

# Chapter 28

## Regulation of Violence in MMORPG

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter looks at the MMORPG market, the impact of prolonged exposure to violent game content on children and reviews the current regulatory measures in Singapore. Complementary strategies, apart from legislation and censorship, empower all stakeholders to manage the risks while promoting the growth of the digital game industry in Singapore are recommended. It is hoped that the range of strategies will adequately ensure that children are protected while they develop the skills and capacity to make responsible choices. With the trend moving towards online distribution of game software, increasing household broadband access to the Internet and increasing connectivity via mobile devices, the extent and frequency with which the young are accessing and engaging with violent game content online in MMORPGs needs urgent attention from the authorities and society at large. Regulatory measures based on the film censorship model should be re-considered to address business models that leverage the ubiquitous outreach afforded by the Internet. The game industry, parents, and the society at large should be more participative in influencing the direction for game content development.*

### INTRODUCTION

Based on IDA's statistics on Telecom Services, household broadband penetration for internet subscription has reached 99.9% in 2008. This would mean that children and teenagers in Singapore

have easy and convenient access to media from multiple channels - television, Internet and mobile devices. 90% of young children (7 - 14 years) had accessed to the Internet over the last 12 months. It is notable that today's youth are constantly tethered to the Web, playing online games, interacting via social networking sites such as Facebook and viewing video clips on YouTube.

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According to the Straits Time article entitled “I Must, I Must Complete my Quest”, published on 12 August 2008, Singapore’s youth rank high on the online gaming scale. In April 2008, research company Synovate released the results of its yearly Asian youth survey, which ranked Singapore’s teens third for time spent playing online games. They averaged 33 minutes daily, behind Thailand’s teens (who averaged 39 minutes), and the Taiwanese (who spent 34 minutes). This brings to mind the potential for children and teenagers to be influenced by detrimental contents via the wide range of media services now available to them.

The question we have is how best to protect the young from violent content in MMORPGs which are currently the rage among gamers worldwide. This paper will explore the MMORPG market, the impact of prolonged exposure to violent game content on children and review current regulatory practices.

## **The MMORPG Marketplace**

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) are online games that involve players from all over the world, in numbers ranging from thousands to millions, logging in simultaneously at any given point of time. These players own characters represented by avatars, assume digital personalities or roles and interact with other characters in a virtual world. MMORPGs commonly involve characters completing missions, such as battling and overcoming monsters and villains, to progress through different levels of difficulty and gain game points or credits.

A survey on Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) subscriptions market share by MMOGCHART.COM in 2008 revealed that MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft (62.2%), Lineage I and II (12.9%) and RuneScape (7.5%) enjoy a huge following among game players worldwide. Figure 1 shows that MMORPGs account for more than 90% of the entire MMOG market

that also includes other genres such as music or rhythm, e.g. Audition Online, and strategy games.

## **Player Demographics**

At least 50% of game players around the world are located in Asia (includes Australia), another 30% in North America and the remaining 20% in Europe (Feng, 2007). Figures from the Internet Literacy Handbook (Council of Europe, 2008) state that 58% of children online play games on the Internet, 30% of them play at least one day a week with some even going up to seven days a week. 5% of children online play games for ten hours or more per week.

A study in the US revealed that at least 25% of MMORPG players are teenagers. Figure 2 reflects the minutes played per week throughout play history. 60% of players were also found to have played an MMORPG for at least 10 hours continuously.

## **Growth Potential of MMORPGs**

The digital game business today garners USD 5.8 billion in annual revenue from the US market alone, with at least 50% of this amount coming from the Massively Multi-Player Online Games inclusive of role-playing genre, another 22% from casual games e.g. traditional board games, puzzles, word games, trivia and prize-oriented games and the rest from a variety of other genres such as first person shooter (FPS), sports/fighting/racing (SFR), strategy games and children’s entertainment (see Figure 3), as quoted by Lakritz (2008).

Lakritz (2008) also cited the forecast by DFC Intelligence that broadband access in households worldwide will reach more than 130 million by 2012 (see Figure 4). This suggests that access to MMORPGs via the Internet will soar to an unprecedented high level. This potential market for such games would definitely be a much relished

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