

The visibility of Chinese game localizers on Gcores: Personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution

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Abstract

The study aims to shed light on the content-sharing activities of Chinese game localizers on Gcores (机核), a Chinese game medium. Two main research questions are discussed. First, what are the characteristics of online content sharing by game localizers about game localization? Second, what implications can these sharing activities bring to the theories of the visibility of translators? On the one hand, through netnography and practice-led research, the researcher, as a content creator on Gcores, introduces the process and features of online content sharing. On the other hand, through content and discourse analysis of the shared information, as well as the comments posted by the online audience, the implications of sharing are further investigated, including personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution. The findings shed light on the interconnection between game localization, the visibility of translators, the game community, and media communication.

Keywords: Game localization, Chinese game localizers, translator's visibility, social media, Gcores

1 Introduction

In contemporary online society, an individual's presence in the virtual world seems boundless, exceeding the limitations of times and locations (Biocca & Levy 2013). Social media serves as a conduit for facilitating digital sharing and communication, enabling the dissemination of diverse expressions, information, ideas, and interests in multiple online domains (Kietzmann et al. 2011). In social media, conversations are established among members, and communities further replace audiences (Novelo et al. 2022, 20).

Culture is a complicated network of meanings (Geertz 2003). Video games are cultural artifacts, necessitating the recognition of a comprehensive framework that extends

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beyond the gameplay experience and encompasses the broader context of players' interactions with many stakeholders (Mäyrä 2008). Gamer culture pertains to the occurrences within video games and their associated phenomena (Novelo et al. 2022). The opinions of game players, game streamers or commentators on social media have hugely influenced the decision-making of game developers or publishers regarding their strategic approach to game localization (O'Hagan 2022, 448). Besides, the active participation of fans, either in localizing the in-game content (e.g., O'Hagan 2017) or in disseminating, localizing, and interpreting information about video games or other related topics on social media (e.g., Chen 2024a), can significantly influence the connectivity among fandom members, or the correlation between fandom and game officials.

As the practice unfolds, there is a growing visibility of the works, roles, or personal identities of Chinese game localizers on Chinese social media such as Sina Weibo 新浪微博, Bilibili 哔哩哔哩, or Gcores 机核. It has been frequently observed that game localizers tend to express, share, and disseminate information about game localization on these media. These game localizers may be in-house workers affiliated with a game company or freelance professionals. Some align their media sharing with their respective organizations and strategically time the release of content to coincide with the game's releases or updates. Others announce that their online sharing is unrelated to the stance of a game practitioner, but it stems from a fan perspective. This statement may provoke controversy, since game localizers' unique positions, extensive experiences, and special insights will inevitably imbue their messages and distinguish the content they share from the content produced by average game fans. In some situations, even if a few game localizers refrain from directly disseminating their thoughts due to a multitude of factors such as work limitations or personal characteristics, their online activities such as forwarding or commenting can still be noticed by those devoted game enthusiasts through game localizers' unique avatars. In addition, some game localizers focus on game-related commercial collaboration or distribution rather than simply paying attention to knowledge sharing.

The game localizers' online sharing often catalyzes netizens to pay attention to the localization strategies used in the official game version. Thus, many people may discuss their respective understandings in the online comment section. Notably, some game localizers may have established a substantial group of fans through activities unrelated to localization sharing, such as game streaming or video making, so their sharing also evokes their fans' attention. This situation may further disseminate knowledge of game localization to a wider group, particularly when not all these fans are originally attracted by their localization skills. Intriguingly, game localizers' reputation, dedication, intelligence, and humor also serve as additional factors that attract more people to engage with their content sharing.

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Currently, there is a dearth of research addressing the characteristics, objectives, and potential impacts associated with game localizers' sharing on Chinese social media. Although the sharing of game localization by the localizers can be theoretically linked to the theories of (in)visibility of translators (e.g., Venuti 1986), it should be noted that the related debate on the (in)visibility of translators was probably proposed earlier than its systematic introduction. Historically, there are a large group of translators such as Dao'an, Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who exemplify the existence of the visibility of translators through their activities, involving a series of sophisticated contexts, strategies, stances, and stakeholders. Additionally, many scholars discuss translation strategies (e.g., Venuti 1993; Lane-Mercier 1997) such as foreignization versus domestication, which inherently involves the (in)visibility of translators.

In audiovisual translation, the visibility of translators/localizers has long been associated with the translation of subtitles or any other textual content. *Tucao* 吐槽 is a strategy widely used by (fan) translators to embed subjectivity in the translated works, which embeds the humorous comments in subtitles or as translators' notes (Wang & Zhang 2017; Lu & Lu 2021). The investigation of strategies like *tucao* implies an extension of research on the visibility of translators. Notably, such an academic trend that primarily focuses on the practices of translators/localizers embedded in the audiovisual products may potentially restrict the scholarly exploration into other valuable aspects, such as their online activities.

It is also significant to make explicit the reasons for the scarcity of research on game localizers' online sharing. First, online events (e.g., fansubbing groups, video sharing, live streaming, media fandom) and corresponding methodologies (e.g., netnography) have yet to establish a significant foothold in translation studies, although there are a few recent exceptional works, such as Huang (2020), Yu (2022), Karagöz (2022), Lu (2023), and Chen (2024a). Second, the decentralized structure of the game localizers' online sharing not only presents great challenges in selecting appropriate online research sites within the vast online domain but also requires proper language pairs with sufficient data. Third, to effectively introduce, elucidate, and interpret the intricate online interconnections, researchers should also develop a great familiarity with the selected online community. For instance, they should possess a thorough comprehension of the popular slang terms in the community and promptly identify the underlying causes behind online events or debates. The aforementioned criteria may lead some translation researchers to perceive that conducting research in an online translation-related community is unfamiliar and impractical.

In the Chinese digital era, game localizers' sharing on social media is both emerging and noteworthy. The convergence of online sharing activities and the characteristics of Web 2.0 poses a significant extension to existing theoretical frameworks. This article aims to

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introduce game localizers' online-sharing practices from an interdisciplinary perspective, thereby extending the theories of translation and game localization.

2 Literature review

The following sections introduce three theoretical foundations: game localization, the visibility of translators, and netnography in online communities, which are the fundamental theories of the research.

