includes that it:

1. Examines the game players and player communities within MMORPGs that are local to a relatively small market – Much is written about MMORPG players and their roles in (re)shaping the industry, but the literature is largely confined to players from large markets such as China, Japan, the US and Europe.

2. Examines the localization process that involves international game developers, Malaysian game publishers and local game players and communities – Malaysia is one of the few countries where both Pay To Play (P2P) and Free To Play (F2P) models have managed to establish themselves in the same market. This research provides an opportunity to examine the localization process in emerging markets where large global gaming companies have just started their new venture.
3. Contributes to the body of literature on the global-local nexus – This research will contribute to the literature that is in support of globalization revisionists. This case study will be beneficial as there is not much literature written on MMORPGs from the perspective of the global-local nexus. As such, this research will be a suitable addition to the growing body of literature regarding the global-local nexus.

Research Methods

For the first research question, as there is a distinct lack of academic research and coverage on the history of MMORPGs in Malaysia and Southeast Asia, combined with a lack of archiving from local media and local game companies, I had to use my own experience and knowledge in the matter to answer this question. My own experience is comprised of an interest in gaming for the last 15 years, both in Malaysia and in the international space. Furthermore, I was part of the local MMORPG industry when I was employed by a local publisher for 3 years. These two milestones in my life have provided me with perspective and insight that will be invaluable to this thesis. As such, the literature review on the MMORPG industry in Malaysia was from my own experiences.

For the last 2 research questions, field research was conducted during the summer of 2012 (June to August) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur is the most urban city in the country and houses the majority of Malaysian game publishers and thus served as a suitable location for this research.

This research draws on a series of personal interviews with the following two groups that play a critical role in shaping the Malaysian online game industry:
1. **Malaysian Publishers** – 3 Malaysian publishers were approached for personal interviews. These interviews were conducted in person. These interviews were focused on their relationships with global developers, localization efforts and the overall picture of localized MMORPGs in Malaysia.

2. **Malaysian Game Players** – 10 local players were interviewed. These were all done in person. These interviews were focused on their personal experiences with MMORPGs and also their interactions with larger gaming communities such as guilds that can often span multiple games and online forums.

All interviews were conducted in a qualitative manner. Interviews with business representatives were fairly formal and structured, meant to find rather straightforward answers and obtain empirical data on the industry. Interviews with game players were semi-structured interviews, focusing on the individual's perceptions & experiences of online games and gaming communities.

At first, several Malaysian game publishers were identified for this study and were approached for personal interviews through their marketing representatives. Three of them responded positively. These marketing representatives provided insight into the business aspects of their companies, especially in pricing strategies and game selection. Although most of the business information was considered private and confidential and that only a limited amount of information may be gleaned from these interviews, I was able to obtain statistical data on numbers and marketing trends from these interviews.

These interviews focused on getting an idea of the licensing process, how they market and sell their games and how they engage and interact with their customers.
Understanding the licensing process is crucial to understand the depth of the relationship between the developer and the publisher and see if it is a two-way relationship. Marketing is also important as these companies are trying to compete with international companies and other local companies for local players’ attentions. The company’s involvement with the players may or may not be as involved to really see how they affect or effect the local gaming community, but they will be able to give insight into overarching trends or behavior that might not be obvious to players.

For interviews with game players, 10 Malaysian players were contacted. I identified 5 from my own personal contacts and they in turn were able to connect me to 3 others. These contacts were either friends that I have known for a long time who were interested in online gaming or from my involvement in a local online forum that had a discussion board dedicated to online gaming. For the remainder, I solicited requests through forums with users that displayed a broad interest in MMORPGs and were fairly active within the community. My approach to each of these players often began with a simple email or phone call where I would introduce myself followed by a simple description of the study I was conducting; all players were very receptive to being interviewed.

Based on my own observations in local gaming forums, most players were wholly devoted to either kind of MMORPGs, F2P or P2P. It was rare for a player to be interested in both types. Most of the players from my own contacts were involved in P2P-based, international MMORPGs and usually by extension, so did their contacts. As such, most of my solicitations through online forums were for those that played F2P games. In the
end, I was able to acquire 6 P2P players and 4 F2P players and among them there was a broad range of eccentricities that provided me with some interesting stories.

For the interviews, I opted to conduct them in a face-to-face manner. For direct contacts, I offered to meet them at their home where they can be most comfortable and for those that I am less familiar with, I met them at a location that they chose. In most cases, this would be a cafe or restaurant near their place of stay or at their workplace. Traveling was not an issue as all the players are based in and around the Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area. The interviews with players lasted anywhere between 30-60 minutes each. Each of these interviews was recorded using my personal cell phone with their consent. Prior to these interviews, I provided them a copy of my questions which allowed them to better organize their thoughts and answers.
CHAPTER 2: THE GLOBAL-LOCAL NEXUS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on establishing what the global-local nexus is and where it resides within the larger discourse on globalization. This includes following its history and how this approach was first adopted and how it has changed the globalization literature when investigating the effects of global forces on small, localized events. The latter part of this chapter reviews a growing body of literature on the Global-Local Nexus in media cultures.

Globalization and Localization – The Global-local Nexus

Globalization has been a much debated issue in the last half century ever since the Cold War, when global forces, including major powers in the West, multinational corporations, and international organizations, sought to influence Third World Countries into aligning with their own ideological standing (Featherstone, 1990). As smaller nations began to adopt or become influenced by greater powers, their internal governance and market structure slowly began to change as it struggled to deal with these foreign forces altering the local environment. This then led to the phenomenon known as the Global-Local Nexus, which is the study of the relationships between the forces of globalization as they encounter various, often adverse, local environments. These relationships are amorphous and dynamic in the sense that neither global nor local forces have control over the other, but at the same time they have great influence over the other. Kinnvall and Jönsson (2002) describe this as “… a process that through which global events, values and ideas are localized in interpretation and outcome.”
Early on, the vast majority of research on the global-local nexus was focused on its effects on the developing world (Alger, 1988). Primarily used as a counter to pro-Western influence on developing nations, it often served as the foundation for directing anti-globalization efforts against international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Kinnvall & Jönsson, 2002). In these studies, globalization served as the scapegoat behind the reason a country continued to flounder despite being given every opportunity to develop (Alger, 1988). Over time, some attempted to have a more balanced approach to the global-local relationship, as it became obvious that some developing countries had actually become quite successful despite these supposed shortcomings and often in their own unique way (Alger, 1988).

Similarly, globalization's effects on local cultures were initially viewed very negatively. Schiller (1976) calls it “cultural imperialism,” based on the world systems theory with the sole core market that represents American values and consumer cultures which “radiate outward” to all other periphery nations across the world. He highlights that this “one-directional” relationship between the core culture and periphery cultures has been enabled largely by media and communication technologies. Schiller believes that the driving force behind this phenomenon are multinational corporations (MNCs) that seek to “... dominate, every cultural and informational space that separates them from total control of their global/national environment.” (p. 7) Their reasons for enforcing such a strict and imposing mindset underlines their need to maximize profits across the globe, and the best way to do so would be to sell a single culture universally around the world. The end result, according to Schiller, is the wholesale eradication of local cultures as they
are either forced to comply or be completely forgotten when confronted by these forces of globalization.

Schiller makes his case in the media, citing American media's increasing dominance of local cultural landscapes in Third World regions like Latin America. In Latin America, the local media is being flooded by imported films and advertising, a result of aggressive commercialization by foreign MNCs, mostly US-based ones. Western Europe, considerably more resistant to foreign influences, is also succumbing to these external forces. Imported Hollywood films are not much of a threat due to economic diligence on the part of these European countries, but local film producers are beginning to imitate these globalized films as a means of proxy imports as they too see the potential profits from these homogenized films. Over time, Schiller contends that these pale imitations will begin to dominate the culture, marking a victory for globalization indirectly.

However, revisionists have argued for more moderate approaches that look at the nexus between the two as they play off each other to form a composite culture that influences the local and the global. Barber (1995) characterizes this relationship as “McWorld vs. Jihad”, McWorld representing the global MNCs that are in the process of “pressing nations into one homogenous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce,” (p. 4) and the provocatively named Jihad which represents the process of “retribalization” (or a return to fundamentalism) across various ethnic, religious, and national lines among the populations of the world.
Unlike Schiller, Barber views the relationship between the two forces as both opposing and necessary for there to be a balance in any given society. A society that embraces McWorld wholly loses its own sense of space, culture and identity, while one that returns to Jihad is in itself resistant to all forms of change or anything that is different which can lead to a culture of jingoism and blind hatred towards anything that is foreign. Thus, Barber states that in the real world, we see both the effects of globalization of the local and the local reacting to it and society combines elements of the two to create a perfect symbiosis that will benefit the people within.

Another view on this interrelationship between the global and the local is raised by Friedman (1999), who also uses a whimsical terminology to characterize the sides of the coin. His notion, “The Lexus and the Olive Tree”, points to the complex relationship between global and local forces, as the former representing globalization and its need to constantly improve and to expand. He compared it to the Cold War as a shift from Einstein's e=mc2, which emphasized weight, to Moore's law which states that the power of silicon chips will double every 18 to 24 months, which emphasized speed. The olive tree represents everything that “roots us, anchors us, identifies us and locates us in the world,” (p. 77) which in a nutshell represents the local quite cohesively and literally. Friedman believes that these two elements are essential for every individual, community and nation to find their place in the world today. In agreement with Barber, Friedman also states that “The challenge in this era of globalization - for countries and individuals – is to find a healthy balance between preserving a sense of identity, home and community and doing what it takes to survive within the globalization system.” (p. 97)
Essentially, revisionists agree that globalization is not an alien force whose sole purpose is to consume all others and merge it into one soulless, profit driven culture. Similarly, the local identity does not mean that it rejects all foreign influences and persists preserving age-old traditions and ancient ideologies. The local will rather have to integrate itself with the global in order to progress or survive and at the same time, the local influences the global ever so slightly, seeing as the negative perception behind globalization being “Americanization” has its roots in local American culture to begin with (Featherstone, 1995). Thus, the latter approach used by revisionists is more positive towards the global-local nexus, which looks at both sides of the globalization debate.

This thesis supports both Barber’s and Friedman’s more moderate views on globalization and apply it to a case study of MMORPGs in Malaysia. There is a large body of work similar in vein to this global local nexus that focuses on local interpretations of international/global influences on cultures and industries at different places.

The Global-Local Nexus in Media Cultures

The global-local nexus research framework has been applied to a vast array of case studies ranging from the effects of tourism in Singapore (Teo & Lim, 2003), the spread of Rastafari culture across Africa (Wittmann, 2011) and residential sorting in Shanghai (Chen & Sun, 2007). For the purposes of this study, case studies in the field of media, primarily mainstream media such as film and music, are used as a staging point to get a perspective of how the global-local nexus affects and effects other forms of electronic media in an online world.
A study of the hip-hop culture in Singapore by Mattar (2003), examines how the hip-hop genre of music has penetrated the Singaporean youth culture. He observes that even though hip-hop was originally an inherently (and arguably still is) a local phenomenon within the United States, it has risen to become an international culture that is influencing various facets of popular music. Despite the international reach of this culture, it still has its roots in African-American culture and it is these roots that Singaporean youths have grown fond of and have begun adopting and practicing it.

Mattar states that this scenario in Singapore is only made possible by way of the Internet as it enables Singaporeans to both consume this overseas culture easily and to easily engage in its use with fellow Singaporeans. Accordingly, Mattar sees this as a subculture of both Singaporean identity and hip-hop consciousness; it is neither fully derivative of either and at the same time is very alien from both. He explains it by showing how these hip-hop fans in Singapore speak using both African American hip-hop slang and local Singaporean speech styles. Like American hip-hop, there also exist various sub-groups within the genre that do not agree with one another, but will temporarily unite against a common foe, such as outsiders and more traditional music fans, who are criticizing their music choice.

This study by Mattar was qualitative by nature and as such, used simple examples to illustrate the differences between the host and follower cultures. This approach is useful for my study on the Malaysian gaming industry that follows similar themes of examining consumers within a global/local based capitalist media product. Unlike Mattar, though, personal interviews are used to acquire a more personal view of this subculture.
The current literature is lacking when it comes to studies related online games. Games studies are a very new field of research and as such this study will be a useful addition to its ever growing literature on the global-local nexus.

