

**MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF  
FINNISH AND JAPANESE MOBILE GAME  
DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS**

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**Yi-Tung Cheng  
International Business and Entrepreneurship  
Supervisor: Mari Suoranta**



## ABSTRACT

Author Yi-Tung Cheng	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Both the marketing communication strategy of mobile game industry and the industry itself have been drastically evolving in the past years since the development of computation, data transfer and communication technology on mobile devices. Marketing communication has been considered a significant part in marketing strategy, but the marketing communication strategy, activity and channels were not well investigated so far. In this study, 9 SMEs Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers provided their experience on how they built up marketing communication strategy for their targeting markets, which marketing communication channels they have used and how they chose the channels. Through this study, it is understood that the marketing communication strategy and activities of both Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers were highly constrained by their financial resource and their own experience on the activities and channels. On the other hand, some difference in user preference in media channels potentially caused the phenomena that some media channels are only used by Japanese mobile game developers and publishers but not by Finnish ones. This study revealed that utilizing marketing communication channels in marketing activity effectively and financially efficiently on the targeted market based on the understanding of user preference of the targeted market could be the potential keys to succeed in the targeted market.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Accompanied with the fast development of the Internet technology and communication technology, mobile game applications can be downloaded to mobile devices, including mobile phones, tablets or mobile game devices, within several minutes at any places covered by broad band mobile data transfer services, such as 3G or 4G/LTE data transfer services. Together with the evolution of mobile device hardware, mobile games designed with high-quality 3D graphics that requires relatively high hardware performance and could only be executed on specialized and high-performance game computers a decade ago can now be run on mobile devices smoothly without further cost specialized for game play. Integrated with motion sensors, microphone and Global Positioning System (GPS), mobile devices now can even also be used to play more diverse video games which can only be played with specialized computers such as Wii console produced by Nintendo several years ago. High-performance mobile devices nowadays expanded the environment for game players to enjoy games with quality as good as the games on specialized computers in the past and improves the access to new games through the Internet as well (Chowdhury, 2015).

Furthermore, more games, especially mobile games, are available for download free of charge since 2010s. Just as short as 10 years ago, game players needed to go and buy game software in physical shops, or pay online for downloading games around 5 years ago, and there were very few high-quality games available free of charge for downloading. The low cost, both on software and hardware, for playing a high-quality video game now on mobile devices makes mobile game industry grow fast globally (Alex, 2011). Moreover, App Store on Apple's iOS operation system and Google Play on Google's Android operation system opened the huge opportunity for all game developers, ranging from giant game companies to individual personal game developers, in the world to enter game industry (Alex, 2011), which encouraged numerous individual game developers to enter this market and stimulated the development of mobile game industry and market as well.

Nonetheless, even though the barrier to distribute video games to different countries and markets through the Internet has been relatively much lower, it's very rare to see that games produced in western countries succeed in both western and eastern markets, nor games produced in eastern countries to succeed in both western and eastern markets. Since the mobile game industry has been such a fast developing industry, there are very few studies existing relevant to this phenomenon, and this issue was rarely investigated and mostly unknown (MarkeZine, 2014; Terao, 2015).

Moreover, while considering marketing strategy for games, it could be separated into product part and communication part. The product part refers to the game itself, including the game mechanism design, graphic design, quality or in-game texts of the game, and the communication part represents the design, distribution of the messages from the product to the audience that is game

player in this study. Hevian (2007) revealed that the in-game texts could be one factor in the product part that affects the performance of the game in a culturally different country or market. Consalvo (2006) mentioned that console game could be culturally hybrid between Japan and USA, which represents that the product part of game could be potentially culturally attractive for both game players in Japan and USA, where Japan is one of the representative cultures in eastern markets and USA is the one in western markets. As a result, this study would focus on the marketing communication part between mobile game developers and publishers and western and eastern game players respectively to explore the reason why there are so few mobile games that can achieve success in both western and eastern markets.