2.1 Game localization

Game localization emerged in the early 1980s, shortly after the birth of the game industry in the 1970s (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002). The tasks of game localization include not only the translation of textual content into the target language but also the adaptation of non-textual elements to meet the cultural, technical, and legal requirements of the local market (Mangiron 2018; Zhang & Song 2023). Initially, game localization was a distinct and secondary process separate from game development tasks, often relegated to an "afterthought" (O'Hagan 2022, 444). Given the growing emphasis on globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation (GILT) (e.g., Mangiron 2012; O'Hagan 2022), the significance of localization and translation has been effectively addressed in managing time-sensitive product rollouts across various markets with different language targets (O'Hagan 2022, 444). Game localization has thus been increasingly recognized for its significance, with a comprehensive connection to game design, distribution, and community management (Dong & Mangiron 2018).

Currently, various models of game localization are employed worldwide, each of which is tailored to or limited by specific features such as talent availability, financial resources, and the release status of the game. The sim-ship model refers to the practice of simultaneously releasing multiple localized versions alongside the original game, aiming to maximize profit across all key regions (Bernal-Merino 2014). Notably, a few limitations such as the lack of awareness of localization, and the shortage of talent or budget may prevent many small-sized indie games from adopting the sim-ship model (Toftedahl et al. 2018), although they can enhance the variety during subsequent stages. To increase the return on investment (ROI), indie game developers or publishers may select a few key languages for localization in the initial stage, based on their product positioning and economic outcomes reduction (Toftedahl et al. 2018). English, specifically, US English, usually serves as the default pivot language for the indirect translation of video game products (O'Hagan 2022; Zhang & Song 2023).

The current game industry has witnessed notable transformations in the correlation between social media and game practitioners. An increasing number of game

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companies are placing greater emphasis on media engagement (Wawrowski & Otolá 2020). Game developers are strongly encouraged to actively engage with online communities to foster strong connections with gamers, initiate co-creation, and boost distribution (Ruggles et al. 2005; Bernal-Merino 2016). Notably, as highlighted by Chen (2024a, 10), “official [social media] releases” specifically pertain to content published by game companies on their official websites or authorized social media channels, which ensures a higher level of accuracy in correlation with the game updates. The fan releases, in contrast to the official ones, are sometimes embedded with fans’ stances and interpretations (Chen 2024a). To a certain extent, the relationship between official and fan releases suggests that game companies should engage with the online community properly and strategically, thereby reinforcing essential communication with the fan base and fostering the creation of high-quality fan content. There is some research on video games and fan localization such as Sánchez (2009) and O’Hagan (2017), whereas limited research has been conducted within the scope of participatory fan translation practices except for Chen (2024a).

Traditionally, official game localizers, whether employed internally or outsourced, did not typically engage in targeted social media exposure and online promotions for their localization projects. The primary factor can be attributed to the lack of clarity among game officials concerning the interplay among game localizers, social media and the game community. Moreover, this can also be limited by non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) between game localizers and game companies, as well as the collaborative efforts of teamwork in localization.¹ Interestingly, in recent years, there has been an increase in social media activity conducted by Chinese game localizers. Additionally, some game companies, such as Blizzard and Riot, even incorporate localization updates or behind-the-scenes storytelling as a regular component of their official press releases. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to pay more attention to these practical breakthroughs.

2.2 Visibility of translators

The (in)visibility of translators is a historical topic in translation studies. As previously introduced, the practices of (in)visibility existed long before researchers concluded notions like “(in)visibility” or proposed the debate between the preservation of the source content and the alignment with the target culture (e.g., Nida 1964; Sechrest et al. 1972; Venuti 1993; Lane-Mercier 1997). A long time ago, activities aimed at disseminating values or cultures, such as the spread of Buddhist sutras or the distribution of the Bible, witnessed the emergence of numerous renowned translators,

¹ By addressing “the collaborative efforts of teamwork in localization”, the researcher wants to raise awareness on the debate of the owner of the shared content (e.g. the game company, the game localization group, or the game localizer), although this is not the main focus of the article.

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culturalists, social activists, and scholars. These related phenomena serve as significant indications of the prominence and influence of translators, which inevitably leads to a practice-based cognition of their substantial visibility.

In Venuti's (1986) landmark research, he delineates the visibility and invisibility of translators across various genres, encompassing the translator as a co-producer of the translated version, the translator's active involvement in the translation process, and translation as both a cultural practice and the outcome of an intricate procedure. The effectiveness of systematic introduction and clear categorization has enhanced the theories of (in)visibility to a level deemed acceptable not only by translators or researchers but also by the public, especially concerning the utilization of a series of coherent nomenclatures.

Crucially, it is imperative to critically acknowledge that the systemic conclusions of Venuti or other scholars who contributed to the foundational aspects of the (in)visibility theories can never comprehensively encompass the entirety of the (in)visibility phenomenon throughout history. Besides, their research cannot serve as the sole foundational starting point of the investigation on the visibility of translators. On the one hand, as highlighted previously, the activities of translators in history have embedded many enlightening hints of visibility. On the other hand, numerous parallel discussions in academia, such as those on translation strategies like foreignization versus domestication, also inevitably indicate or echo the content of the (in)visibility theories.

In recent years, an intricate, interdisciplinary study of the (in)visibility of translators/localizers has gradually appeared. The translation profession in Europe and North America is often perceived as subordinate to the writing profession (Simeoni 1998), which may be attributed to the growth and advancement of relevant industries. In contrast, the concept of "translator celebrity" remains relatively unfamiliar in some cultural contexts, such as Japan (e.g., Hadley & Akashi 2015), or China (e.g., Liu 2013; Li 2018). Some target readers or publishers in these contexts seem to focus more on the authors' contributions, thereby having less awareness of the significance of translators' efforts (Venuti 2017). Furthermore, as translators are often encouraged or inclined to adopt translation strategies focusing on fluency or domestication, the techniques they adopt have further contributed to their invisibility (Venuti 2017; Akashi, 2018).