Online games are truly global entities; the games can be accessed from anywhere on the planet and these games allow people to forge connections with others irrespective of national borders, but on the other hand, it can also be very local based on the players and communities within. Despite that, there are a good number of localization efforts in various regions around the world such as Russia, China, and Southeast Asia and the players themselves have grouped themselves into various place-based communities, which brings the local into the global space of the Internet that is brought forth by the consumers of these games. Thus, the business is very global by nature, but its actual execution and reception is hugely centered on the players themselves who influence these games with various local factors themselves. In order to have a better understanding of the interactions between globally-produced, globally-advertised and globally-played games and their locally-based consumers around the world, it is important to examine the roles played by all participants, including developers, publishers, communities and its players, in the online game industry.
CHAPTER 3: MMORPGS – GLOBALLY AND IN MALAYSIA

Introduction

This chapter serves to underline what Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games are and how they have evolved over the last two decades. Once established, this chapter will focus on how MMORPGs entered the Malaysian market and explain how it differs from global trends.

MMORPGS – Global Trends

An online game is a video game that is to be played over the Internet with other players from all over the world. These games often have a multiplayer component that allows players to interact with others in a single game environment. The term itself is highly generic and does not indicate the genre of the game, but rather its focus; which is for play that will make use of the Internet, which can be achieved either through direct or indirect competition and/or cooperative play among players.

Online games can be easily classified into a two very broad categories: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPGs) and online multiplayer games. MMORPGs represent the core genre within online games and the games themselves consist of large virtual worlds that can house thousands of players at once. Online multiplayer games are basically traditional multiplayer video games that function solely in an online environment. Unlike MMORPGs, these game worlds are much smaller in scale and are limited to dozens of players at a time and exist only for a short duration.

The definition of a MMORPG is a game that operates a persistent online world that allows players from around the world, to connect to using the Internet and access
them together with thousands of other players. The avatars that they create will remain in
the world even though players log out, awaiting their return. Unlike regular retail games,
these games are designed to be played for extensive periods of time (often months) for a
player to completely exhaust the content within and provide social communication tools
to facilitate player interactions.

The MMORPG first started in the early days of desktop computing in the form of
the Multi User Dungeon (MUD) (Koster, 2000). This started out as an adventure game
that would accommodate multiple players in a single game in Essex University in 1978
(Koster, 2000). It then became Internet capable in 1980 when Essex University joined the
APRANet program, the fore-bearer to the modern day Internet, and thus became the first
Internet MUD that will later evolve to become the modern day MMORPG (Koster,
2000).

These games were at their core highly abstracted due to the primitive nature of
these MUDs. Thus, the first modern, 3D-based, commercial MMORPG was Meridian 59
by 3DO in 1996. (Koster, 2000) In it, players could create avatars that they would control
in an open environment that featured Player vs. Player (PvP) interactions, whereby
players could engage other players in combat, a completely player-run social structure
and a whole virtual world to explore. The game itself introduced many newer concepts
and introduced the concept of paid monthly subscriptions to the MMORPG genre
(Koster, 2000). Despite its pioneer status, the game did not receive a large amount of
support and was then overshadowed by Electronic Arts Online's Ultima Online in 1997
(Koster, 2000). Building off the Ultima franchise, whilst offering the same core gameplay
as that of Meridian 59, Ultima Online grew tremendously and reached 100,000 subscribers very quickly (Koster, 2000).

These games were not widely popular until 1999, when Everquest was introduced by Sony Online Entertainment. This game was revolutionary for MMORPGs as it introduced modern day staples of the genre such as fixed quest structures, vast, elaborate Player vs. Environment encounters and a highly rigid but more class driven avatar progression. This game also brought MMORPGs into the mainstream as it was widely popular and ran for more than a decade (Kelly, 2004). This game also brought about the first public concerns about the addictive qualities of games in this genre, which led to the coining of the phrase, “EverCrack” to state its addictiveness to crack cocaine.

The Everquest model is the prevailing model in the market today for the standard MMORPG. Thus, norms for these games include playing a single avatar in a huge multiplayer environment that can include upwards of thousands of players. Avatar progression is very limited and is achieved by completing quests that are given by non-player characters (NPCs) in a structured way that guides players across the world or through participation in combat with monsters or enemies that are part of the environment (This is known as the Player vs. Environment (PvE) aspect of an MMORPG) (Kelly, 2004). Players are given direct control over their avatar, their inventory and equipment, and choice of spells and abilities.

Another key aspect of the MMORPG, which some say is the most important of all, is social interactions within it. Thus, MMORPGs will have various internal social relationship structures that aid player interactions. These include player chat channels
(That function like a simplified version of an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) chat room), a grouping system (That allows players to find other players nearby to go adventuring with), a friends system (That help players manage relationships with specific players) and a guild system (That allows for the formation of a structured organization that can recruit hundreds of players) (Kelly, 2004).

Unlike regular retail video/computer games, MMORPG titles are not sustainable with just the retail price. Since the persistent worlds require the constant operation and maintenance of hundreds of dedicated servers, MMORPGs require a constant stream of income to earn profits while overcoming its high overhead costs.

Thus, the MMORPG market is divided into two separate business models for income. The so-called “Western” approach, used and exacted by North American and European developers, uses a very traditional approach that relies on a monthly subscription fee for revenue, known as the Pay to Play (P2P) model. These games tend to have long life cycles before being discontinued, often lasting anywhere between 5-10 years. This situation allows players to develop long-term social relationships with other players in the same game as they interact with one another over an extended period of time (Ström & Ernkvist, 2006).

The Eastern approach, used by companies based in East Asian countries like South Korea and China, was introduced recently to the MMORPG genre. This approach often called a “modern” approach and is known as the Free to Play model (F2P), whereby the game is completely accessible to anyone without cost, but the play experience is severely limited unless the player is willing to spend money on specific features through
micro transactions (Hyman, 2009) that will improve their play experience. This situation can often lead to the best player being the one who is willing to spend the most cash and these games often have distinctly shorter life cycles that lead to a very migratory player base (Ström & Ernkvist, 2006).

Due to the rising cost of development and operations, the P2P model has been declining in popularity. The high cost of entry makes it difficult for new MMORPGs to draw in strong enough subscriber numbers in a short period of time and together with stiff competition from F2P games, success with the traditional model has become very rare these days as only old mainstays such as the biggest MMORPGs, such as World of Warcraft and EVE Online, are able to continue using it. Referring to Figure 1, there has been a huge shift from the P2P model to F2P in the last three years and that trends looks to continue for the next couple of years as well. Most new games in the last decade that use the P2P model, such as Age of Conan and Everquest 2, were unable to garner enough profits with this model alone and were forced to switch to the F2P model in order to remain operational.
Even with the failings of the P2P model for newer MMORPGs, there still exists a large number of players that are still skeptical about F2P based games as they consider them to be inherently unfair; the player who is willing to invest the most money will be the best at the game. In order for the game to be fully enjoyable, one would have to invest large sums of money each month (Often more than the traditional $15 that most P2P games asked for).

There exists a third new approach, called the hybrid model that incorporates these two payment schemes. Pioneered by Turbine Entertainment with their game Dungeons and Dragons Online, the company decided to revamp the entire payment scheme for the game that was running on P2P. The game was turned into a F2P game with much of the regular content being converted into “premium” content that would require a fee. Players,
who wished to continue paying the previous monthly fee (P2P), could still do so in order to continue to have access to this content. Thus, this benefits players who are fans of the P2P payment scheme that will continue to have full access to all content and attracts new players via F2P that can enjoy the game at their own pace as they do not have a monthly fee to worry about and may spend money as they see fit.

**Malaysia – History of MMORPGs and Practices**

Considering the lack academic literature on MMORPGs in Malaysia and a general lack of archiving from local media and local publishers, the vast majority of information provided here was provided from my own personal experiences and knowledge of the local market. I have been interested on the Malaysian gaming industry from 15 years ago through my own personal interest in playing games and keeping abreast of local and foreign gaming news. In these 15 years, I have been keeping track of the local MMORPG industry from when it began, witnessed as local publishers formed and closed down and watched as the local market shifted from P2P to F2P.

That is not the extent of my knowledge on the Malaysia MMORPG market; I worked in the industry for 3 years prior to starting this research. While I was not involved in decision making or marketing, I was privy to the way these companies operate and how these games are managed. This insider perspective has placed me in a better position to examine the nexus as I am able to relate the information gather from both a publisher and player's perspective. However, my own knowledge is only used in this section of the thesis and is not used with my findings.
Malaysia does not have any home-grown MMORPG developers. Instead, several local businesses have been set up to license these MMORPG from developers around the world, repackage them for the local Malaysian market (localization). This may seem unnecessary and seemingly disingenuous as MMORPG are based online and “borderless”. Despite this, these local MMORPG publishers are incredibly profitable and successful, with the local industry earning millions in revenue yearly.

The first company to start localizing international MMORPGs is Gameflier (M) Sdn. Bhd., which localized a very popular South Korean MMORPG, Ragnarok Online. The game was originally released in 2002 in South Korea and its developer, Gravity, began licensing the game out to various markets around the world. In 2003, Gravity struck a deal with Gameflier (M), which then began localizing the game into Bahasa Malaysia for Malaysia (Tai, 2004). When it was first released, it was released for free in what is known as an “open beta”, implying that the game was still in the testing phase and did not charge players. This phase lasted for a year and the game was then officially released with a monthly subscription fee. While not as expensive as other international MMORPGs, the game lost many of its players and only lasted a few years after. Using Ragnarok Online as a benchmark, many other publishers began bringing in other international MMORPGs into the country, most of which came from either South Korea or China over the next few years.

The failure of Ragnarok Online heralded the downfall of P2P-based MMORPGs in Malaysia as several other games also failed to gain a foothold among Malaysian players. Fortunately, this trend was affecting the rest of Asia as Asian developers
struggled to compete against Western MMORPGs which often have better spending power and come at premium prices. The result was a shift to F2P-based MMORPGs which was then introduced into the Malaysian market. This new business model was difficult to sell at first, but became popular quickly as many players were attracted to the idea that you could play for free without any initial cost.

Even with the quick rise of F2P, there were still several P2P MMORPGs that continued to be released in the country. All of these games, however, failed to gain a foothold in the country due to a small player base. The last high profile P2P MMORPG, South Korean Lineage II, which launched in 2007, was shut down just two years later. Since then, there has been no interest in bringing in any P2P based MMORPG into Malaysia.

Western developers have shown little interest in Malaysia over the last decade. The biggest interest so far has been from Blizzard with World of Warcraft as they were in talks with a local company (Sendi Mutiara Multimedia) to local World of Warcraft for the Malaysian and Southeast Asian market with local servers and local payment methods in 2005 (Gameaxis, 2005). However, the deal fell through and no other Western MMORPG developer has attempted since then. Despite this, some developers have not completely ignored Malaysia and Southeast Asia; developers such as Trion Worlds, developers of Rift Online, have begun working with local Malaysian publishers to distribute and sell their games in the local market.

Nonetheless, the MMORPG market in Malaysia is booming with a large body of publishers in the country, each operating several games simultaneously, while constantly
trying to acquire new titles. These companies are in high competition with one another as companies often shut down, rebrand or rebuild as their games flounder and perish. One such example is CubeTech Asia, local publisher for Lineage II in Malaysia and Singapore. After the licensing agreement was cancelled between them and the developer, NC Soft, the company could no longer sustain itself as a MMORPG publisher and rebranded themselves as Grabbitgames and changed their business model to be that of a games distributor instead (which has ended in failure as that venture no longer exists either).

As shown in Table 1, this small selection of just 8 MMORPG publishers in Malaysia operates over seventy games simultaneously and all their games come from East Asian based MMORPG developers. The localization effort is mainly centered on Chinese, which is minimal in most cases as these games would then be almost identical to the original games that come from Chinese developers. English and Bahasa Malaysia are present but not as all-encompassing as Chinese language games. Despite the stiff competition, there are still companies that were present at the dawn of the industry with companies as early as 2011 still making headways.
This research looks at the role that these local publishers play in linking global MMORPG developers to local Malaysian game players. Research on cultures surrounding modern day online games is rising steadily but most of this research is often conducted in bigger markets like North America, Europe and China with very little emphasis on other periphery markets like Malaysia. As a force of globalization, research such as this would be a worthy contribution to the ongoing discourse on globalization in
an online era. By examining how a small market ekes out its own space in cyberspace, my research builds upon Benjamin Barber’s assertions that globalization and localization can co-exist and be mutually beneficial to one another.