Looking from the aspect of the size of mobile game developers and publishers, there could be many differences between relatively big-size mobile game developers and publishers and small ones. Generally speaking, big companies own more financial resource, manpower and potentially more experience. On the contrast, small companies make decision faster and potentially could focus on a specific area easier. In the marketing communication field of mobile game industry, the financial resource plays a very important role since some of the effective marketing communication channels require financial resource to execute. Since most of the mobile game developers and publishers in the world are small-sized and lack of financial resource, this study would focus on how small-sized mobile game developers and publishers execute effective marketing communication strategies to build up knowledge for small-sized mobile game developers and publishers to strive in the competitive market. The definition of small-sized company in this study is referred to the definition of SMEs by EU recommendation 2003/361 (EU Commission, 2003).

Company category	Staff headcount	Turnover	or	Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m		≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m		≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m		≤ € 2 m

Table 1. Definition of SMEs by EU recommendation 2004/361.

The definition of “western markets” and “eastern markets” could be ambiguous. However, by looking at the top ranked mobile games in the major mobile game markets, it’s not difficult to find some patterns. The major mobile markets in western world are USA, UK, Germany, and the ones in eastern world are Japan, China and Korea (Sidora Marketing, 2016). As a result, comparing USA and Japanese mobile game market may provide a relatively proper angle to understand how the difference is.

Furthermore, several top mobile game in USA market were developed and published by Finnish mobile game companies (Neogames, 2015), which

leads to questions relevant to the marketing communication strategy of Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Although there are more than 200 mobile game developers and publishers in Finland (Neogames, 2015), how can these developers and publishers deliver their marketing messages for their games to foreign markets since the Finnish domestic market is so small? How do Finnish game developers and publishers feel about other foreign markets even though Finnish language is the mother tongue of Finnish people and Finnish people can generally use English well? What is the possible marketing communication strategy for Finnish mobile game developers and publishers?

Japanese mobile game market is partially similar to the market of USA. Japanese mobile game market is also one of the major markets in the world (Sidora Marketing, 2016). However, the top mobile games in Japan are mostly developed and published by Japanese mobile game developers and publishers (Clegg, 2016). Japanese mobile game developers and publishers seldom succeed outside of Japanese market (NewSphere, 2014). These phenomena also lead to similar questions: what is the possible marketing communication strategy for Japanese mobile game developers and publishers? What are the major channels for marketing communication in mobile game industry in Japan? How do Japanese mobile game developers and publishers acquire game players for their games? As a result, this study aims to investigate the potential answers to the following questions:

- What is the marketing communication strategy used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers respectively?
- What are the effective marketing communication channels used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers respectively?
- What are the differences between the marketing communication strategies used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers?
- What are the differences between the effective marketing communication channels used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers?

This study aims to investigate and understand how relatively small-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers are doing similarly and differently on their marketing communication strategy to successfully launch and distribute their games in the markets. When the questions can be answered, the acquired knowledge could be potentially beneficial for western mobile game developers and publishers to enter eastern markets and vice versa to activate and stimulate the further development of the global mobile game industry and market when they are building up their marketing communication strategy for their mobile game products.

This study is structured in several parts. The overall background and the research target and questions of this study are described in the chapter of introduction. In the second part, the development of information technology, communication technology and software, hardware performance are reviewed. The connection between these technologies and video games and mobile games are also described. Then overview of Japanese mobile game industry and Finnish mobile game industry are reviewed and introduced to understand the composition, structure and difference of these two industries and markets as the third part of this study to have a basic understanding to these two specific markets in advance. In the fourth chapter, the relevant theoretical frames are introduced to review the marketing communication related findings and theories available so far. In the following chapter, the methodology for social science research was reviewed and the criteria introduced in this study are given details and why this study takes qualitative approach is explained. The specific questions used in interviews are listed up as well. In the results, the sixth chapter, the data recorded and transcribed is analyzed, classified and made connections to the theoretical frames and each categories. The marketing communication strategy and channels used by each Japanese and Finnish mobile game developer and publisher are discussed. The conclusion follows as the last part of this report.