In the last several decades, relevant theories of translators' (in)visibility have undergone significant advancements. Maier (2007) discusses the rights and obligations of translators and their prominence, suggesting that translators and translation scholars should not only advocate for these rights but also acknowledge and address conflicts inherent in translation practices. McLaughlin (2008) critically examines the dislocation in French and the voice of translators, elucidating how Venuti's theories are reworked to encompass new features. Federici (2011) expands the criticism of binary thinking and advocates for overcoming dichotomies in translation

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studies, extending the critique to the examination of the visibility of female translators. Liu (2013) elucidates the correlation between the visibility of Chinese translators and social variables, highlighting that visibility is rewarding in terms of social exchanges and learning experiences. The study by Hadley and Akashi (2015) examines the translation strategies employed by Haruki Murakami, a well-known Japanese writer and translator, focusing on the implications of the visibility paradigm. Akashi (2018) also proposes an investigation into the influence of renowned Japanese celebrity translators and their impact. Freeth (2022) argues that the concept of visibility should encompass not only how translators and their work are presented to readers but also the sophisticated interplay among translator agencies, publishing requirements, and reader interests. The edited book by Freeth and Treviño (2024) further explicates the ambiguity of previous definitions of (in)visibility and provides empirical case studies related to social media, reception, institutional translation, and literary translation.

Although the theories appear extensively and encompass cross-field disciplines, the majority of them are grounded in the domain of literary translation, with limited consideration given to translation in the digital age. From the inception of cinema to the emergence of Web 2.0, there have been numerous innovative translation practices (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda 2019). The relationship between translators and the community, as well as the working modes or impact of translators, have become heated topics (e.g., Yu 2019; Lu 2023; Chen 2024a). Although some of the works do not explicitly articulate the correlation of each study with the (in)visibility theories, it is apparent that they extend the academic discussion on the (in)visibility of translators/localizers in the digital realm.

2.3 Netnography in online communities

A field is a social space, and it constitutes a microcosm that emerges within a broader society, characterized by its own set of regulations, norms, and hierarchical forms (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Online communities give rise to or embody cultural phenomena (Kozinets 2015). In the Internet era, a field is decentralized, combining many individuals and social groups with different backgrounds or stances (Belk & Kozinets 2017, 12).

Netnography is “a qualitative [anthropological] research approach for gaining cultural understanding that involves the systematic, immersive, and multimodal use of observations, digital traces, and/or elicitations” (Kozinets and Gretzel 2024, 1). Netnography is conducted on the Internet, involving participatory observation through online fieldwork and adherence to established field regulations (Kozinets 2015; Belk & Kozinets 2017). There exist four notable distinctions between conventional face-to-face ethnography and Internet-based netnography: alternation, anonymity, accessibility, and archiving (Kozinets 2010). Netnography entails an immersive and prolonged

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engagement with social-community members, whose conductor should endeavor to discern and comprehend the culture through “thick, detailed, nuanced, historically-curious and culturally-grounded interpretation” (Kozinets 2010, 60).

Scholars have extensively examined netnography in translation studies. For instance, Lu and Lu (2022) investigate the relationship between researchers and participants and discuss the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Huang et al. (2023) raise awareness of negotiating access to various fieldwork sites, obtaining participants’ consent, managing data, and reflecting on researchers’ positionality in relation to the community members. Li (2023) employs a combination of netnography and interviews in her investigation of crowdsourced translation and indicates the potential limitations of netnography. Chen (2024a) examines the efficacy and restrictions of netnography in catering to the specific game community that is influenced by the fandom hierarchy centered around fan localizers.

Netnographic methods in game localization studies require significant use of information from specialized websites, blogs, and internet forums (Mangiron 2017, 89). Researchers have creatively explored game localization under netnographic frameworks. To elaborate, Karagöz examines the indie game-localization Facebook group (Karagöz 2021) and fan-forum posts about war games (Karagöz 2022). Mangiron (2021a) studies SEGA’s video game localization strategies and their reception. Afzali and Zahiri (2022) investigate Iranian game players’ translation needs. Chen (2022) examines the localization strategies of *Overwatch* Chinese esports streaming. Additionally, Chen (2024a) researches fan-conducted localization practices on social media releases about *Overwatch* and its esports competitions. In short, netnography is progressively gaining significance in game localization studies.

3 Methodology

Based on the practical and theoretical foundation, two research questions are proposed. First, what are the characteristics of game localizers’ online content sharing about game localization? Second, what implications can these sharing activities have for the theories of the visibility of translators? The following sections justify why Gcores is selected as the online research field. Furthermore, they outline the research methods used to collect specific types of data and explain how the data is connected to the research questions.

3.1 The research field: Gcores

Gcores 机核 is a comprehensive website for distributing information on video games, films, TV series, literature, science, etc.² It is described as “one of the most influential

² For more information about Gcores, please see: <https://www.gcores.com/>

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Chinese game media”, listed by the Cultural Service of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Beijing in its Game Developer’s Guide to the Chinese market.³

In recent years, Gcores has progressively expanded beyond social media to cover diverse associated domains such as podcasts, documentaries, and game memorabilia. Gadio (*jihe diantai* 机核电台) is the general title of Gore’s podcast series, encompassing a wide range of content. G-Fusion (*hejubian* 核聚变) is the offline seasonal gathering of gamers and game practitioners, featuring game jams, game distribution talks, on-site demo play, and cosplay shows. Gcores Industries (*jikaosi gongye* 吉考斯工业) is the brand for the peripheral products series including clothing, footwear, and accessories produced by Gcores in collaboration with game companies. Gsense (*jishi* 即视) gathers a collection of interesting trailers or documentaries.

Given the diverse range of topics and themes on Gcores, it is pertinent to highlight Gcores’ unique media-facilitated features that are particularly relevant to the content sharing conducted by game localizers.

First, registration for Gcores is publicly accessible, allowing any individual to obtain their unique Gcores ID. On the user’s main page, *tougao* 投稿 “post and contribute” allows users to share several types of content, including news, videos, articles, game projects, and short comments. Specifically, in the *youxi xiangmu* 游戏项目 “game projects” section, game industry practitioners, such as art designers, narrative designers, social media managers, or localizers, can link their projects with their Gcores ID by providing evidence to Gcores editors. Once the application with evidence is approved, the Gcores users’ homepages will display a section entitled *canyuzhizuo* 参与制作 “participating in the projects”, clarifying the game projects and the users’ contributions.