As shown in Figure 2, this represents what the local MMORPG markets looks like. You have global developers that license their games to local publishers who in turn publish them for local players to play. This is a simplified view of the relationships between these three groups, as it shows a rather one-sided relationship stemming from the global that controls the local with no recourse for the local, which according to traditional globalization literature is the likely scenario. Hence, this thesis seeks to debunk this and illustrate that local publishers and local players are able to wield power of their own through their own actions.

![Figure 2: The local MMORPG market in Malaysia](image)
There are a number of Malaysian game publishers in the country and each of them would often run anywhere between 3-10 different MMORPGs at once. Each of these titles would often have varying features that would cater to different demographics. These may include traditional fantasy based MMOGs along the same vein as Everquest and World of Warcraft or some other genres such as music, First Person Shooters (FPS) and even racing games.
CHAPTER 4: LOCAL PUBLISHERS

Introduction

As all of the interviews were conducted on the basis that the company and the representatives remain anonymous, I will not be able to divulge much information about their businesses as it would be all too easy to discern which companies were involved. Generally, all 3 companies are fairly successful, have been in business for more than several years and operate upwards of half a dozen games at any given time. Almost all of their business is using the F2P model and the majority of the games being licensed come from either China or South Korea.

The major difference between these 3 companies is the demographics that they target; two of them target the Chinese Malaysian market while the other focuses on English speaking games. This difference can be observed in the games being offered as the Chinese-centric companies will have a large selection of Chinese-language games while the others will have a wider selection of languages being offered.

Company Interview #1 – Greg

The first interviewee was company representative, Greg (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, July 18, 2012). Greg has a position within the marketing division of one of the major MMORPG publishers in Malaysia. His company has been in business for half a decade and hosts a large number of MMORPGs. The portfolio of the company consists primarily of MMORPGs from Chinese-based developers. The types of MMORPGs that his company operates are commonly referred to as “client-based” games whereby the player is required to download/purchase (Just the
cost of delivery and DVD) and install a game client in order to play a particular game. The alternative to this are “web-based” games which operate out of a player’s web browser, requiring little to no external software to run. Client-based games are considered of higher quality and value but often require a player to have an up-to-date gaming personal computer to run them and the converse is true for web-based games where the quality may be significantly lower, but since it runs from a web browser, players can play them on almost any computer.

*Company Interview #2 – Jill*

The second representative that I interviewed was marketing executive, Jill (not her real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, July 24, 2012). Jill represents a Malaysian publisher that is actually a subsidiary of a MMORPG developer in China. The same developer has circumvented the need for an external publisher by establishing their own publishing subsidiaries around the world. Despite the fact that her company is a subsidiary of a foreign developer, they behave like a regular publisher and do in fact publish games from other developers too. Like the first company, their games are primarily Chinese-language titles but their focus is geared towards web-based MMORPGs.

*Company Interview #3 – Bill*

The last interviewee is Bill (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, August 8, 2012), who is a marketing executive for a major MMORPG publisher in Malaysia. Unlike the first two companies, his company has a broader range of games as they cater primarily to English speaking players and license games from
South Korea as well as China. Furthermore, this company covers most of Southeast Asia, giving Bill extra perspective when looking at the Malaysian market as he is able to compare it with other markets in the region.

Licensing

On the topic of the game licensing process, Greg was involved directly in several dealings with developers, although he would not divulge details of the deals. He explained that the process of a game publisher acquiring the rights to publish a game for a developer is known in the industry as the game licensing process. Most MMORPG developers focus solely on developing games and then license their games to publishers to be sold in markets around the world. All three agreed that East Asian developers preferred this approach since their games (F2P) were aimed at players with little income such as college students and school children, customer groups that would require the expertise and skills of a local publisher in promoting and marketing products effectively.

When asked on who initiates this process, Greg stated that both parties might. Publishers may employ a “sourcing house” whose job is to scour games from various developers and once they find one that is suitable for that publisher, they will make contact with them on behalf of the publisher. For developers, they first have to have a game that they wish to sell, and thus they look around the world, in countries that they are targeting and then they approach any publishers there that are willing to take their games.

The licensing process itself varies depending on the relationship between the publisher and the developer and the actual game in question. But generally, publishers are
required to pay a fixed amount or “license fee” up front and then there is “revenue sharing” between both parties as the developer gets a royalty from all profits earned by the publisher for their game. The rationale behind this royalty is that these games are constantly being updated by the developer and royalties pay towards that. Additional charges like “technical fees” and “upfront royalties” are sometimes incurred by some developers who believe that they have high quality or sought-after games. However, Greg countered this by saying that these are old practices from 2-3 years ago and are fairly uncommon these days.

Based on his experiences over the years in the industry, Greg says that despite the open market nature of his licensing process, a lot of deals are struck based on past relationships between developers and publishers. He states that “ Doesn’t mean if you have the money, they will give you the game,” continuing, “they will evaluate your strengths and decide whether you are suitable for their games.” These “strengths” are generally about the publisher’s marketing plan, customer base and experience in types of games published. Basically, the content of a licensing agreement depends heavily on the publisher meeting where various requirements are set by the developer.

Licensing deals last anywhere between 3-5 years, based usually on the lifespan of the game and technological advances. Due to the short lifespan of these games (Western MMORPGs generally have a lifespan of at least 5+ years), developers would often bring in new games that would obsolete their older ones. Essentially, according to Greg, “3 years is considered quite long,” as the publisher will have to find new games quickly as “you will have to have new games that players want and stir player interest.” From this
statement, Greg is implying that Malaysian players would get bored with games very quickly forcing higher turnover inevitable and new games need to be brought in to keep them interested.

Jill’s explanation of the licensing process was very similar. What differed was the terminology used; She referred to the upfront payment as the one-time/yearly based payment or royalty fee and what Greg considered the royalty fee, Jill referred to as “profit-sharing”. The difference in terminology somewhat reveals the different relationships that their respective companies have developed with their developers; Jill’s company, as a local subsidiary of the parent company, while Greg is positioned rather as a third party.

Again, Bill’s description of the licensing process is not wholly different than what was described by Greg and Jill. Bill did state that for some cases, developers are merely looking for a “payment gateway provider” in a specific region; basically, a way for local players to make payments to the developer using local monetary channels instead of relying on using the so-called globally-accepted credit card transactions. This is essential for F2P MMORPGs as players need to be able to spend their money in the most locally convenient way possible. In addition, given that schoolchildren and college students are not likely to have credit cards available, these alternate payment methods are necessary. These alternate methods include selling special game cards at local stores or offering direct bank transfers using local bank accounts. In these situations, the publisher definitely plays a mediation role between the global developers and local players.
With regards to the “sourcing” phase, Bill brought up another method that is perhaps only available to publishers with large capital backing. In China, some developers actually accept investments from publishers around the world before the game is even completed. This investment guarantees exclusivity to certain publishers for their respective markets, and according to Bill, this is a practice that is common among big budget Western MMORPG developers. Due to the uncertainty with this type of investment, Bill says publishers generally invest only in developers with a proven track record.

In terms of the licensing agreement, the relationship is fairly straightforward; the developer provides the game software and tools to manage it, while the publisher is given access to alter the language, perform some rudimentary game maintenance and management and given free rein to promote and sell the game to local markets. These may seem like a fairly sizable amount of control, but not so once you get into the details. In terms of altering the language, publishers are merely given access to the text files for all text that appears in the game and their role is to simply translate the original text into a localized one. Game maintenance varies based on the licensing deals, but usually consists of the developer supplying the software necessary to run these servers and the tools required to allow the publishers simple access to them to manage and maintain them. Selling and promoting the games is where the developers give the most control to the publishers (as long as they can justify it). In essence, publishers are considered to be experts on their own local region and as such should be trusted to be able to market effectively to them.
Since developers dictate the extent of the license deal such as the upfront licensing fee, which regions and languages that are allocated to the publisher, this often creates a contentious and confusing situation as publishers scramble to get the best games from the best developers. In some cases, some publishers can actually establish their localized game as the primary game for the region as the developer will actually enforce IP restrictions on the international version for anyone from a country where a publisher has signed an exclusivity deal. This move, often employed on very popular international games, is used to maximize the market potential for a game but at the cost of angering local gamers who may prefer to play internationally instead. In some rare cases, two publishers may sign on with a single developer for the same region, each with a different language.

Due to the short-lived nature of F2P games, these licensing deals commonly last between 2-5 years depending on the popularity of the game. In accordance with that, publishers will try to license more than one game at any given time. Smaller publishers have difficulty doing so and often struggle with just one or two titles before earning enough capital and presence to be able to court more developers to work with them. Running multiple titles is crucial to the success and longevity of a publisher as F2P game players would often play multiple games for a change of pace and theme.

With regards to the Global-Local Nexus, there appears to be a very heavy slant towards developers within the licensing agreement with publishers afforded very little liberties with the games that they are licensed. However, since publishers may also act as investors and in some cases be successful enough that they can dictate terms to the
developers, shows that there is room to maneuver within this relationship. Indirectly, the publisher’s market performance and the feedback that they return to the developers, though minor compared to more lucrative markets, influences a developer’s choices for future games.

Localization

The localization process, according to Greg, is mainly centered on translating Chinese or South Korean content to English and Bahasa Malaysia. Since the developers only allow very limited access to the game’s code, publishers are only able to alter the text of the game and as such that is all they do for translation. When translating, it is also important to take into account the sensibilities of the local cultures so as not to offend potential users. Greg gives an example of localization in Thailand; he states that “in Thailand, tigers are considered evil spirits and as such any characters in the game that are tigers need to be modified.” He also brings up the issue of pigs in games in Malaysia, citing Malaysia’s Islamic background which views pigs as dirty animals and the same treatment is given to any pig-based characters. As his company is not able to modify the game content, all they are able to do is just rename the character to something else.
Referring to Figures 3-5, each showing a different game has been localized for the Malaysian market, the translation is done on all text elements in the game. When compared to their international counterparts, these games will look near identical save for the text. Even then, in some of these images, players themselves communicate using their own preferred language regardless of the language of the game proper.

*Figure 3: Screenshot from Jin Online, a local MMORPG in Bahasa Malaysia*
Figure 4: Screenshot from Maple Story, a local MMORPG in English
On the topic of localization, while very similar to the other two, Bill’s company had significant sway with some developers as they are able to request for special localized content for Malaysian players. These include creating special environments using local landmarks and creating custom costumes that are specific to local cultures, traditions and norms. With that in mind, Bill said these requests were only taken into consideration as these games were very popular. In most cases, they will not be heeded and in the end, it is still up to the developer on whether they wish to do this or not.

*Figure 5: Screenshot from Perfect World Online, a local MMORPG in Chinese*
Pricing is another aspect of localization that is where the publisher has almost absolute control. That being said, Greg adds that developers still require justification from the publisher for the prices used. To illustrate the difference in costs of living, the price of a McDonald’s hamburger, called the Big Mac Index, in both Malaysia and China is usually used for comparison. Even then, pricing is often determined by the type of demographic that the company is targeting in the local market. The pricing of items in the game is an important factor to ensure the game’s success. Simple, throwaway items need to be priced at very affordable rates so as to entice impulse buyers to part with their money. Given that the demographics range from school children to middle-aged working adults, the cheapest item should be affordable by the former and there should be higher priced premium items that are more attractive to the latter.