## 2 MOBILE GAMES

### 2.1 Development of mobile game

Mobile games are video games that are designed for mobile devices, including cell phones, tablets, portable gaming systems, etc. The typical brands of each device are iPhone/iPad Mini/iPad with iOS operation system from Apple, smart phone series from Samsung with Android operation system, DS portable game device from Nintendo or PlayStation Portable from Sony, and so on. The history of mobile game can be traced back to the globally popular game called Snack installed in Nokia 6610 cell phone in 1997 (Wright, 2008). Although ancient games such as Snack is very simple in game mechanism and lack of visual or sound effects, it still became one of the most famous mobile game in the world due to the fact that it's originally installed in almost all cell phones produced by Nokia and the fact that players don't need to buy and bring another portable game device with them to play a game. In the past decade, accompanied with the development of technologies in computing speed, data transfer speed on the Internet and opened platforms for mobile game production, mobile games have been developing very fast (Chikhani, 2015).

#### 2.1.1 Computation speed of mobile devices

Computation speed of device has been a critical limitation for game development all the time. Graphic calculation for producing real visual effects needs to be supported by powerful computation power, or serious delay will occur frequently in the game play, which will bring terrible experience in the game play. As a result, one of the important issues in video game development has been how to optimally utilize the computation power on current device to produce the most real player experience (Liapis, Yannakakis, & Togelius, 2014). Computation technology has evolved drastically and amazingly (Experts Exchange, LLC, 2015). The speed of computation is doubled and doubled in relatively short time interval, and the volume of computing device became much and much smaller than we expected (Puiu, 2015). The first iPhone introduced by Apple in 2007 owns twice or higher computation speed than the video game console machine PlayStation launched by Sony in 1994 (Experts-exchange.com, 2016). Moreover, the size of iPhone is as small as hand size comparing to the desktop size of PlayStation. Similarly, iPhone 6 of Apple can compute as fast as the video game console PlayStation 2 of Sony, and Samsung Galaxy S6 computes almost twice faster than Xbox with a much smaller volume as well. The powerful computation on cell phones such as iPhone or Samsung Galaxy undoubtedly has provided mobile game development an environment that is almost similar to or higher than the level of game development on PlayStation 2 (Experts-exchange.com, 2016), which brings mobile game players much better

experience on small mobile devices and directly brings the huge potential for further growth in mobile game market.

### **2.1.2 Mobile data transfer**

Different from traditional card or board games, video games are digitally recorded. However, in order to play video games, people need to go to game shops to have the game programs in physical recorders such as floppy disks, cassettes or CDs before the development of the Internet (Edwards, 2010). Based on the fast development of the Internet technology at the end of 1990s, the data of games could be downloaded through the Internet with physical phone lines or cables (Computer History Museum, 2016). Mobile data transfer technology started to evolve from the beginning of 2000s. Mobile 1G technology only allows distant wireless transfer in analog voice. Mobile 2G technology allows simple data transfer such as text messages with speed around or less than 0.5 Mega bites per second (Mbps). Then mobile 3G technology provides data transfer speed up to several or tens Mbps, which makes it possible to send and receive digital photos, music files or map information. Nowadays, Mobile 4G/LTE technology offers data transfer speed up to tens to hundreds Mbps (Bhalla & Bhalla, 2010). Furthermore, the cost for mobile data transfer became affordable in the past years (Louis, 2013). The evolution of mobile data transfer speed and cost created new channels for mobile game distribution.

The new distribution channels through mobile data transfer provide players much higher convenience than ever before. With fast and low-cost mobile data transfer service together with a cell phone, game players can check game information on their phone at home, at a café, at a bus stop or other places covered by the data transfer service. Game players don't need to find an hour to go to a game shop to buy video games or stay at home to download games. Instead, game players can download games within seconds or minutes at home, at a café or at a bus stop. This change brings video games and game players much closer than ever, which also drove the growth of number in game players.

### **2.1.3 Open platforms for mobile game development and distribution**

In the past, video games were developed by game developers and sold by game publishers (Perez, 2012). Game developers plan, design, draw, code and test games, and publishers market and sell the games. Publishers used to own the power of their own brands and their physical distribution channels so that they buy games from developers or cooperate with game developers and sell the games through their physical channels (Plunkett, 2011; Kishimoto, 2013). Since it is not efficient and effective for game developers to own the physical distribution channels, it was very difficult for game developers to publish their games by themselves. Therefore, it is almost impossible for game developers to publish their video games by themselves since customers don't recognize their brand and it would cost too much to acquire distribution channels by themselves (Kishimoto, 2013).