Furthermore, Gcores provides users with a dedicated text-editing facility, resembling an online streamlined word processing application. Before submitting content for review and publication – whether it is a video, a piece of news, or an article – users need to fill out forms at the end of the editing page regarding the keyword (*guanjianci* 关键), channel (*pindao* 频道), and theme section (*fenqu* 分区). Additionally, users need to clarify whether the content is original or not. Some of the shared content follows certain word templates pre-set in the Gcores text-editing system, such as the channel or theme templates, while other content can be customized by users, especially the keywords. Once the content is submitted, the manuscript undergoes a comprehensive evaluation

³ For more information about Game Developer’s Guide to the Chinese Market published by the Cultural Service of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Beijing, please see: https://igp.org.pl/raporty/Raport_ChinskiRynekGier_2023_EN.pdf

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by a third-party automated review software. Sometimes, a manual review by Gcores editors is required.⁴

The recommendation section of Gcores encompasses a wide range of recommended posts from diverse contributors featuring exceptional content, which attempts to expose the content to a wide range of Gcores users.⁵ As stated by Gcores officials, if the high-quality user-generated content has great potential for valuable discussion, aligned with current industry trends, ongoing events, or player concerns, it will be considered by editors for a recommendation.⁶ On the other hand, similar to many contemporary websites, Gcores' web and mobile app facilitate the dissemination of content through links or notifications, which aims to reach a wide group of audiences who are interested in specific keywords or themes.

Last but not least, Gcores' online search and promotion techniques are undoubtedly promoting a shift in individuals' mindsets, encouraging them to transcend their original perspectives and explore more comprehensive and superior content. High-quality posts shared by game localizers on Gcores are usually displayed with a few keywords, such as *youxi bendihua* 游戏本地化 “game localization”, *youxi fanyi* 游戏翻译 “game translation”, *youxi lilun* 游戏理论 “game theory” or *youxi chanye* 游戏产业 “game industry”.

The aforementioned Gcores' features reflect that the theories and practices of game localization are highly anticipated in the online community. Unfortunately, at this stage, the adoption of Gcores for content sharing among game localizers is still relatively limited due to factors such as localizers' schedules, work constraints, personalities, and their perceptions of using social media for content sharing. Notably, since the content sharing of game localizers on Gcores has established a certain scale in the Chinese context, what game localizers share and how they share on Gcores are worthy of academic investigation.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As early as February 2022, the researcher started to distribute game localization theories through a series of videos and articles on Gcores, using a self-owned account named 'Dody_Desperado'.⁷ Gradually, the researcher connected with some game localizers who use Gcores through interactions such as likes, comments, and research-irrelevant conversations. Notably, in the early stage of the researcher's Gcores

⁴ ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 13 December 2023.

⁵ For more information about the Gcores content sharing and censorship regulations, please see the article posted by Gcores editors: <https://www.gcores.com/articles/163391>

⁶ ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 24 May 2024.

⁷ For more information, please see: <https://www.gcores.com/users/596864/talks>

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engagement, the researcher was driven by an interest in exploring the online community rather than conducting related research.

Since June 2023, the researcher started to reacquaint with the significance of visibility theories, thereby consulting systematic references on related methodologies in translation, game, and media studies. Then, to delve into the research topic, it became imperative to exclusively identify and select game localizers who publicly disclose their roles and identities as online-based sample providers in the public social media domain. Such public announcements of identity, roles, and tasks can be traced and regulated on social media, and thus, the data can be categorized as an open-access resource. Related methods have been widely adopted in media studies and celebrity studies (e.g., Akashi 2018; Fang et al. 2024).

According to the researcher's observation of content-sharing activities conducted by game localizers on Gcores, a total of 9 game localizers were selected for this project. The selection of these 9 individuals was conducted in the following manner: First, the researcher carefully observed the release of articles, podcasts, and videos on Gcores about game localization during a particular observation period. Second, the researcher employed Internet search methodologies to authenticate the professional backgrounds of the content sharers, aiming to distinguish practitioners from game enthusiasts.⁸ Some of them registered their roles and projects on Gcores, with their bios indicating their tasks to the public. Even if a few did not actively disclose their responsibilities or roles regarding specific game localization projects, they could be easily identified as online transmedia celebrities due to their active presence on other platforms such as Bilibili or Sina Weibo, where they frequently disseminate thoughts on game localization. For those individuals, hints are usually given on their IDs, the shared content, as well as the users or topics they follow. Then, the researcher frequently updated the list of authenticated game localizers and followed their recent trends on Gcores. Lastly, since the final selection was more or less constrained by the researcher's insights into the project, this resulted in the number of individuals selected as sample providers being fewer than the number of eligible Gcores-based game localizers.⁹

Notably, the researcher is one of the sample providers. The inclusion of the researcher aligns with the framework of practice-led research, which emphasizes that the researcher, as the creator, can provide reflective and reflexive thoughts on the research topics (Smith & Dean 2009). Therefore, various influences, ideas, decisions, materials, technologies, events, and theories can serve as inspiration, information, constraints, or

⁸ The complexity of this verification process varies from person to person, which involves the check of the person's publicly accessible IP address or ID, and the analysis of the person's shared content released on different media.

⁹ This statement elucidates that the researcher may opt for those people, whose shared content not only solely focuses on the game text translation but covers an in-depth reflection, particularly about the industry, or whose activities involve cross-platform collaboration.

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facilitators (Candy 2006). Related methodologies have been creatively adopted by translation researchers such as Lu and Lu (2022) and Chen (2024a).

In contrast, the other 8 game localizers exhibit distinctiveness in both their backgrounds and the content they share. On the one hand, the working modes they adhere to and the localization projects they undertake are distinct, thereby showcasing notable diversity in comparison. On the other hand, most of them express their distinct perspectives on game localization, primarily focusing on text translation but also considering its broader implications for the industry.

Details of all sample providers' Gcores ID and Gcores homepage links are shown in Table 1, with each of the game localizers coded (referred to as 'S+Code' in later sections). Among them, S2 is the researcher.