For instance, Bill’s company focuses more on school children and college students, which means these players will have less money to spend but are more willing to spend if the items offered are cheap and attractive. As such, his company focuses their sales on items that allow for customization and are priced at relatively low rates targeting local youth. Bill’s approach is slightly different as he is conveying that his company’s approach to revenue is more on increasing the number of paying players rather than focusing on only rich paying players which spend a lot each time. He states that his company’s focus on kids rather than young adults is due to the stiff competition from other “yuppie” activities such as clubbing, spending on high tech gadgets and western big budget MMORPGs. In either case, the developers leave it up to the publishers whom they trust to “know” the market, according to Jill.
Transition from P2P to F2P

On the issue of income model, Greg, an industry veteran who witnessed the transition from P2P to F2P, was able to offer a dual perspective on the issue. The P2P model began a decade ago but was no longer used in the last 5 years as all Malaysian publishers had shifted to the F2P model. He states that P2P was never going to succeed in “small markets” like Malaysia as the “customer base is not big enough to support a very good game.” The inference here is that most P2P games are big budget titles that would require a large number of subscribers to succeed, which Malaysia does not have. The F2P model in this case, Greg claims does not “limit yourself in terms of customers”. Furthermore, Greg says that “the younger generation in Malaysia does not like paying for things in advance, which makes the subscription model of P2P games very unattractive and unappealing to them. They would prefer free access to a game and if they like the game, they will then support it with their money.”

However, the change from P2P to F2P was actually the result of East Asian MMORPG developers making the switch. As Jill states, the developer’s create these games with a particular model in mind, and all the publisher can do is follow suit as they are in no position to request for changes or even modifications to the base model. Fortunately though, the East Asian model for F2P which favors players that wish to spend more is especially popular among Malaysian players that explain its success unlike the Western P2P model. As a result, the MMORPG market in Malaysia consists entirely of F2P MMORPGs, wholly different from the international market which consists of a majority of P2P MMORPGs (Refer to Figure 1).
Free to Play

With regards to the F2P model, Greg described it as a game “with no fixed sum for players to join the game.” Instead, for “certain items in-game... players will need it in order for them to level up their characters.” Basically, players who wish to advance in the game will have to purchase specific items to do so. Thus, it is important that players are willing to pay for these services. Indeed they are as Greg chimes that it is a “proven successful business model for this industry” and that is punctuated by a growing number of publishers in Malaysia.

The sale of in-game items is the main source of income for these companies. According to Greg, these items can range from “fashionable items” (purely to beautify one’s character), mounts & pets (special animals that a player’s avatar may ride like a horse or just accompany them), and special “luxury items.” But, the most lucrative of these items are “those that players need to upgrade”. These items vastly improve one’s avatar and in most cases give a direct advantage over other players, which is very appealing to Malaysian players and is pejoratively referred to by players as “Pay2Win” (P2W) items. Other types of items that are sold in these games are listed in Table 2.
Table 2

*Items Sold in Free-to-Play Games*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Type</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetic</td>
<td>Low to High</td>
<td>Customize the appearance of player avatars, no other benefits or effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boost</td>
<td>Low to High</td>
<td>Single use items that provide a short/long term benefit to player avatars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement/&quot;Pay2Win&quot;</td>
<td>Medium to High</td>
<td>Equipment for player avatars that provide a significant benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Low to High</td>
<td>Seasonally themed items that offer unique benefits for a short period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Medium to High</td>
<td>Access to new content for players</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the topic of the F2P model, Jill shed some light into the widespread adoption of this model in the Malaysian market. Simply put, Jill says, “F2P stimulates players to spend more” and states that this is the reason for the demise of P2P in the industry. She then explained that there are two types of players in F2P MMORPGs, Free Players and Money Players. Free Players are players that have not spent any money in a game while Money Players are those that have.

She did go into extreme detail when describing the “conversion rate” of players, which is how soon it takes to convert a Free Player into a Money Player. The average for most games is usually 1 day but this number goes as high as 3 days. She attributes this to the fact that these games often “assist new players early on” which means players do not
have to spend money during this initial period to progress or have fun. This is done to familiarize a player with the game and mechanics. Then, once they are familiar, these players will be more willing to spend.

Free Players may not necessarily contribute to the company’s revenue stream, but their presence in the game ensures that Money Players will have like-minded friends to interact with as they play the game. Basically, the company uses these Free Players to keep their Money Players company and provide socialization. Thus, converting Free Players is not high on Jill’s company’s agenda. Similar to Greg, Jill states, that “without them (Free Players), the game will not survive”. However, her company does have a variety of plans to convert long-time players into paying customers by organizing events for older players and establishing a “coaching system” that will reward more experienced players who assist new players.

Despite being the main contributor of income to a publisher, not all Money Players are equal. Within these Money Players, there exists an even smaller group of players who would spend copious amounts of money on the game. While having no actual name, Greg refers to these players as “VIP Players” as these players would usually spend upwards of hundreds of thousands of Ringgit (several tens of thousands of Dollars) each month on the game. For these players, looking unique and progressing quickly might not be enough for them but rather being the absolute best in the game would suit their goal. To accomplish this goal, they are willing to “invest” their money in specific virtual items that will greatly improve their character above everyone else and the only way others can compete is if they too invest similar amounts of cash. Thus, there is
usually a small pool of VIP Players that would compete with one another to become the top player in the game.

Given their enormous contributions to each company, these VIP players would often prefer preferential treatment from local publishers. Greg said that this would be in the form of being provided a direct line to the technical support department so that they will get instant technical support to remedy any problems or issues that they are facing. In addition to that, these publishers would also hold special VIP-only events for these people where they can get feedback on the games.

Table 3 shows the different types of players that are present in a F2P MMORPG. While VIP and Money Players are technically the same, for a publisher, the VIP player group has a bigger role in the industry as their spending is what keeps the game afloat and as such is given a higher importance over regular Money Players. Of the 3 company representatives, only Bill’s company downplayed the role of VIP Players in his company’s games as he claims that his company’s approach is more towards having a larger more balanced Money Player base rather than focusing on a small number of very rich VIP Players.
Table 3

*Types of Players in a F2P MMORPG.*
*Source: Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Money Spent</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>% of player population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Players</td>
<td>Players that never spend any money in the game, but play it a lot</td>
<td>Never or very little (&lt;$10 in total)</td>
<td>Enjoy free content, interact with other players</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Players</td>
<td>Players that spend money in the game to progress quickly</td>
<td>Anywhere between $100-$1000 a month</td>
<td>Enjoy content until bored, interact with other players</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP Players</td>
<td>Players that spend ludicrous amounts of money in the game to become one of the highest ranking players</td>
<td>Average spending of upwards of $10,000 per month</td>
<td>Antagonize other players, aim for top spot in game</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community

One of the advantages of having a local publishing company is that it is far easier for the company to communicate with game player communities as they are place-based. This is beneficial to both parties as the publisher will be able to focus their marketing more efficiently and with lower cost, while players will have easier and more familiar access to the publisher. Unlike international games, the act of contacting their customer support is not only expensive but can be difficult; time zone differences make it difficult for players to make contact and the language and cultural barrier is an issue for many players.
The most basic form of community support is through the use of Game Masters (GM). These are customer support representatives who will be present in these games. Players who have issues can contact any of these GMs in the game in order for it to be rectified. These include technical issues related to purchases or problems with the game. The presence of these officials is fairly standard in all MMORPGs and they are ever present in Malaysian MMORPGs. Contacting a GM is not limited through using the game though, as some publishers, such as Greg’s and Bill’s companies offer technical support hotlines for players.

Since the interviews were conducted with primarily marketing executives or individuals involved in the marketing process, they were able to provide in-depth information on their marketing practices. Marketing for local MMORPGs consists of pure advertising and “on-ground” events. The former is handled differently depending on the company, but generally involves advertising through local magazines, websites or the use of buntings at local cyber-cafes. On-ground events can either be specialized community-events where the company invites players to gather with various activities or merely setting up a booth at a larger event for the purposes of promoting the game.

In addition to these specialized community-level events, some of these companies use other means to foster community growth, such as the use of online forums or social media. Events are more successful than online forums and social media as a large number of dedicated community members regularly attend events while online participation is fairly low. Since these are communities that are being fostered by the publishers, they tend to either revolve around organizing their feedback towards the games or just for
networking and visibility purposes. Thus, from a company’s perspective, offline gatherings would work for both collecting feedback and increasing the interest of their players in the games.

Feedback is handled differently depending on the company. Greg’s says his company will evaluate most of them, but generally only consider the ones which his team also deems to have merit. They then submit this to the developer and this feedback often gets ignored as Malaysia is deemed too small a market to make changes for. He did state that in some rare cases, when multiple publishers from multiple regions submit similar responses, only then will it be considered. Even then, these are minor changes such as minor tweaks to the gameplay and nothing more. Jill and Bill stated that their respective companies have done the same, but unlike Greg, they have not seen any of their proposed changes ever taken into consideration by the developers.

On the topic of the Malaysian player base, Greg was fairly critical about them. He claims that Malaysian players are fairly disloyal and will bore easily when given repetitive tasks. As such, he explains that this is why Malaysian publishers all operate more than one game simultaneously; they all have to “broaden their product lines” in order to keep their increasingly distracted and disloyal players interested. The rationale behind this is that most players play more than 1 game at a time. Greg goes on to state that it is necessary to survive in a small market, since there is such a small number of players but an obscene amount of games to choose from. As a result, the average player often only plays a game for 3-6 months before moving on to something else.
CHAPTER 5: LOCAL GAME PLAYERS

Introduction

For the interviews with players, the target interviewees were to be players that played MMORPGs, either F2P or P2P games. Based on my own experience on the matter, amongst Malaysian players, there is little overlap between players of these two types of games and as such, the interview subjects would have to be comprised of players from both camps to get an understanding of why this division exists and how different their point of views are. Considering the local market in Malaysia where all local MMORPGs are using the F2P model and conversely, all P2P MMORPGs are international, F2P players essentially play locally while P2P players play internationally. Of the 10 interview participants that I needed, I originally planned on interviewing 5 P2P players and 5 F2P players but ended up with 6 P2P players and 4 F2P players. Since most P2P games are international games, the subjects should preferably be quite involved with other Malaysians or at least be aware of them. As for F2P players, of which there are aplenty, the biggest challenge was to find so-called VIP players that have heavily spent on these games.

Pay to Play (P2P) Players

I managed to acquire 6 subjects who can be considered as active P2P MMORPG players. Due to the fact that these games often share many similarities, there were many shared answers between these interviews. All of the games were international which means they bypass local publishers to access globally played games (See figure 4), with a
vast majority originating from Western countries such as the North America and Europe. The remainders were usually focused on Chinese-based MMORPGs.

*Even Playing Field*

In most P2P games, aside from the subscription fee that is required by all active players, there is usually no other monetary transactions that exist within the game. As a result, a player’s progress through the game is determined wholly by the player’s own involvement in the game; essentially, a player’s general progress in the game is the direct result of their time investment in the game. This even playing field creates a relatively fair environment for players whereby a player’s power is based off the time spent playing and their own personal skill.

One interviewee, Kirk (Not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, June 27, 2012), expressed that he preferred P2P games simply because these games promote an environment where players “expect to be treated equally.” Since P2P games usually charge players a fixed amount each month, the measure of a player’s avatar’s abilities and strength is based primarily on the amount and quality of time they spend in the game. This forced tenure within a game teaches players to play the game better, to learn its systems and also get them more involved, which indirectly fosters a better social environment. Thus, when all players are on an even footing, players will have to better their skills and knowledge at the game in order to compete or be seen as valuable to other players who may have spent the same amount of time or more time than they do. Essentially, a player’s ability is usually a direct result of their commitment to a game; this
includes spending more time in a game, doing research in order to play better and
discussing with other players in order to learn more and improve one’s self.

F2P games on the other hand, the Kirk continues, treat players differently based
on how much money they are willing to spend, rather than time. Having an “even playing
field” is one of the cornerstones of being a good MMORPG as he feels that if another
player manages to defeat you, it should be because he is the better player, rather than
because he had spent more money on the game. That being said, Kirk actually enjoyed
tormenting weaker players by constantly “player-killing” them (the act of killing another
player that offers little reward other than satisfaction). Known as “ganking”, it is
extremely frowned upon by MMORPG communities, but would be severely undermined
in F2P systems as weaker players could easily spend money to improve themselves over
stronger more veteran players. Those who criticize F2P games often participate in
“ganking”, as it makes it more difficult for them to engage in “ganking” as they would
have to spend more money, rather than time, in order to do so.