However, by utilizing the Internet as the distribution channels, game developers don't have to allocate resource to acquire physical distribution channels anymore, which make it easier to publish games by game developers themselves (Think Tank, 2009). Furthermore, the major smart phone operation system developers, including Apple (iOS system) and Google (Android system), opened the platforms for developing and distributing mobile games on their operation systems (Goode, 2016). Apple and Google are both providing mobile application developer programs for game developers to upload their mobile application on their online stores such as App Store of Apple or Google Play of Google (Viswanathan, 2016). Mobile application developer programs and online application stores from these two companies provide individual game developers to create and sell their games without cooperation with traditional game publishers (Think Tank, 2009). Open platforms that cut the cost for acquiring physical distribution channels encouraged individual game developers, and small or medium-sized firms to enter mobile game market, which stimulated the development of mobile game market. Furthermore, as online platforms, App Store and Google Play utilize the Internet as a border-less environment for game developers to distribute their games even without any presence in foreign markets (Manyika et al., 2014). Game developers can launch their games crossing national borders through the Internet without investing significant capitals, efforts or time nowadays.

#### **2.1.4 Cost of video games**

The cost for playing video games comes from hardware and software respectively. In the early age, a personal computer or a game console machine together with a TV is the necessary equipment for playing video games. Then, game players need to buy game software. However, the cost for enjoying a game on mobile devices now has become extremely low (Rogerson, 2013).

With the current mobile devices integrated with powerful computation function, there are no needs to spend further cost for hardware other than the mobile devices themselves for playing games on mobile devices. Moreover, the cost for game software has decreased drastically as well due to the innovation of pricing models. Traditionally, game software is considered as a product that needs to be purchased to use. However, in the more and more competitive market of mobile games, game developers and publishers started to provide different pricing models for their games (Loomls, 2014). One model is to provide free version of the game with limited contents and request game players to pay for the game if they want to enjoy full contents of the game (Munir, 2014). Another model is to provide full contents of the game free with in-app purchase function for players to pay in the game to save time or to become better than other players (Munir, 2014). The other model is to provide a game completely free without in-app purchase function with in-app advertisement display which has the revenue mechanism similar to the advertisement displayed on webpages (Munir, 2014). In-app purchase options and in-app advertisement for mobile game monetization have become the mainstream of monetization model for

mobile games, which represents the fact that more and more mobile games are free of charge for downloading and playing. In fact, the market share in revenue base of free apps with in-app purchase in App Store in USA had increase from 46% to 79% from 2012 to 2014 (Schoger, 2014). This extensively lowered the cost for playing games and boosted the population of game players for mobile games. While the total cost of playing mobile games decreases, more and more people start to play mobile games.

In short, several critical factors that limited the development of mobile games were improved in the past years. The hardware computation function of mobile devices grew a lot so that high-quality video game can perform well on a small mobile device. Second, the installation of game software can be done through the Internet to mobile devices in relatively short time and low cost due to the development of mobile data transfer technology. Additionally, the cost for playing video games on mobile devices is comparatively very little now because of not extra cost except the phone for hardware expense and free download models for game software.

## 2.2 Core and casual games

While observing the behavior of game players, game players spend different amount of time for different games. The average amount of time spent for a game could be considered as a feature of the game. Under this consideration, game players could be roughly classified to core game players and casual game players (Casual Games Association, 2007; Kuittinen, Kultima, Niemelä, & Paavilainen, 2007). It is explained that casual game players spend less time and are less enthusiastic on games than core game players. This concept of using “core” and “casual” for the behavior of game players was developed and applied for as a feature or a genre of games. As a result, nowadays people refer “core” and “casual” more to a type of a game rather than the behavior of game players. However, precisely speaking, there is no clear line between a core game and a casual game. The concept of “core” and “casual” is generally based on how much time game players spend in a game and how enthusiastic game players are into the game. The amount of time and level of enthusiasm are difficult to be separated into two groups. Therefore, there are derivative concepts emerged such as “hardcore” or “semicore”. “Hardcore” represents the behavior of game players who spend more time and are more enthusiastic than core game players, and “semicore” is the behavior of game players between core and casual game players, which were also applied for the concepts for games such as “hardcore” games and “semicore” games.