Table 1 – Game localizers observed on Gcores

Code of Game Localizers	Gcores ID	Gcores Homepage Link
S1	410	https://www.gcores.com/users/52173/talks
S2	Dody_Desperado	https://www.gcores.com/users/596864/talks
S3	大食蚁兽吃大蚂蚁	https://www.gcores.com/users/589722/talks
S4	Lingomancy话术研	https://www.gcores.com/users/638475/talks
S5	谜之声	https://www.gcores.com/users/611966/talks
S6	轻语的R君	https://www.gcores.com/users/90578/talks
S7	潜入火炎地狱的间谍	https://www.gcores.com/users/523089/talks
S8	Soaper	https://www.gcores.com/users/88834/talks
S9	Wango_Abathur	https://www.gcores.com/users/382717/talks

In the next stage, the researcher conducted an extensive investigation into the content posted by these individuals on Gcores (e.g., videos, podcasts, and articles), using content analysis and discourse analysis. On the one hand, content analysis aims to derive reliable and valid inferences applicable to a specific context (Stemler 2000). On the other hand, the researcher paid special attention to the discourse of the shared content and the underlying motivations behind it, because discourse belongs to “social practice” (Gill 2000, 175), which is performed to achieve a certain purpose.

To elaborate, when one of the sample providers tried to reflect explicitly on how to translate a game line in an article, the researcher annotated the context in which this line appears in the game, the situation in which this version of the game is launched, the role of the content sharers, the overall online feedback on the game or the game localization, and any other significantly related data that can be obtained from the

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public resources. The purpose was to investigate whether game localizers discuss their work objectively, ensuring utmost accuracy in context restoration and placing it within a social environment. Notably, short comments posted by them were excluded from the analysis due to their non-compliance with rigorous platform-based censorship and the randomness of the content.

Eventually, after each piece of the content underwent annotation, the researcher categorized them and analyzed their features, similarities, and differences. To this extent, the researcher consciously compiled some key points of the game localizers, such as their working mode (e.g., in-house or freelance), or the general shared content (e.g., game localization strategies). Furthermore, the researcher also devoted particular attention to certain unique details embedded in the shared content. For instance, a few game localizers were proven to reflect on the game localization work much later than the original release of the game version, and the researcher extrapolated possible causes based on game community trends and possible industrial regulations.¹⁰

Additionally, for questions about game localization strategies, issues, or the intentions of game localizers in sharing, the researcher attempted to use direct messages to contact relevant individuals through Gcores, WeChat, or email. The participants provided their consent to share their answers with the public for research purposes. Finally, a series of representative and relevant cases, concluded from the in-depth analysis of 49 articles and 6 episodes of podcasts, were used for an in-depth discussion to elaborate on the research questions.¹¹

4 Findings

The following sections show the case analysis of game localizers' shared content, featuring what to share, how to share, and why to share. Moreover, it highlights that sharing is not only about knowledge dissemination but is also related to personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution.

4.1 An overview of game localizers as Gcores content creators

All 9 observed key game localizers share their content through publicly accessible accounts fully owned by themselves. A few of them, either as in-house workers or

¹⁰ The attention to game trends and online feedback in data analysis for game localization works has been emphasized in Chen (2024a). For instance, netizens may redirect their emotions towards official content sharers during certain periods, even if these sharers are not responsible for the game's delayed release or updates. Such a situation may lead to changes in game localizers' sharing strategies.

¹¹ The content generated by the 9 game localizers on Gcores exceeds the content of the selected articles or podcasts for analysis in this project. Due to the great variability in the content of each article or podcast, it is not feasible to provide a specific quantification of cases in this context.

outsourced talents, explicitly announce that sharing is independent of their localization professions. Significantly, they appear to blur the boundary of their identities either as localization contributors or game enthusiasts. This is to say, while sharing content, they tend to both show deference to the game company and delineate localization practices themselves. Furthermore, they tend to avoid mentioning certain sensitive aspects of their work, such as the precise communication between the game localizer and game developers or detailed teamwork processes. Presumably, this can be due to their engagement in individual online sharing, necessitating special attention to game-related policies, NDAs and associated benefits. In short, regarding the subject and content, the act of sharing usually aligns with personal dissemination, while the subsequent chapters further reveal a contentious aspect regarding this point.

Despite Gcores offering certain templates for content sharing, it is intriguing that each game localizer adopts a distinctive approach to crafting the unique design of their content-release format, writing structure, as well as shared themes. In terms of format and structure, most game localizers employ a casual writing style to articulate thoughts on game localization, in contrast to academic publications. Additionally, the absence of a predetermined release schedule renders the act of sharing more casual. Some game localizers adhere to the sharing a few days or weeks after the release of their game localization works, whereas others seem not to have established any predetermined intentions for a schedule.

The informality is also evident in the content. First, game localizers, as content sharers, may focus on their own localization projects or the works of others. Furthermore, they may sometimes produce a sophisticated discussion on localization, such as specific strategies and issues, using one or two cases, or briefly introduce the overall localization stages or thoughts. Additionally, a few game localizers may pay special attention to certain topics like linguistics, cultures, or contexts. For instance, one of the game-localization podcasts co-produced by Gcores editors and S5 specifically discusses the use of game slang terms in game localization.¹² In short, such random and diversified sharing activities indicate each piece of sharing can be attributed to game localizers' willingness to share, their stances, profits, or characteristics, as well as constraints like NDAs.

Last but not least, the utilization of a self-reflexive or informal style in the online public domain suggests the intention to enhance accessibility for a broader spectrum of audiences. Notably, there is a significant proportion of shared content that requires readers to obtain a basic understanding of game localization before reading it. For instance, the omission of definitions or background introductions in a few articles may

¹² For more information, please see the series of the Chinese podcast produced by Gcores editors and S5: <https://www.gcores.com/radios/162482>

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be attributed to the writers' assumption of readers' familiarity with certain topics. Therefore, reception studies are deemed necessary for further investigation.

4.2 Behind the content sharing: Complicated scopes

In particular, the reasons underlying interest-driven or interest-related activities are usually intricate and diverse. Akin to the act of watching game streaming, for instance, viewers may not always consciously maintain specific motivations, and some may remain oblivious to the stimuli that elicit their pleasure from viewing until further scholarly investigation (e.g., Cheung & Huang 2011).

Taking the case of the researcher as an example, in the initial stage, participation in Gcores was primarily to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the online game community, while subsequent activities fostered closer connections with game localizers and boosted social-media branding. This highlights the dynamic triggers of content sharing, wherein its cause and purpose may undergo subtle transformations across different temporal and spatial contexts, thereby reflecting the evolving mindsets of game localizers as content sharers.