That notion is representative of the way Kirk himself plays these MMORPGs as
he enjoys manipulating the “system” or players in these games. Basically, he wants to
“feel like what I do in the game matters”. For example, in World of Warcraft, a game he
played religiously for several years, he would manipulate the “auction house” (a free
market that allows players to sell and buy goods) by holding on to large quantities of
precious items and selling them at opportune moments when the prices rise due to the
lack of supply. This was one of the few ways he would find alternate methods to enjoy
the MMORPGs by “changing the way content is experienced”. While P2P games have
become considerably generic among MMORPG players in recent years, Kirk’s prolonged
interest in the genre might have made him inured to regular routines and be able to
engage in these alternate forms of play on a larger social level will be of great interest to
him. As such, the money-driven worlds of F2P games will probably make it more
difficult for him to continue doing these actions and is possibly why he is so against
them. He believes that in order to be good at an F2P game will require much more money
than this single $15 per month subscription in the long run.

Another interviewee, Oliver (Not his real name) (Anonymous, personal
communication, July 18, 2012), had a more moderate view of the F2P model. Instead of
focusing on the negativity with allowing players to buy an advantage, he instead looked
at the effects of allowing players to play a game for free. According to him, “if there’s no
barrier to entry, there’s no commitment.” He expressed this using the example of a local
pay card service called “Touch-n-Go” and said that “in the real world, when you use a
Touch-n-Go card, you need to pay RM10-15 ($3-5) for it, just to get committed.” This
commitment is crucial in an MMORPG in order to foster social interaction between the
players. Games that require players to purchase the game or pay a monthly subscription
are inherently committed to the game because they have paid money up front. F2P games
do not have this restriction and as such, the majority of free players do not feel connected
or committed to the games that they play. It is also difficult to find other players and
connect with them if they play for perhaps a few weeks or several hours before moving
on to a new game.
Oliver jokingly remarked that this line of thought is surprisingly “elitist” but I think he did not realize just how pervasive that attitude was. This idea that requiring an upfront payment for an MMORPG makes for a better playing experience overall as you have players who are more committed and players that actually care about the game and the world within is quite common among all the P2P players interviewed. They do not perceive paying $60 for a new game or $15 for a month as an expensive requirement but just a simple barrier to keep out the non-committed, casual players. But, in Malaysia, that price, while not necessarily high, is prohibitive to a large segment of the gaming population, such as school children and college teens that wish to play MMORPGs. Yes, these players like the idea behind an even-playing field, but entrance into that field is anything but even as it discriminates against those who do not have the financial means to do so.

In general, P2P players would subscribe to one game at a time. This was apparent in all my interviews. The only exception would be for them to try out new games and even then this only lasts a month and they will stick with whichever they prefer. This singular devotion to one game a time is described by 5 out of the 6 P2P players who were interviewed that they did not want to focus on more than one game at a time because it was very costly to do so. Interestingly, one F2P player commented that he chose not to play P2P games simply because the subscription would compel him to play the game as much as possible to get his money’s worth and as such it became more of a chore rather than him enjoying himself at his own pace.
Local Players Coming Together

The idea behind a Malaysian guild in an international MMORPG is very peculiar and perhaps unnecessary. I had two interviewees that were rather involved in Malaysian guilds. Betty (Not her real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, July 29, 2012), was fairly involved with several high profile Malaysian guilds in World of Warcraft for a number of years. The other, Mary (Not her real name) (Anonymous, June 27, 2012), may have had a shorter tenure with Malaysian guilds, but her involvement with that was far higher.

Betty first started out playing with American guilds, but she soon found, through word of mouth, that there were Malaysian guilds and they were recruiting new members. Thus, the first Malaysian guild she joined was called the “Mamak Alliance”, the term “Mamak,” refers to the race of Malaysian Indians who are Muslims who commonly operate food outlets and stalls that cater to all Malaysians and serve a wide variety of food. The name was selected as it was representative of the guild’s multicultural Malaysian roots and all are welcome.

The guild is comprised mostly of Malaysian Chinese players, yet the language that is used commonly throughout the game was English. Even then, proficiency with it was not an issue, according to Betty because “As long as you understand, it’s ok.” Accordingly, she states, that while some players may not have the best English, whether in text or spoken form, they are never discriminated against.

After hearing about this guild, Betty made her application to join through “a friend of a friend” as these guilds would usually require an active member to send an
invitation to join the guild. Despite the open nature of this guild, there was a recruitment system in place for new members which included various tasks and probation periods in order to be considered “a serious member.”

Once admitted, she gained a better view of this rather large 100+ member guild; 90% of the guild members were Malaysians. Due to the large number of players present, there were many cliques within. These cliques are formed around groups of like-minded players with common goals; some preferred to group up with other people to socialize with and some others wanted to create special raid groups. Most of the cliques had little interaction with each other and the members would commonly just interact with members in the same clique. The exception to this is with the guild leader as “his word is law around here” and all members generally follow his leadership. That being said, the guild leader rarely uses his executive powers and generally focuses on his own clique. Nonetheless, such is the power of the guild leader, that once he lost interest in the game, he merely disbanded the guild leaving its former members looking for a new home.

Thus, Betty managed to find another Malaysian guild, again through word of mouth from her friends. This new guild was called “Lanun”, the Bahasa Malaysia word for “pirate” and while fairly new, was growing quite fast and looked to be a suitable replacement for “Mamak”. Similar in style to “Mamak”, except that the guild’s preferred language was Bahasa Malaysia and while this alienated most foreign players from joining made this guild stand out even more as its members would commonly chat in the general chat spaces (That all players can view) using Bahasa Malaysia, much to the chagrin of
confused onlookers. Her time with this guild was short-lived as she found a bigger guild on a new server and made her move there.

This new Malaysian guild was formed on an Oceanic server; in World of Warcraft US, while all game servers are hosted and operated from within the US, the company has created a special set of servers which have an internal day cycle that is catered for the Oceanic time zone. So, while this may not necessarily offer any significant performance gains for any Oceanic players, they corrected internal clock will help players organize themselves better and at least serves as a suitable meeting ground for all Oceanic players. Considering Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries’ proximity to that region, many players opted to make the switch to these servers.

The new guild was significantly larger than either “Lanun” or “Mamak” with over 200 members at its peak. Unlike those other guilds, there were no entry requirements and literally anyone can join. This was the will of its leader at the time who “wanted Malaysians to be together”; the guild was meant to be very casual by nature with no strict requirements or forced laws on players. Despite its casual nature and large size there were in fact cliques that were focused on being serious and this was exploited by some officers in the guild who would recruit hardcore players into the guild.

Because of its overwhelmingly large size, Betty lamented that it was impossible to get to know everyone and that the cliques were far more numerous. There was even a hierarchy of cliques whereby the perceived “top” cliques, based on their skill and equipment would deride those perceived to be lower than them. Having been in a number of large guilds, she says this is quite normal and would be surprised if Malaysians did not
suffer the same problems as she considers Malaysians to be far more competitive when compared to American players.

So, based on her experience with these Malaysian guilds, Betty made the assumption that some players just like joining guilds with their fellow countrymen, even though it is completely unnecessary in a borderless online environment. It is perhaps the familiarity and the fear of the unknown or foreign that draws them together. She says that when she tells other players that she is Malaysian, they are often surprised and shocked at how well she and other Malaysian players have such a good command of English. So, in a sense, these large guilds full of Malaysians are overturning the world’s view of the country which it may consider to be rural, backward and uneducated.

In Mary’s case, she only came upon Malaysian guilds only after playing for several years. She previously had more interaction with Oceanic based players. Unlike Betty, Mary would often switch between various MMORPGs that she would commit to. As it was, she had decided to return to World of Warcraft after spending much time playing the Warhammer Online. When she rejoined, a friend invited her to join their Malaysian guild, “Lanun”. Intrigued at first, Mary eventually joined this guild.

The Lanun guild was the same guild that Betty had joined at one point. She had a more reserved view towards the size of the guild, compared to Betty; there were usually on average about 60 players on at any given time with 500 over avatars registered in the guild, but she was unsure as to how many of them were just “alts” of other members (alternate avatars for players) who are just members so that they may benefit from it. She was not surprised by this as the guild was extremely aggressive at recruiting new
members as they would advertise in various local forums, Facebook, and through word of
mouth.

Unlike Betty, Mary had higher aspirations when playing an MMORPG; she would commonly engage in higher guild functions in her previous games and as such, she was quickly promoted to become an officer within Lanun. Her tasks include moderating the guild’s Facebook page, forums and to “sort out guild stuff” which is comprised of various housekeeping duties with regards to the guild’s resources and wealth.

Despite the guild’s Malaysian roots and overall demographic, there were other foreigners that would join the guild. According to Mary, these include players from France, Australia and Singaporeans. These players were usually friends of existing members and would join to be with them. Unfortunately, due to the rather casual nature of the guild and perhaps the esoteric nature of discussions and communications, these players are not likely to stay long to have any significant influence on the structure and activities of the guild.

Explaining more on the mentality behind Malaysian players, one interviewee, Zach (Not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, July 1, 2012), had a lot to say on the issue. Zach himself had indulged in quite a number of international MMORPGs (Both P2P and F2P games), but unlike Mary and Betty, did not involve himself with other Malaysian players. That is not to say he played alone (He was involved in several large international guilds), but it was just that he had some negative perceptions of interactions with local players. He claims that they “always look for the same thing” and that “very few can avoid that competitiveness”, meaning he believes that
the majority of Malaysian MMORPG players focus on being extremely competitive in
the game at the cost of other aspects like being sociable with other players. This
“competitiveness” refers to players who will focus on becoming the best at some task in
the game and will focus all their energies into achieving that. This would not necessarily
be a problem, but he states that these players also take things very personally and as such
often get into petty squabbles with other players over their choice of play and tactics as
these critiques are deemed as affronts to their own person.

It is this underlying mentality of Malaysian players that deters Zach from ever
considering joining any Malaysian guilds. He claims that a lot of these Malaysian guilds
are highly competitive amongst each other and would often “fish good players from each
other” in order to show off their achievements. These guilds also become the target for
certain players that wish to become well-known just by being part of the guild; they want
these guilds to “carry” them to the top because that’s all they care about.

Conversely, I had one player, Larry (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal
communication, July 12, 2012), who played a wide range of international MMORPGs
(Mostly F2P games) but played a few P2P MMORPGs. While Larry enjoyed playing
MMORPGs, he had little interest to socialize with other players in these games; he was
more interested in just completing the content. Thus, when playing two international P2P
MMORPGs, Guild Wars (While not technically a P2P game as it has no subscription fee,
it does require an upfront payment) and the Taiwanese version of World of Warcraft, he
was forced to participate in guilds to gain access to certain benefits that require one to be
part of a guild. With Guild Wars, he formed a simple guild with friends just for the
purpose in clearing content together and enjoying the benefits of being in a guild. Members came and went rather quickly and he does not remember anybody in the guild anymore as it was merely a tool.

With World of Warcraft Taiwan though, he joined a Malaysian guild upon reading up on it in a local online forum. Not being a fan of the subscription model of P2P games, he was willing to try this version as it allowed for hourly or daily subscriptions which was more suitable for a player such as himself who would only play intermittently and did not pressure him to play to get his money’s worth. This Malaysian guild was rather large with over 100 members though there were only 10-20 people online at any given time. He barely remembers his time in the guild as he was basically an outsider throughout his sojourn; he never interacted with anyone else, had no idea what the guild structure was or whether there was any and the only reason he joined was to take advantage of the guild and nothing else. He did mention that the guild had a lot of non-Malaysians in it though as it was an English speaking guild in a Chinese language dominated game and a lot of the players stayed because they had other English speaking players to chat with.

While Larry may be a case of someone who joins Malaysian guilds solely to benefit from being a member, which does not necessarily mean that these guilds foster proper friendships within despite most of its members residing within the same country and in some cases even the same city. Both Mary and Betty, who were in Malaysian guilds for long periods of time, did not manage to make long lasting relationships with most of the players in the guild. Betty, who was involved longer, only keeps in contact
with several other players after she left the guild and Mary has absolutely no contact with anyone from Lanun since her departure. Perhaps, Zach’s reservations about Malaysians ring true in that Malaysian players focused only on the game and the moment that common ground ceases, so do all other players who are connected to it.