Casual games own several features. According to the Casual Games White Paper 2007 Market Report (Casual Games Association, 2007), casual games are defined as “video games developed for the mass consumer, even those who would not normally regard themselves as a game player”. As the feature of casual games, casual games are easy to start and easy to stop. Furthermore, cas-

ual games are easy to access, easy to learn, require no previous experience or skills. At the same time, there is very little influence to the game to pause or stop playing in casual games, which is another feature of casual games. Microsoft Solitaire and Tetris are the typical examples of casual games. The other feature is the monetization model. The monetization model of core and casual evolved together with the characteristics of the games. In order to make game players spend more time and be more into the games, core games are developed with more addictive designs, such as higher difficulty that need to be resolved with relatively complicated strategy, social networking events, or internal mini games which generally need game developers to invest longer time and more budget for development. Therefore, generally speaking, core games are produced by relatively big-sized game companies. Due to the intensive addictiveness of core games, game companies monetize these games by in-app purchase as an effective way. On the contrast, although casual games can be equipped with some addictive designs as core games as well, casual game are commonly and relatively simpler in game design or structure and own less addictive features. Since the addictiveness is lower, casual games tend to monetize by in-app advertisement, including banner advertisement, interstitial advertisement or video advertisement and so on, together with in-app purchase options such as paying for advertisement elimination or better in-game weapons. As described previously, it's difficult to precisely define and separate all games into the two genres: core and casual.

### 3 JAPANESE AND FINNISH MOBILE GAME INDUSTRY

#### 3.1 Mobile game industry

Because of the fast growing trend of the global mobile game market, more and more companies are entering mobile game industry, which make the composition of stakeholders in this industry becomes complicated. Shim (2015) summarized an industry landscape map for Korean mobile game industry with some of the major stakeholders on it. Although the original country of this map is not directly relevant to this study, the overview of this landscape map for stakeholders in mobile game industry provides good reference for understanding.

The core role in mobile game industry is game developers. Game developers plan, design, code and test games. Game developers are like farmers in agriculture. They produce games which bring the original value of the whole industry. Game developers own the function of game design, graphic design, program coding, even though some of the functions can be outsourced. A game development team usually is composed of producer, director, planner, programmer, graphic designer and sound creator (Kishimoto, 2013; Tokuoka, 2015). Publishers are companies which provide or focus on functions of planning, branding, marketing, promotion, sales, distribution and customer service. Publishers usually work closely with game developers in order to efficiently bring games to the market (Kishimoto, 2013; Tokuoka, 2015). Relatively big publishers also do game development by themselves. Similarly, game developers own marketing function may publish games by themselves as well.

There are many other stakeholders in mobile game industry. App store platforms such as App Store of Apple and Google Play of Google provide online marketplace (Tokuoka, 2015). Gaming media are channels connecting games and game players. Advertisement agencies provide advertisement channels for game developers or publishers to deliver their marketing messages to game players (Tokuoka, 2015). Marketing service providers offer specific marketing functions to provide complementary functions for game developers and publishers. Translation service providers are needed when game developers or publishers are trying to launch their games in foreign markets where different languages are used.



Figure 1. Korean mobile game industry landscape (Shim, 2015).

There are specialized stakeholders in mobile game industry which are relevant to monetization (Varma, 2015). The area in monetization of mobile game industry is highly intensive in technology and advertisement (figure 2). The typical categories of these companies are advertisement networks companies and data analytics companies. Advertisement network companies play the role as the bridge between advertiser and digital media. Advertisement network companies receive advertisement projects and materials from advertiser and deliver the advertisement to each digital media they are connected. Data analytics companies develop technology to acquire traffic data of user access to mobile apps and provide these data to mobile app developers or publishers to offer more insights for further improvement to raise more user access. Due to the focus in this area on user acquisition based on advertisement and the importance of investment efficiency verification for advertisement, advertisement network companies and data analytics companies are significant in mobile game industry. The other significant factor that makes this monetization related area much better developed than other traditional industry is the capability of using mobile internet connection and mobile device function to trace user behaviour of specific app on mobile devices, which makes it possible to analyse user behaviour and raise the accuracy for market targeting through technology facilitation.