The term “discourse” refers to the written or spoken exchange of ideas among individuals, particularly involving in-depth deliberation on a specific subject (Van Dijk 1997). The sharing of content on Gcores by game localizers can be considered as a sample of discourse between game localizers and netizens. Gill (2000, 175) assumes that people pursue diversified aims in their discourses, such as attributing responsibility, providing justifications, and strategically presenting themselves in a favorable light. Correspondingly, one suitable approach for eliciting the motivations of these game localizers is to analyze their discourses, especially at different stages. Significantly, although the primary expectation of sharing is usually acknowledged by the conductor to disseminating knowledge about game localization, below a few cases highlight specific objectives beyond this aim, encompassing a wide range of motivations such as personal branding, video game distribution, community management, and public-opinion redirection.

4.2.1 Platform-based business collaboration and content exposure

Some of the 9 game localizers are “Internet celebrities” who had established dedicated fan bases before their engagement in content sharing on Gcores. Particularly, S5 is a well-known Chinese game streamer, game localizer, and literature translator. S5, who has been consistently engaging in game streaming since 2015, has a subscriber base exceeding 435,000 on Bilibili, a popular Chinese game streaming and video-sharing platform.¹³ One of the notable streaming features of S5 is that he likes to play English

¹³ For more information, please see the video sharing and game streaming channel: <https://space.bilibili.com/673816>

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video games that are not localized in Chinese and produce Chinese versions of game texts using his speech. Owing to exceptional translation or interpretation skills, gameplay performance, and streaming interaction, S5 has earned a widespread reputation.

S5's Gcores ID, *mizhisheng* 谜之声 (“Sound of Mystery”), remains the same as his Bilibili streaming ID, which has enabled netizens to ascertain the identity of the account owner almost immediately. Since S5's introduction into Gcores in May 2022, he has released and co-produced six podcasts, which are officially commissioned and co-produced by Gcores editors and S5. Notably, five of the podcasts are categorized into a series entitled *mizhisheng liao bendihua* 谜之声聊本地化 (“Sound of Mystery's thoughts on game localization”), with each episode lasting 40 minutes to 1 hour.¹⁴ The first episode of the game-localization series is freely accessible to all, while the subsequent 4 episodes are bundled together at a price at 40 Chinese RMB (approximately 5 EUR).

According to Gcores officials, S5 has established a strong industry reputation with lots of experience as a professional game localizer and a well-known game streamer, thereby demonstrating great potential to add ingenuity and professionalism to the Gcores collaborative podcasts.¹⁵ As stated by S5, upon being informed about the potential collaboration with Gcores, he aimed to utilize a professional media platform to foster awareness of game localization within a broader community by sharing his experiences and stories.¹⁶

Additionally, as reflected in the comments of each podcast episode, it is evident that Gcores users' attitudes are twofold. On the one hand, many comments encompass Gcores users' feedback on podcast topics, such as game localization strategies or issues, echoing and extending what S5 highlights in the series. This aligns with O'Hagan (2009), who notes that the evident interest of the community in game localization is indicative of a prevailing phenomenon. On the other hand, some Gcores users express anticipation, excitement, and satisfaction regarding the collaboration between the renowned practitioner and Gcores. This reflects the translators' celebrity effect described by Hadley and Akashi (2015), Akashi (2018) and Chen (2024a), and it further integrates the theories with the online game community. According to S5, he has gained valuable insights from the communication prepared for the podcast production and obtained useful feedback in Gcores comments on game cases or localization strategies.¹⁷

Based on the S5 case, it is evident that inviting game localizers, especially those who have a large fandom, to participate in media events centered around video games can be mutually beneficial, resulting in increased public attention. Although this series was

¹⁴ For more information, please see the podcast series: <https://www.gcores.com/albums/182>

¹⁵ ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 24 May 2024.

¹⁶ S5, email to author, 24 May 2024.

¹⁷ S5, email to author, 24 May 2024.

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released under a paid model, potentially limiting its dissemination compared to freely accessible releases, it is a remarkable synergy between game media and industry professionals that transcends mere commercial motives. Furthermore, in the digital era, diverse content-sharing activities that leverage multimodal channels (e.g. podcasts, videos, or live streaming) are frequently witnessed. These activities are widely accepted, cost-effective, and educational for individuals who seek to acquire knowledge on game localization practices and theories.

4.2.2 Personal branding and networking

Gcores provides users with the opportunity to customize their Gcores bios, a section limited to 120 Chinese characters. Among all observed game localizers, S8 has carefully crafted his bio to encourage those who are interested in establishing business collaboration with him to initiate a conversation directly through the Gcores messaging.¹⁸ Additionally, based on observation of S8's online transmedia activities on Bilibili, he regularly organizes paid online training courses for those who have an interest in systematically learning game localization.

According to S8, from July 2022 to May 2024, he organized 10 seasons of game localization training. He offered two types of course bundles per season, including the general bundle and the simplified bundle. Each season of the training lasts approximately one month. The general course bundle contains 8-10 class hours, originally priced at 600 Chinese RMB (approximately 76 EUR), while the current price has increased to 900 Chinese RMB (approximately 114 EUR).¹⁹

For all trainees who purchase either the general bundle or the simplified bundle, S8 provides pre-recorded instructional videos and feedback sessions for homework. Notably, those trainees who purchase the general bundle are offered more interactive opportunities with S8 and other trainees. For instance, they can take part in interactive Q&A sessions through open-access live streaming via S8's Bilibili account called 'Soapp'.²⁰ Moreover, there is a group project at the end of each season, wherein three to four trainees assume the role of localizers, quality analysts, and project managers.²¹

Notably, S8 uploads recordings of some live-streaming sessions into extensive video collections accessible to all netizens on his Bilibili video-sharing channel. In addition, S8 establishes communication groups on Tencent QQ, a widely-used communication application in China, to facilitate course-related discussions and disseminate game-

¹⁸ S8 is the game localizer of *Demon's Souls Remake* (2020), *Returnal* (2021), *God of War Ragnarök* (2022), and *The Last of Us Part II Remastered* (2024).

¹⁹ S8, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

²⁰ For more information, please see S8's Bilibili channel: https://space.bilibili.com/5557573?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0

²¹ S8, WeChat message to author, 1 June 2024.