Due to the international nature of these P2P games, I aimed most of my questions towards their interactions with other Malaysians in these games. Two of the interview subjects actually abstained from interacting with other Malaysians in these games. These players had rather negative experiences with their fellow countrymen and as such had negative associations with them; these players were generally considered immature, antisocial, and were overly competitive. These are merely simple stereotypes for them as they are still quite open to interactions with other Malaysians and do in fact have actual Malaysian friends outside MMORPGs.

*Offline Gatherings*

Offline gatherings are special events, often organized by a small group of players, in order to allow players within a guild/community to gather and meet each other in person. The purpose of these gatherings is usually to get to know the people behind their avatars and perhaps bond with them. These events range from simple “yamcha”/”teh tarik” (Cantonese and Bahasa Malaysia respectively for “drinking tea”, a colloquial term to represent a sit-down session where people can talk frankly while having a beverage, which is common among all Malaysians) sessions to more organized events such as movie outings and barbeque parties.
During Mary’s time with Lanun, she took the initiative to organize many of these events. She organized these gatherings every Tuesday as that was the day when World of Warcraft would be offline for maintenance. This group would comprise of 10-12 individuals each meeting, which is a far cry from the entire guild which numbered in the hundreds. Even then, she said that it was very difficult to mobilize this group as people would hesitate to come out of the anonymous network or are very non-committal. During these gatherings, the conversations tend to focus almost exclusively about the game they are playing. These discussions usually focuses around “theory crafting”, which is a slang word among MMORPG players referring to the discussion of strategy and tactics for completing tasks in the game. Mary says 90% of the discussions are based on this and the remaining 10% is her and a few others trying to interject with “real conversation”, conversation such as politics, what they do for a living, etc.

She finds it perplexing that even in an offline setting these players all still focus on the game and nothing else. As such, she was never able to organize anything more grandiose than weekly dinner meets as the group felt it would get in the way of their game discussions. It is especially galling for her as she did not notice this sort of behavior with her friends who were players from Australia; she claims that those groups would have special gatherings fairly regularly and that the players all got to know each other rather well. As expected, once Mary stopped playing the game and quit the guild, so too did these weekly dinner gatherings. She believes that due to the way the guild leader managed the guild, the community did not transcend the game as the players only kept in
contact as long as they were playing the same game. Once players were no longer playing
the same game, these relationships came to an end.

Betty’s experience with offline gatherings are a little more positive, but also has
the same criticisms about Malaysian players. While she was with Mamak Alliance, they
too had meetings on Tuesdays when the game was down for regular maintenance. She
said most of the discussions are focused on the game but she was more positive on the
fact that players actually got to know each other and had other topics of discussion that
were not part of the game. That being said, she still stated that the “only common topic is
the game” which meant these non-game discussions were possibly few and far between.
She shared Mary’s lament that Malaysian gatherings are only focused on dinner meets as
she knew Singaporean guilds would often take field trips together.

Even though most offline interactions for local communities unfortunately seem
to rarely progress any further than being “yamcha/teh tarik” meetings, it does fit within
the Malaysian lifestyle. These informal gatherings are the hallmark of any group of
Malaysians that merely wish to have a simple meeting where they can have food and
beverages while discussing subjects of interest with the rest of the group. Since the
cohesion of these groups is tenuous at best due to the one-minded nature of Malaysian
players towards MMORPGs, these meetings represent how these local players are taking
these international MMORPGs and incorporating it into their local culture.

*A Malaysian Community Unlike the Others*

There are some exceptions to these Malaysian-centric guilds though. One of my
interview subjects, Oliver, was the founder of one of the largest Malaysian MMORPG
communities with a peak of around 5000 members at one point. He originally started this community to serve as a way for like-minded players to gather and play games together. Like most Malaysian-centric guilds, this community also had very lax entry requirements but overtime as the community grew larger, there was a need for proper rules and regulations to organize the community better. The community would still be considered casual but there would be a council of members that would govern the community as a whole. There was also a probation period for new members but members could still play any game that they wanted and had no obligations to play specific games. It was also at this point when the guild took a hardline stance against disruptive members, those that would heckle and belittle others were told to leave.

One of the reasons as to why Oliver started this community was that he did not like these so-called “open guilds” that were synonymous with Malaysian guilds. He claims this practice creates guilds that lack “culture” where guilds lack direction and players do not have clearly stated “objectives”. According to Oliver, communities should have clear objectives and its members should be in line with them. Furthermore, he hated the idea behind having a large body of players just to improve their chances in PvP and instead wants to focus on smaller, organized arenas. Also, unlike Malaysian guilds, he was proud of the fact that this community maintained communication and contact with members who no longer played games.

Considering that one of the community’s charters was to foster friendship among its members, there were many events that would be organized on a regular basis. Since most of these organizers were based in Kuala Lumpur, most of these gatherings would be
held here. Despite the geographical spread of the community across the country, these gatherings would often attract between 30-50 people. These gatherings, unlike those from regular offline Malaysian-centric guilds, were focused on relationship building and actually served to strengthen a sense of community among members. They would engage in a multitude of activities such as barbeque parties, field trips to scenic locations and simple board game parties.

This happy scenario could not be maintained though as schisms began to emerge when there was disagreement among the council members over the direction of the community; some wanted to make it more hardcore while some others wanted it to remain the same. This inevitably caused dissent among the community which resulted in several members leaving to form a new one. Oliver blames himself for this event that almost destroyed the community at the time as he felt he did not address the issue properly and if he had it may not have escalated to such levels.

These days, this community has shrunk to just a handful of members who maintain very close contact with each other. They still play games, but since these members have been playing games for almost a decade, they are now no longer able to devote their time to MMORPGs due to other obligations such as family and career and thus mostly engage in regular games. Even though he was highly pessimistic towards other Malaysian guilds in the past, he feels that the Malaysian community as a whole is changing for the better due to an increasing Malaysian middle-class and a general rise in education.
Bypassing the Local

With reference to Figure 1, from globalization perspective, it does appear that the global is controlling the local with little recourse for the local. However, the situation in Malaysia is not as dire but rather positive. Figure 6 above, is a representation of the relationships between global developers, local publishers and local players. Based on Figure 6, the actual picture of the MMORPG market in Malaysia can be seen. While the perceived top-down view from Figure 1 is present in this figure, it is but a small segment of it as local players are able to bypass it entirely as evidenced by these P2P players in Malaysia. In addition to that, these players are also recreating their local spaces in these international games via guilds and forums which in essence bring the local to the global stage.
Free to Play (F2P) Players

For F2P players, I managed to locate 4 players that played these games. I was fortunate to have diversity in interviewees as two players who only played for free and the other two were those that spent money. In addition, two of them played international...
F2P MMORPGs and the remaining two played local ones. Three of them had also spent time with P2P MMORPGs which gave them some added perspective when they were asked to compare F2P and P2P.

*Free is Good*

Looking at the average F2P player, it is easy to make the assumption that these players are cheap and poor as they choose to play games that require no fee. Considering the fact that the vast majority of F2P players never spend any money, identifying a player that does would have been difficult. Fortunately, I was able to find two players who have spent money in these games. Before we get into those that spend, we should first look at what makes a one that doesn't tick.

The “Free” in “Free to play” is usually presented as a way to entice players to try a game, and over time, perhaps put some money into the game that they are playing. But based on the publisher’s perspective, that’s rarely the case and having plenty of players that do not spend any money does have other benefits. So, why are there players that spend years playing these games and not spend a single cent on them?

One such player that I interviewed is Taylor (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, August 21, 2012). Taylor has been playing F2P MMORPGs for the last 5 years and has never spent any cash in any of them. These games are all local as he likes the better network performance of playing on local servers. Though he has played numerous games, he is currently still playing a game that he played 3 years ago. Unlike most MMORPG players, he actually focuses on the content almost exclusively; he
pays attention to the story, quests and even the character designs in the games he plays, something that most players only have a fleeting interest or are never a primary concern.

The reason why Taylor does not spend money in these games is that he considers these “virtual things, have no worth to me,” or in other words, he does not place monetary value on intangible items. That reveals one fact about Malaysia, that intellectual property appreciation is still fairly low throughout the country with high piracy rates with all forms of media. With that in mind, Taylor basically plays these games as much as he can until he is no longer able to continue for free as some games will require the use of premium items that have to be purchased. Even then, if there is a way for Taylor to circumvent this, usually by trading with players who spend money, he will do so as long as he can still play for free.

When asked about his interactions with other players who actually spend money, his response is that he just ignores them. In most of these F2P MMORPGs, “player-killing” (PK) between players is fairly common and especially more so by stronger players over weaker players. In this case, the stronger players are the ones that use money to bolster their avatars. Taylor says it can be frustrating to have his play session interrupted by those stronger players, as he is unable to retaliate, but he merely shrugs it off and waits for them to get bored and stop or he moves to another area. He considers this behavior unique to Malaysia as he claims that in international games, “players don’t ‘PK’ for no reason,” citing that most PKs happen during large raids only.

While Taylor is an example of a player that chooses to play these free games solely on their own volition, there are other incentives as well. One of the other P2P
players I interviewed, Zach, had also played some F2P games, but his incentive to play them was a lot different from Taylor’s. While these games’ being free was certainly a good incentive to start, more often than not, he was influenced by his friends to try and play these games. He prefers the lack of a financial and time commitment that is commonly incurred by P2P games as you are “free to jump in, and jump out.” There is another commitment though, which is to his gaming peers. The relationship that they have, he succinctly described as “if they quit, you quit and if you quit, they quit.” He said this commitment can be sometimes more difficult to overcome than financial or time as you have to manage your relationships with your friends. That being said, Zach said that while it was certainly easier to bring new people into these games as they were free, it was often a more arduous task in keeping them.

Also, unlike Taylor, Zach had a less tolerant view towards the F2P games that he played. He was sorely against any F2P game that allowed players to buy an advantage over others. Thus, the only cash items that he had no issue with were aesthetic items that had no impact on your avatar’s performance. As such, Zach mostly played in international F2P games where these P2W types of sales are not necessarily available.

Money Talks

Money Players on the other hand are players that have no qualms about parting with their cash for use in these games. Players make these transactions through special “cash shops” within these games that will give the player special items in exchange for their cash. These premium items range from purely aesthetic items that improve an avatar’s appearance to specialized items that significantly improve their avatar’s abilities.
These items are priced as low as RM 1 (33 cents) to as exorbitantly high as RM 60,000 ($20,000).

Being part of the minority that puts money in these games, David (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, August 16, 2012), was an individual I was very fortunate to find. As luck would have it, I chanced upon a veteran of MMORPGs for a decade that not only spent money in F2P games, but spent it quite callously in order to remain competitive. Unlike most Malaysian F2P players, David plays mostly international F2P MMORPGs. This preference is based on his own experience with local MMORPGs which he claims often have poor service, are filled with immature players and are generally short-lived games.

When asked on what he spends his money in these games, he answered “to speed up progress.” “Progress” covers a wide range of items; items that vastly improve the performance of your avatar and some others that reduce the tedium of the game. He said he had no interest in cosmetic items as he would only purchase them if there was a direct benefit to having them other than looking better. Some of these items offer such immense gains and it is how the name Pay2Win was coined by the community as they reward players who spend the most money. David has no issue with this concept and has used several. His justification for this is that he is able to pay for it, so it should not be a problem.

Even though he does invest heavily in items and equipment that give him an advantage over other players, David is actually more concerned with clearing content rather than “player-killing”. Known as “Player versus Environment” or PVE, this refers
to the quests and missions within the game that just has players engaging the game’s own enemies rather than other players. The rewards behind these quests are often items and experience points to progress your characters, but more importantly, David says it serves as trophy to lord over other players for being able to clear content faster than his peers. So, in a sense, even though he is not competing with other players directly, he is indirectly competing with them in terms of how fast they can progress through the game.

