

# Chapter 43

## National Differences and Gender Stereotypes in Days of Empire

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### ABSTRACT

*Days of Empire is a freemium mobile strategy video game developed and published by the company ONEMT, whose actual headquarters is in Fuzhou Fujian, China. The company specializes in fantasy video games mostly set in the Middle East and full of references to the history and mythology of the Arab and Turkish peoples. The objective is to provide a description of the game and to perform a qualitative analysis of the attitudes of selected players towards the game, their emotional drivers, and the financial commitment many of them undertake to achieve greater success in the game. As many discussions take place in the chat function of the game, the author is interested in stereotypes referencing the players' country of origin, gender stereotypes, and even the sexual harassment to which female players are subjected. Using the emic approach, an insider's perspective will be shown of the ways in which the players of Days of Empire look at the issues of nationalism and gender stereotypes, and the emotional connection between single individuals and a freemium game of this type.*

### INTRODUCTION

While observing the context of role-playing games (RPG), the researcher chose to conduct a study on a game entitled *Days of Empire*, which reached the peak of its popularity during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to carry out the study, the researcher could not rely merely on the official – and extremely scarce – presentations of the game developer, the Chinese company ONEMT, but also had to become a participant in the game, even in the absence of previous gaming experience with any other RPG on a mobile device.

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## BACKGROUND

The present work adheres to the methodological principles of netnography research, as indicated by Robert Kozinets (2020), and represents a further step on the path indicated by other authors who have dealt with videogames netnography such as Tom Boellstorff et al. (2012), Ercilia García-Álvarez, Jordi López-Sintas and Alexandra Samper-Martinez (2017), Yi-Sheng Wang, Wei-Long Lee and Tsuen-Ho Hsu (2017), Jenna Drenten, Robert L. Harrison and Nicholas J. Pendarvis (2019), Ahmad Zaidatul and Noor Aireen Ibragim (2020), and some unpublished final thesis or doctoral dissertations.

The author drew on five types of possible information: those offered by the developer, the graphic and textual structure of the game, the group communication carried out in the game's chats and on the cross-platform service Whatsapp, interpersonal communication through long-distance telephone interviews, and intrapersonal communication (autoethnography).

Instead, the author does not present clear statistical data as the game developer does not appear to be transparent enough in the marketing of its product. The little data available is derived from comparison with similar online games and from a sample of 105 players.

All respondent names are fictitious. Not even the aliases used by respondents in the game have been reported, so that it is not possible to trace the identity of the informant. The phrases taken from the chats of the game are instead reported with the nickname that the player uses in *Days of Empire*.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF *DAYS OF EMPIRE*

### *Days of Empire* in the Context of the World of Freemium RPGs

Over the years, video games have increasingly become an integral part of life for a large part of the world's population. It is also a generally accepted fact (Polaková 2011: 57) that when creating a character, a player at the same time is creating an imaginary "me". The player assumes a foreign identity, sets out from the reality of the ordinary world into another, better one. The player can eliminate the norms and demands of his everyday role and throw himself into an adrenaline adventure without the risk of any real danger.

*Days of Empire* can be defined as a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) used mainly on mobile phone. Although it does not appear in the world rankings of "the best RPG games", the interviewed players consider it among the best in the world "for its graphics", the possibilities of "getting relief even when defeated" and the "willingness to dialogue in the majority of players". The reviews are not numerous, and as in other cases it is not always possible to distinguish spontaneous reviews from those created *ad hoc* by the developers. One of the most popular public reviews goes into the details of the game and only complains that it is necessary "to improve translation, for better communication among players" ([play.google.com](https://play.google.com) - 10 February 2021).

The business model of *Days of Empire* is one known as *free to play* (F2P). It is a model that developed particularly in some Asian countries – Korea, Japan, Taiwan – and then spread to the rest of the globe (Park & Lee 2011: 2184). Today Chinese companies have seen the largest increase in sales in the world for this type of game, and *Days of Empire* seems to represent only a fragment of the gigantic turnover related to digital games.<sup>1</sup> Its specific feature is to target players interested in the glories of the Ottoman Empire – i.e., Turks from the motherland and the diaspora – to other players from Islamic countries, and finally to other interested people from various other parts of the world. The game even presents itself as

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