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related news, such as recruitment opportunities or game releases.²² The groups often engage in intense discussions for three months following the start of the courses.²³

These transmedia activities indicate S8's conscious efforts as a game localizer and trainer to enhance the dissemination of game localization and promote his training courses across various media. On the one hand, the transmedia activities foster the development of S8's brand-building and expand S8's influence and reputation. On the other hand, they encourage individuals interested in game localization to engage with the community. As stated by S8, the objectives of creating the training courses are threefold: first, to augment the income; second, to establish connections with professional game localizers; and third, to identify and assist like-minded individuals who have yet to venture into the game localization industry.²⁴

In April 2023, the researcher (S2) attended an onsite networking event for Chinese game localizers who are based in or near Shanghai, China.²⁵ The event was organized by Angela (from Blizzard's Chinese localization team) and Danni (from TransPerfect).²⁶ The 2023 event was attended by over 50 game localizers, providing the researcher with an opportunity to meet several professional and well-known game localizers, such as S3, S5, S8, and S9. Networking offers numerous learning opportunities, which are compelling factors for game localizers to make progress (Zoraqi & Kafi 2024). Unfortunately, this significant social event in Shanghai has been conducted only three times so far (i.e., November 2019, April 2023, and April 2024). The reasons are likely associated with the interplay of industry interests, organizational vacancies, geographical location, and the localizers' schedules or personalities.

Significantly, the lack of connection between the public (e.g., gamers) and game localizers, or between game localizers and other game professionals, has resulted in an increased reliance on online social platforms. The emergence of such an elaborate form of network communication represents a novel and sophisticated approach, encompassing not only crowdsourcing (e.g., O'Hagan 2009) and game localization training (e.g., Mangiron, 2021b), but also networking opportunities for game practitioners.

The S8 case exemplifies notable issues in the Chinese game industry. First, to gain a comprehensive understanding of game localization, individuals tend to rely on industry practitioners for insights, which highlights the scarcity of professional education

²² S8, WeChat message to author, 20 December 2023.

²³ S8, WeChat message to author, 24 May 2024.

²⁴ S8, WeChat message to author, 20 December 2023.

²⁵ Shanghai serves as China's cosmopolitan hub, fostering numerous game companies, game localization teams, and game localizers.

²⁶ Although this series of events is organized by individuals, it is imperative to acknowledge the professional backgrounds and industry influence of the two main organizers and their companies may have an impact on the distribution of the events.

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dedicated to nurturing talent in game localization.²⁷ Second, even though many well-known individuals or organizations have been increasingly organizing on-site or online networking opportunities for China-based game localization practitioners, communication among game localizers, researchers, and other game practitioners is still in its early stages.

4.2.3 Distribution strategy for game localization

Game localization is essential for effective marketing and game distribution (Mangiron 2018, 131), and it encompasses the adaptation of game-related business promotional content, such as homepage descriptions or game trailers (Zhang & Song 2023). Owing to the prevailing trend of globalization, numerous game companies have increasingly emphasized enhancing and maintaining both local and global game communities (Burger-Helmchen & Cohendet 2011). Therefore, it is significant for game officials to promptly interpret, comprehend, manage, and respond to feedback from gamers.

In the age of GILT, video game companies or indie game developers are widely encouraged to recruit professional talent to manage maintenance of the sophisticated localization tasks. Additionally, many game localizers offer services in social media management and online feedback collection across language contexts, encompassing a broader spectrum of game-related localization and management activities beyond the localization of game content. Unfortunately, the implementation of such systematic and intricate community promotion or feedback monitoring tasks necessitates substantial investment (e.g., economy, talent, and time), posing challenges for stakeholders who lack sufficient financial investment or awareness (Chen 2024b).

Many Gcores-based game localizers, through friendly relationships or business partnerships, have assisted non-Chinese game companies, especially indie game developers, by writing recommendation articles or reflective notes on Gcores, such as S2 on *Before I Forget* (2020) and S7 on *Cuphead: The Delicious Last Course* (2022).²⁸ These strategies present a mutually beneficial outcome, as they not only enhance the visibility of game localizers and their contributions but also amplify the promotion of non-Chinese games in the Chinese market. Notably, such promotional events are particularly helpful for those indie games with limited financial resources to distribute their games beyond their original contexts.

Significantly, these content-sharing activities may inadvertently blur the boundary between the content sharers and their profession as game localizers, assimilating them into the game community as enthusiasts. Potential reasons include the relatively

²⁷ Some Chinese universities, such as Beijing Language and Culture University, have established game localization courses.

²⁸ For more information about the article on *Before I Forget* (2020), please see: <https://www.gcores.com/articles/148735>
For more information about the article on *Cuphead: The Delicious Last Course* (2022), please see: <https://www.gcores.com/articles/153227>

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natural click-and-view manner in which they disseminate information on Gcores and that all registered Gcores users are allowed to comment and initialize communication with the content sharers. Unfortunately, at the current stage, the lack of sufficient data hinders an in-depth investigation into the potential impact of such behaviors on game distribution and game sales, whereas the role of game localizers as intermediaries remains highly noteworthy.

Among all the game localizers observed as content sharers on Gcores, S9 presents a compelling case study that expands upon the aforementioned strategies employed in indie or niche game localization and distribution.

S9, working as the official game localizer for *Overwatch* (2016) and *Overwatch 2* (2022), is an in-house member of the Blizzard Chinese localization team.²⁹ S9 embarked on their localization journey in 2017 by working on the official localization of esports releases related to *Overwatch* (2016) and subsequently becoming a key contributor to the localization of *Overwatch* (2016) and *Overwatch 2* (2022).³⁰

Since January 5, 2021, S9 has maintained a column on Chinese social media including Bilibili, Weibo, Gcores and NGA called *shouwang yishi* 守望译事 (“Localization Stories about *Overwatch*”), featuring the introduction of *Overwatch*-related behind-stage English-Chinese game localization stories.³¹ As S9 acknowledges, content sharing serves as a valuable avenue for effective communication between the localization team and the Chinese game community.³² Additionally, sharing stories about game localization aligns with the localization branding strategy previously highlighted by Emil Lu, the former localization manager of Blizzard’s Chinese localization team.³³

According to Emil Lu, the game localizer can be invisible, but the process and value of localization can never be invisible.³⁴ Notably, S9’s distributed localization materials in *shouwang yishi* serve as promotional tools for fellow game departments, particularly as Chinese gamers often send messages to other departments’ social media accounts requesting specific information about localization efforts.