His interest in F2P games began during his schooling years, but only when he started working did he begin to put money into these games. After overcoming that initial reluctance, he has absolutely no qualms about spending money in any of the F2P games that he plays. He refers to this as the “F2P poison”, where “once you get hit by this poison, you keep spending.” As such, each month he spends an average of RM 500 ($160) but generally, he spends as he please. Highly aware that he is perhaps spending more than he should in these games, he says it is not a problem as his profession allows him to. David jokingly said “I myself got addicted to spending money.” That being said, he believes that this lifestyle is highly detrimental to his well-being in the long run but he says he can’t help himself. In spite of this, he thinks it is still a waste of money and believes that P2P games are “more worth it.”

While he may be rather cavalier with his spending, that doesn’t mean he throws money at any F2P that comes his way. Often, he would play these games for a considerable amount of time, he refers to this as the “middle point”, which is the point where he realizes that in order to progress at a pace that he is comfortable with, he will have to start using money. This trial period with games allows David to thoroughly
acquaint himself with the game and give him an idea of whether it would be worth his time and money. Once he has decided to spend though, then there is no other barriers as he fully commits himself to the game financially. He says that once you make the first transaction, the second and others are easy as it is so convenient to spend money in these games.

The amount of money he invests into a game, David says, is a metric for how invested he is in a particular game. One of the game’s that he had heavily invested in, about RM 1000 ($322) in total, was Battle of Immortals, which he ended up playing for almost 6 months. Another game that he tried, Eden Eternal, he only ended up spending RM200 ($64) and that lasted just a month. With Eden Eternal, he retired from the game early once he realized that it was rather easy to progress without using money and he grew tired of the “endgame”. Within MMORPGs, the “endgame” refers to the point where a player’s avatar would have hit the limit of their character’s progression and there are a new range of tasks available for the player to accomplish that will keep the player playing for the foreseeable future. These tasks are often repetitive by nature and the rewards are usually more powerful equipment and items that will make the player’s avatar even more powerful than before.

David may have been a rather heavy spender in F2P games, but he is nowhere near extravagant as another interviewee of mine, Vince (not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, August 27, 2012). Unlike David, Vince plays F2P games more competitively; he would spend huge sums of money into the games that he was playing and participate in very competitive guilds. Vince does not even look at it as “spending”
money but more as “investing”. He explains that he spends money to purchase items that will allow him to hunt for much more difficult to acquire items, which he then resells to other players for a profit. The majority of these sales is under the table and usually is against the Terms of Service for these games, which means the company has the right to ban and cancel his account if they find out, which Vince believes they never will. Despite that, Vince estimates that about 50% of all players take part in this. Vince himself claims that he has managed to earn RM10,000 ($3,220) on top of getting a full return of his initial RM 20,000 ($6,448) “investment”. He asserts that in these games “you definitely have to spend”; though the question is, whether it is time or money.

The lucrative nature of this player-controlled market, Vince says, exists because of the way these games are designed. The players are divided into two distinct groups, Time Players and Money Players. The differentiating factor between the two is what they “spend” in order to progress in the game. Time Players spend their “time” in order to progress through the game by completing tasks, quests and slowly acquiring items and equipment that can only be gained through perseverance. It is important to note that this small change in terms used between players and companies with regards to Free/Time Players underlines how they are perceived; companies view them as freeloaders that are essential, while players view them as just another type of player that uses an alternate path to progress.

Money Players on the other hand, spend their money to purchase the items they need in order to progress, skipping and bypassing a lot of the tedium and repetitive tasks. With that in mind, not all items can be purchased and not all items can be acquired just
by hunting for them. This creates a vacuum that both types of players will be able to take advantage of; Time Players can sell their difficult-to-acquire items to money players for cash or premium items that can only be purchased. As a result, Time Players who may not have the funds or means to make purchases are able to acquire these items and Money Players are still able to skip the tedium using their money. It seems to be a win-win situation for both types of players but it also benefits the company in the long run.

As Vince said, Malaysians play these games extremely competitively; they do not care about having an even playing field and if they can “buy” an advantage, they will. In some cases, as David put it, some very wealthy and egotistical players would try their hardest to become the best player in a particular server and then join a new server and continue doing so until all servers for that game are dominated by their avatars.

Working Together

The symbiotic relationship between Time and Money Players is not limited to just open market item trading but is also present within highly competitive guilds. During his heydays in one of his early F2P games, Vince was involved in a guild that was at one point, the top guild on the server. Being the “top” guild is mostly an informal declaration and is generally based upon the guild’s accomplishments. These accomplishments can vary depending on game but can be anything from the overall guild’s wealth, accolades of members when participating in Player versus Player (PvP) events or their ability to complete “dungeons” or “raids.” “Dungeons” are special events where players go in large groups in order to vanquish every enemy within and can take several hours to complete. The most difficult of these dungeons can take several hours to complete and requires very
meticulous planning and preparation by the players (Both in terms of strategizing and having the right items) in order to complete. Thus, these dungeons represent the pinnacle of PvE gameplay and so the guild which can complete the most difficult of these in the most efficient way possible is often regarded as the best guild.

Becoming the top guild is more than just having the top spenders in the game. Getting back to the symbiosis between Time and Money Players, that relationship is even more apparent in these guilds as illustrated by Vince. Completing a dungeon requires the work of a team of players, ranging between 10-25 players at once. On top of that, the players who participate will have to be of a certain quality in order to be able to complete these dungeons. Since most Money Players buy their way through the game, Vince notes that their actual skill with the game is generally average as they have less experience with the game compared to a Time Player of similar strength. Conversely, Free Players, who are forced to play the game for long periods of time, understand the game’s inner workings and are very effective in playing the game based on their significantly higher number of hours of play and perseverance just to be on the same level as Money Players. So, Money Players take the responsibility of paying for items to be given to the best Time Players which will allow them to participate in these dungeons since their skill with the game will be crucial in order to complete it. Again, a win-win situation for all involved.

Figure 7 illustrates this relationship between Time and Money Players that has been explained by Vince. This relationship has created two economies, one formal one and an informal one. The formal economy uses official channels for both types of players to interact. This is the primary method for both Money Players and Time Players to
progress through the game; Time players play the game as it should and progress slowly by completing quests and tasks and using the in-game marketplace to trade for equipment that they need while Money Players will use their real money to make purchases of premium items and the like. The informal economy exists outside the game and consists of players communicating with one another either directly, within guilds or through online forums. The dealings that take place here are as what was described by Vince above.

Figure 7: Time-Money player relationships in F2P MMORPGs
Having multiple high profile Money Players does cause issues within the guild though. Vince says that most of these players are very selfish by nature and often fight amongst themselves to become the very best at a particular role. He equates this to Malaysian players always wanting to be considered the best at a particular task and it affects the chemistry within the guild as players would often bash heads over deciding who is the best at a particular task is. Further acts of selfishness include bribing other players for priority when dungeon rewards are divided among the players; some players will bribe poorer players to get more advantageous spots. Vince was very annoyed by this behavior as it affected the growth of the guild as most of the top equipment would end up with a small number of the top Money Players, which meant the rest of the guild had to make do with lesser equipment.

Oddly enough, despite the fact that the top spender often makes a show of having spent a lot of money on the game, that player does not actually run the guild. Vince believes that while the player enjoys controlling the guild indirectly using their money (Vince claims “everything comes from him”) and everyone in the guild is perfectly aware of it, he does not want to be in charge of the guild. Perhaps, Vince feels, he just does not want to shoulder any responsibility of operating the guild yet wants to make it the best at the game.

The guild actually organized weekly offline gatherings for its members, the most common of which was just dinner sessions with some movie outings every now and then. These gatherings were usually attended by Kuala Lumpur natives and were often held after a significant event by the guild such as the completion of a dungeon or having a
guild war. Not surprising though, was that these gatherings still revolved around the game and not much else. Hence, when Vince left this guild after 3 years, he had no lasting relationship with any of his former guild mates.

The Dichotomy

Early on, I mentioned that 5 out of 6 P2P players I interviewed had rather negative associations with F2P players. One interviewee, Carl (Not his real name) (Anonymous, personal communication, July 5, 2012), chalked it up to “the way people think is very different,” when describing P2P and F2P players. He considers F2P players to be “more immature” while P2P players “tend to think more rationally and critically.” Carl believes this situation exists since the younger generation of today has easier access to MMORPGs compared to many years before when there were no F2P games and so only those with money were able to play them. He bases all this on his own experience with one local F2P game that he played. Carl is not alone with these negative associations though as some of my other interviewees like Oliver and Kirk, both shared similar views. Oliver may have similar feelings to Carl about F2P players, but at least he was able to admit that this preconceived notion was in fact elitist and at least he believes this “immaturity” of local F2P players was merely just a stage in the evolution of the local player base and that they would eventually “grow” out of it. Kirk described his dislike to F2P games as “hate” as he believes the industry is moving towards that model and as such, his beloved P2P model is perhaps coming to an end. That last point makes me sympathize with these players as P2P games appear to be on the decline as even newer
international MMORPG releases are beginning to adopt the F2P model and it is natural for them to feel threatened by this.

F2P players, on the other hand, hold no animosity to their P2P counterparts. While 3 out of 4 the F2P players interviewed did not like the idea behind paying a subscription fee and the other did not like not being able to purchase items with money, they do not reciprocate the hatred levied towards them by P2P players. Vince actually dabbled in World of Warcraft for 6 months and while he was frustrated by the fact that he could not pay to advance, he just said that the game was not for him and did not harbor any ill-feelings towards the game and its community.

As such, Figure 8 illustrates the perceptions of both P2P and F2P players compared to the demographics of players. While both types of players have very inaccurate stereotypical perceptions, P2P players hold on to those perceptions very rigidly and often use it as ammunition to berate players that choose to play F2P games. From my observation, it appears that the real dividing block is not so much the financial barrier, but more to do with language as most local F2P games seem to cater towards Mandarin speaking players and for international games, English is the language of choice.

Figure 8: F2P-P2P player perceptions
CHAPTER 6: MMORPG LOCALIZATION IN MALAYSIA:
ITS REALITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

From the data collected and interviews conducted, it was very easily determined that local players represented one aspect of the “local” within the Global-Local Nexus at work and international developers represented the “global”. However, the role of local publishers was not as clear cut as the other two. Serving as an intermediary between the two, local publishers could technically be a part of both; they shape the local market using internationally acquired games and also acting as a middleman between the local players and the developers by altering the game for local needs and relaying player trends and feedback back to the developers. While their actual input is rather limited, they still manage to make a sizable contribution to the local market.

Thus, my research focuses on 3 aspects of the Malaysian Online Gaming market to expand existing discussions on the Global-Local Nexus in the media industry: 1) global influences on the local MMORPG market and how local publishers have carved their own space, 2) the tension between P2P and F2P based MMORPGs players and 3) Malaysian players, creation of their own place in the international space of MMORPGs.

Global Influences on Local (P2P Failing in Malaysia)

Malaysian publishers serve as an intermediary between the local players and the global developers for the games that they run, as illustrated in Figure 2. The publishers provide a service that gives local players a local option for MMORPGs which in effect is bringing the global to the local arena. Despite developers giving publishers some
autonomy in deciding the pricing within their games, publishers are rarely allowed to go further than that. The widespread adoption of F2P in Malaysia has more to do with market changes in the global online game industry, such as the rise of East Asian developers and their appeal to young Asian players, than with Malaysian publishers playing a role in the decline of P2P games. This is best exemplified with the rise and fall of Lineage 2 in Malaysia which was the last localized P2P game in Malaysia that was somehow launched and ultimately failed while F2P games becoming ever more successful.

From the locals’ perspective, local publishers should be able to relay feedback and requests for improvements to the games, gathered from their own experience or from players, back to the developers. However, the publishers also say that most of this feedback is rarely heeded by the developers as they consider Malaysia too small a market to use as a basis to make changes across all their games in other markets. If any of this feedback is actually taken into consideration and implemented, it is rather due to publishers in bigger markets making similar feedback. So, while individual problems and issues in Malaysia would rarely affect the global developers, it still contributes through participation with other publishers that help shape the games sold and played around the world.

Based on literature on traditional forms of globalization, the MMORPG market in Malaysia does appear to be a one-sided affair for global forces while local publishers, particularly those in small markets, seem to serve a minor or miniscule role to influence the global industry (Refer to Figure 2). While there is a small chance that local publishers
and players will be able to influence these global giants, it is incredibly negligible and it appears that this so-called Global-Local Nexus may not actually exist and is merely another form of neo-colonization as the locals seem helpless to thwart the colonists.

