Chapter 11
An ARM Framework for F2P Mobile Games

Marisardo Bezerra de Medeiros Filho
Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil

Farley Fernandes
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8573-8877
UNIDCOM IADE, Portugal & Universidade da Beira Interior, Portugal

Felipe Matheus Calado
Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Brazil

André Menezes Marques Neves
Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an ARM (acquisition, retention, and monetization) framework for F2P (free-to-play) mobile games to be used as to support game design practice and research. ARM strategies are dispersed throughout various sources such as websites, papers, and books, hampering the work of researchers and practitioners in this field. The aim of this framework is to list and organize these strategies into a single source. A literature research about ARM strategies in F2P mobile games was conducted to identify and select elements. Based on surveys with game development professionals, some of these elements were polished, merged, or removed. Finally, these elements were organized into a single framework, consisting of 3 main categories (acquisition, retention, and monetization), 8 subcategories, and 59 specific elements.

INTRODUCTION

To make profitable Free-to-Play (F2P) games, there are some elements used to promote new players acquisition, retain them playing and drive them to monetize the game. Acquisition - Retention - Monetization (ARM) strategies are an important tool to help game developers to understand elements and relations between such stages, increasing the chances to make more profitable F2P games (Fields and

Cotton, 2012; Lovell, 2013; Luton, 2013; Thibault, 2013). However, these ARM strategies are dispersed throughout various sources such as websites, academic works and books. During this research the authors did not find any source that listed or tried to organize, formally, a set of ARM F2P game elements. Such listing can be important for knowledge development about free-to-play mobile game design and help game development professionals and researchers to formally identify possibilities and opportunities related to such games.

The general objective of this work is to organize common ARM F2P game strategies in an unique framework, describing and organizing the content of ARM related elements and strategies. It can be used by to design acquisition, retention and monetization features on F2P games and also be used as a foundation to further academic researches on the subject. The specific objectives of this research are:

- Review the academic and professional literature regarding Acquisition, Retention, Monetization, and ARM Funnel, applied to F2P mobile games, this being the aim of this paper;
- Propose the elements and an architecture to organize an ARM framework for F2P mobile games;
- Evaluate the proposed ARM framework with F2P mobile games experienced professionals;
- Based on the evaluation conducted, make the adjustments needed for the final version of the framework.

This paper is organized with the following structure: The next chapter covers the main aspects about ARM in F2P mobile games; the third chapter lists and presents the main elements regarding user acquisition, retention and monetization; the fourth chapter presents the development and version 1.0 of the framework; and the fifth chapter presents the conclusions and discussions of this work.

ARM IN F2P MOBILE GAMES

The term ARM refers to an analytic framework, often used to describe a business model, in mobile game industry. As an acronym, it means Acquisition, Retention, and Monetization. It could be useful as an aid to understand the business models used by F2P mobile games, and also as a guide for developers when applying the concepts at their own games. Acquisition strategies are used to attract new users to the game; Retention strategies aims to keep them playing and lastly, Monetization strategies are used to make users generate revenue for the game (Kuusisto, 2014; Tao, 2014). However, games that are not F2P use a different framework, named B2P (buy-to-play), where its users first buy the game (Monetization), then discover the gameplay (Acquisition), and finally can repeat the experience (Retention) (Davidovici-Nora, 2014). In this context, the retention is at the end of the process and does not have a direct connection with monetization. On the other hand, F2P games business model architecture is way more complex and can generate multiple interactions among stages and not only a one-to-one relationship.

In F2P games, the monetization stage is pushed to the end of the process as payment is optional to a certain extent. Games with F2P business model put emphasis on experience before monetizing it, in order to accumulate a huge user base and make them engaged. Considering that the price to acquire a F2P game is zero, acquisition stage seems to be an easy and automatic stage in such model when compared with B2P ones (Davidovici-Nora, 2014). Figure 1 shows the ARM funnel initially proposed by Kontagent (2011).

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