²⁹ *Overwatch* (OW) and *Overwatch 2* (OW2) are both team-based massively multiplayer online (MMO) first-person shooter (FPS) video games, developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment. OW2, released on 5 October 2022, is the updated and iterated version of OW.

³⁰ S9, WeChat message to author, 22 December 2023.

³¹ For more information about the column, please see: <https://www.gcores.com/portfolios/781>

³² S9, WeChat message to author, 22 December 2023.

³³ Emil Lu was the manager of the Blizzard Chinese localization team from June 2011 to April 2023, and the localization manager of Lilith Games from April 2023 to April 2024. The “localization branding strategy” is not strictly a business strategy, but it emphasizes the use of social media to increase the visibility of the localization works.

³⁴ Emil Lu, WeChat message to author, 24 May 2024. This is a translated and paraphrased version of the Chinese speech expressed by Emil Lu, and the original Chinese version is “曝光的从来就不是参与本地化的人，而是本地化的过程和价值。译者可以隐形，但是翻译本身不可以”。

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In January 2023, the world witnessed the suspension of cooperation between Blizzard and NetEase, whose partnership began in 2008. This intricate matter, constrained by regulations on Chinese game censorship and game accessibility (e.g., Zhang 2012; Zhang & Chiu 2020), has further influenced the localization and distribution of the *Overwatch* series. During the suspension period, Blizzard’s Chinese localization team maintained the localization of game content and important social media releases in Simplified or Traditional Chinese, whereas the official social media channels for the game, which were used to disseminate a wide range of information, were temporarily inactive (Chen 2024a, 3). Since April 2024, when the notice of the restart of the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation was released, the official *Overwatch* accounts on various Chinese media platforms resumed activity.

Intriguingly, even during the severe scenario of the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation suspension, S9 persistently disseminates content through his personally established column, *shouwang yishi*. S9’s behavior represents a strategic approach to extending the localization branding strategy by continuously enhancing the visibility of localization works within the online community. As emphasized by S9 repeatedly in the serialized content, the act of sharing is inherently subjective and closely tied to personal initiative, with no requirement from the company.

Significantly, it appears that S9 does not intentionally prioritize personal achievement or exposure. Rather, a handful of references and positive comments about teamwork are frequently mentioned. Additionally, S9 personally funds digital artists to contribute to the series, thereby making the content more vivid and attractive.³⁵

For instance, in an article introducing the stories on the localization of a newly-released game hero called Lifeweaver (*shengmingzhisuo* 生命之梭), he invites an illustrator to draw a picture showing how Lifeweaver, a playable character, uses the character’s ability “Life Grip” to drag B.O.B, a non-playable character, in a newly-released seasonal game mode called “B.O.B. And Weave”.³⁶ According to S9, the inclusion of illustrations stems from his desire for content perfection, as sometimes the description of game characters or game situations cannot be properly conveyed through text or game screenshots, and the cost of each illustration ranges from 80 RMB (approximately 10 EUR) to 1700 RMB (approximately 215 EUR).³⁷

S9’s sharing has elicited two major types of feedback. On the one hand, when Chinese gamers, under that special period of Blizzard-NetEase disputes, expressed that their previous investments of time, money, and emotions had depreciated because of the game removal and content inactivity (Chen 2024a, 3), S9’s sharing may have helped restore some of the reputation of the game’s Chinese localization team. On the other

³⁵ S9, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

³⁶ For more information, please see: <https://www.gcores.com/articles/165200>

³⁷ S9, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

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hand, a significant portion of online users still lack a comprehensive understanding of the precise concepts and duties of game localization, let alone interpret the objectives of S9's sharing. Thus, such consistently pertinent updates on game localization on social media by an individual, who is affiliated with the company, can exacerbate community confusion because of the dearth of information from the official Chinese channel.

The S9 case exemplifies the research significance of translators' exposure in online communities, especially when such exposure represents a highly proactive and constructive undertaking. Furthermore, further investigations could explore the subjective awareness of translators in the digital age and include the investigation of reception.

5 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the practices of Chinese game localizers' online content sharing on Gcores, a game-centered social media platform.

The analysis of sharing features is focused on the examination of what, how and why game localizers share about game localization. Revolving around these dimensions, the study delves into the potential ramifications observed in online sharing. First, game localizers' sharing is usually conducted casually, with no specific regulations regarding format, content and release schedule. Second, the significant use of cross-platform collaborations for content dissemination is also widely observed. Furthermore, sharing not only disseminates knowledge but also fosters communication, enhances personal branding, boosts collaboration, and promotes game distribution. These intricate effects, in turn, contribute to the diversification and complexity of the motivations behind content sharing, which correspondingly prompts some game localizers to pay attention to the details, like the sharing schedule or content structure. Last but not least, content sharing is also constrained by factors such as the relationship between game localizers and game projects, as well as game localizers' stances, profits, and personal characteristics.

From an industry perspective, content sharing activities indicate game localizers' eagerness to network with a wider community and receive feedback not only from industry professionals but also from the public. Additionally, the sharing also exposes some issues within the Chinese game localization industry, such as limited communication among practitioners, the imbalanced allocation of resources in certain cities or regions, or the lack of industry guidance. Notably, while sharing is overall beneficial, the act of sharing seems to underscore the importance of creating new roles in social media distribution or game community management.

Concerning the theories, although the notion of visibility in this study does not align directly with previous scholarly proposals (e.g., Venuti 1986), most cases highlight the

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association between visibility and social media in the contemporary era. The utilization of nethnography and practice-led research underscores the necessity for researchers to adapt to industry advancements, particularly by actively engaging in social activities and industrial events.

The transformative power of translation, as highlighted by Venuti (2012), has a profound impact, constantly intertwining with new media forms, technical tools, user behaviors, and relationships with communication and translation (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda 2019). Accordingly, this study follows the trend of translation development and social practice and further extends the conclusion that translation is an interpretive act with far-reaching social effects.

Future research could explore the perspectives and feedback of game localizers, the reception of content sharing within game communities, and the impact of sharing on game distribution and sales.

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Gameography

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