However, that is not whole picture of how the Global-Local Nexus exists. Even though local players may not necessarily have the size or official means to effect changes globally, that is not the extent of their influence. There are many other ways that local players and local publishers are able to create their own nice despite the strong-arming from globalization and develop their own characteristics that are different from, though not independent of, global trends, as shown in Figure 3.

P2P vs. F2P (Localization)

The battle between the two payment models of MMORPGs rages on across the world and not just in Malaysia. While P2P games still boast large subscriber numbers internationally, the battle is all but over in Malaysia and most of Southeast Asia. As one publisher put it, the market is too small and therefore unsustainable for any game that relies on monthly subscriptions for profits. Despite the bias towards F2P by local publishers, there still exist players that prefer P2P-based games instead and without any further local avenues, they simply opt to play international P2P games, not the ones modified by local publishers.

The differences between P2P and F2P aren’t merely in how revenues are generated, but it is all-encompassing as it alters every aspect of the game. As such, players would fall into two camps of either pro-P2P or pro-F2P players. Internationally, P2P players are generally more vocal about their dissatisfactions with F2P games which
often substitute player skill with player wealth, meaning that the richest player is often the best player as opposed to the player with the highest skill. On the other hand, international F2P players are quick to belittle these “Pay2Win” type of games and often use examples of F2P games that use more fair pay systems for revenue to illustrate that F2P games can be fair to both Time and Money Players.

In Malaysia, where the vast majority of F2P MMORPGs rely on “Pay2Win” sales, the discourse between P2P and F2P players is far more one-sided. While local P2P players maintain a fairly similar stance as their international counterparts, local F2P players, of which the majority are free players, would often ignore the P2P vs. F2P debate, as they are focused more on playing a game that is “catered to them locally” and “is free.” For these players, just being able to enjoy a game at their own pace is reward enough. It is interesting that these players exist as F2P games rely on free players to populate the world for money players to play with and unlike most international F2P games, Malaysian F2P MMORPGs are often designed to cripple play experiences immensely unless a player is willing to use money to advance. Many international F2P MMORPGs have closed down due to the free content requiring too much tedium and repetition in order to progress, but this very problem has worked for Malaysian MMORPGs; Time Players continue to play as long as they can progress (however slowly) while those that do not tolerate it easily become Money Players.

This rather docile and accepting rationale of most F2P players has formed a stereotypical view among most P2P players that their F2P counterparts are mostly idle, young school children, as shown in Figure 8. This superiority complex is further
bolstered by the language barrier between P2P and F2P games; most P2P players would have better than average command of English as international P2P games often require a lot of reading and understanding of the language (the game’s systems as well as interactions with other international players), very much unlike local F2P games which are usually in Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia and therefore its players, through either lack of practice or circumstance, often do not possess good English language skills. This deficit in proficiency of English is then perceived by P2P players as a synonymous with their intelligence level. In short, F2P players are happy with what they are doing, unconcerned with the larger debate at hand while P2P players have become almost like “bigots towards F2P players,” as one of my interviewees stated.

Malaysian Culture Standing Out Amidst Globalization

The biggest find from this research is actually the behavior of Malaysian players who play P2P games. These games are international by nature and thus borderless, but they seem to defy this notion and instead attempt to create their own local space in the online environment. The idea behind Malaysian guilds, where any Malaysian or anyone who wants to be involved in a Malaysian community can join is carving its own niche within these global behemoths. In a way, this enables a lot of local players who are otherwise afraid to venture into these foreign and alien worlds. Despite the loose premise in which these players congregate, some have actually taken to gathering offline around the country which ties the ephemeral online community to a local, physical locality. While the extremely casual nature of most of these guilds means they rarely last long,
they serve as a gateway for Malaysians to enter into these MMORPGs and that definitely has a lasting impression on the global space of MMORPGs.

While it may look like there is little to no interaction between the local F2P market (players and publishers) with P2P players, the general dissatisfaction of the P2P players with both the F2P market and local players does have its own repercussions. As “elitist” as these P2P players appear to be, the very fact that they still like to be involved with their fellow Malaysian players in an international space shows that while they may not approve of their local F2P playing brethren, they are still proud of their nationality and culture. So, in essence, due to the influx of these F2P games into the local market, which they feel attracts “the absolute worst of Malaysian players,” they are spurred to create their own Malaysian communities in these international games and gather more like-minded Malaysians to them.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

On the local front, you have the local publishers and F2P players that are building a local industry that could perhaps grow to be more influential in the future and on the international front, you have local players recreating local spaces through guilds, communities and forums which indirectly export their culture to a global stage. In both scenarios, these local elements do little to actually influence global forces in a meaningful way; nevertheless, they do enrich and make it less homogenous in the face of globalization. The long-term future of these Malaysian communities is in doubt as international MMORPGs are beginning to shift from P2P to F2P games. Whether or not these communities will persist or evolve to adapt to it if such a change occurs is still questionable.

The Global-Local Nexus within Malaysia is comprised of a complex combination of various groups of people, each contributing in one way or another to the online gaming landscape in the country. On the local front, there are the local publishers and F2P players that are building a local industry that could perhaps grow to be more influential in the future and on the international front, local players are creating local spaces in international gaming scenes. In both scenarios, these local elements do little to actually transform global forces in a meaningful way; nevertheless, they do enrich and make it less homogenous in the face of globalization. It is unclear, however, that these communities will persist or evolve to adapt to changes, as international MMORPGs are beginning to shift from P2P to F2P games, as shown in Figure 1.
To conclude, this research is not to demonstrate that local publishers and players are as powerful as global developers. That's not what the Global-Local Nexus literature is arguing for. It is rather to demonstrate that globally-developed, globally-played online games have local features, such as local payment methods, traditional taboos, cultural idioms, and player communities that hold offline gatherings. These elements combine to make Malaysian MMORPGs different from, but still comparable to, other MMORPG markets around the world.

Discussion

There are other important questions that are beyond the scope of this thesis. I was not able to investigate thoroughly the importance of language and its use in these games, local and international. Considering Malaysia's large diversity in local cultures, language would also be an important factor for these players when choosing to play local games which will have local languages, or international games, which are in English. Within this thesis, I stated that P2P players had a better command of English compared to F2P players, but that requires proper research to get a proper view of the situation.

Despite Malaysia’s small presence within the international market, some Malaysians are still striving to stick together in the international arena and in some cases, present Malaysian culture to the world. Looking at the proliferation of online games around the world, it should not be surprising if Malaysia is not necessarily unique with this situation; Southeast Asia alone has other prominent online gaming communities. With that in mind, does this make Malaysia stand out from the rest or merely serve as an example of a locality making its stamp on the global stage?
Despite the growth and rise of the Malaysian MMORPG market, there does not seem to be any local company that is willing to try and develop a true local MMORPG. In the past, there have been a couple of companies that have created full-fledged MMORPGs, among them, this game called Fung Wan Online which was wholly developed by a local developer. That game and company have since ended and none have risen to take its place. Looking at how competitive the market in Malaysia is with several dozen publishers all vying for the same place, it does seem rather odd that no one is attempting to cut out the middleman altogether. For these games to be truly local, it would have to be 100% developed locally and perhaps it is a lot easier and less risky to merely license a game from someone else.

Is this divide between the F2P and P2P player communities going to shift in either direction? Considering the flagging state of P2P games and the rise of F2P even in international MMORPGs, in the future either F2P will be dominant or there will be a new hybrid state with the best of both models. What will happen to the players who are so vehemently against the idea of using money to boost themselves? Will they just give up on MMORPGs forever or will they bite the bullet and join the rest?
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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COMPANY REPRESENTATIVES

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<th>Sub-topic</th>
<th>Research Relevance</th>
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<td>Games licensing selection</td>
<td>- What are the steps involved?</td>
<td><strong>Research Topics:</strong> International and local markets, localization process</td>
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<td>process</td>
<td>- Are there any variations in the process?</td>
<td><strong>Stakeholders:</strong> International developers &amp; Malaysian publishers</td>
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<td>- Who initiates this process, publishers or developers?</td>
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<td>- In terms of localization, what are they allowed to do?</td>
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<td>- What are the benefits to each party?</td>
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<td><strong>Pricing Policies</strong></td>
<td>- Who decides?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How many different kinds are there?</td>
<td><strong>Stakeholders:</strong> International developers, Malaysian publishers &amp; local player communities</td>
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<td>- How do they measure how successful their pricing policies are?</td>
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<td>- Have they experimented with different methods?</td>
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<td><strong>Marketing Strategies</strong></td>
<td>- How do they sell their games to consumers?</td>
<td><strong>Research Topics:</strong> Local markets, localization process and local player community involvement</td>
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<td>- Do they target local or international markets as well?</td>
<td><strong>Stakeholders:</strong> Malaysian publishers and local player communities</td>
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<td>- Is the localization aspect taken into account?</td>
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<td>- What are their target demographics?</td>
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<td>How does it translate into profits?</td>
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<td><strong>Community Support</strong></td>
<td>- What do they do to foster community building?</td>
<td><strong>Research Topics:</strong> Local markets and local player community involvement &amp; global-local nexus</td>
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<td>- Do they interact directly with the community?</td>
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<td>- Do they take into consideration feedback provided by the community?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| International Markets | - What do they think about their company’s position in relation to the international market?  
- How does the local market differ from the international market?  
- What are their prospects for the future? | - **Research Topics:**  
International and local markets and local player community involvement  
- **Stakeholders:**  
International developers, Malaysian publishers and local player communities |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personal opinion on the local market | - What are the future prospects?  
- What trends are there currently? | - **Research Topics:**  
International and local markets  
- **Stakeholders:**  
International developers & Malaysian publishers |
| Other companies | - What are your opinions on other companies in the field?  
- Who is the biggest/leader in the market?  
- How do you see your company in comparison? | - **Research Topics:** Local markets  
- **Stakeholders:**  
Malaysian publishers |
### APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR LOCAL ONLINE PLAYERS

#### (GAMES THAT THEY PLAY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Online Gamers – Games that they play</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Sub-topic</th>
<th>Research Relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Local and International Games              |       | - What MMORPGs are they familiar with? Examples? What are their experiences with them?  
- What are the critical differences between them? P2P vs. F2P or Local vs. international community?  
- What are their own personal pros and cons for both international and local games? | - Research Topics:  
Local & international markets  
- Stakeholders: Local players |
| Selection Process                          |       | - How do they choose?  
- Peer pressure (From cliques) or personal preference?  
- How does the payment system factor into their selection?  
- Are there any other factors? | - Research Topics:  
Local & international markets & local player community involvement  
- Stakeholders: Local players & local player communities |
| Why do they like these games                |       | - General opinions on why they like the games they play  
- How do they measure how much they enjoy them? Time spent playing, specific aspects or community? | - Research Topics:  
Local & international markets & local player community involvement  
- Stakeholders: Local players & local player communities |
| Money spent                                |       | - How much money do they spend each month?  
- If F2P, on average how much per month? What do they spend their money on and why?  
- Which do they feel is the better bargain? | - Research Topics:  
Local & international markets, localization process  
- Stakeholders: Malaysian publishers & local players |
| Local and international markets | - Their opinion on the differences and the general situation between them  
- What do they think is the future? | - **Research Topics:**  
Local & international markets  
- **Stakeholders:** Local players |
### APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR LOCAL ONLINE PLAYERS

(ONLINE COMMUNITIES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Online Gamers – Online Communities</th>
<th>Research Relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub-topic</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Personal participation within a community | - How involved are they? Are they involved in more than one?  
- How did they first get involved?  
- Their opinion on these communities  
- What are the social structures within their community?  
- How vested are they in these communities?  
- Is their involvement limited to the games they play or further?  
- How do they communicate with other members? | Local player community involvement  
**Stakeholders:** Local players & local player communities |
| Participation with communities outside games | - Do they have any activities with communities outside the games? Examples?  
- Does the community dynamic transcend the games they play?  
- Are people who quit playing these games still considered members?  
- Do they influence the game publishers or developers in any way? Examples? | Local player community involvement & global-local nexus  
**Stakeholders:** Local players & local communities |