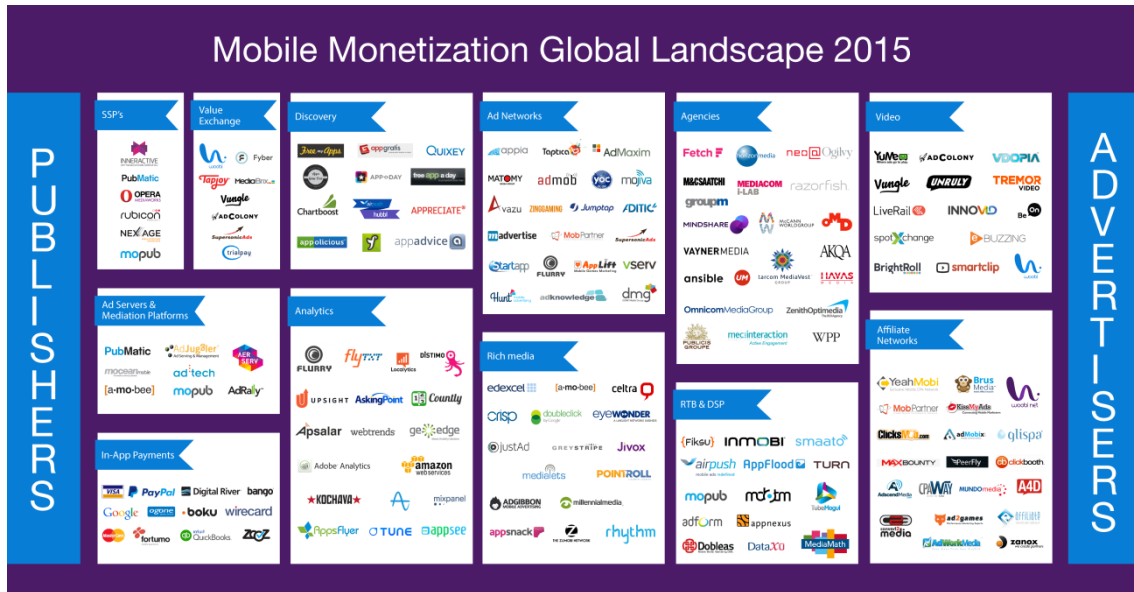


Figure 2. Mobile monetization landscape in 2015 (Varma, 2015).

### 3.2 Japanese mobile game industry

Japanese game industry had been leading global game industry for decades. The advanced development of video games by Japanese game giants such as Nintendo and Sony had taken significant marketing share in the global video game market because of the well-developed hardware equipment and software application. The limitation of being compulsory to cooperate with gaming console machine companies for gaming software developers was released in mobile game industry since the hardware is no longer limited to specialized gaming machines but general smart phones (Kishimoto, 2013). As a result, mobile game developers in the world have less limitation to develop mobile games, which makes Japanese game developers lose their superiority in global mobile game market, which potentially resulted in the situation that Japanese mobile game developers are more focused on Japanese domestic market rather than overseas markets.

In 2015, the market size of Japanese mobile game was estimated to be 5.16 billion USD which is the second biggest mobile game marketing in the world (EEDAR, 2015). Japanese mobile game users are reported to spend 4 more times of time playing mobile games than players in USA, UK and Germany (Famitsu App, 2015). The mobile game player population in Japan was estimated to be 33.8 million in 2014 (Famitsu, 2015). With a second biggest mobile game market as its domestic market and a relatively long history in game industry, the mobile game industry in Japan has developed to an almost complete structure consisting of Japanese market specialized game design, graphic designers, game media, advertisement agency and marketing services. The big domestic market and special Japanese culture make Japanese game developers or publishers fo-



cus on Japanese domestic market first before internationalization, generally speaking.

Moreover, due to the fast growth of mobile game market in Japan, many companies have tried to enter this market. Traditional game development companies have shifted their business from console games to mobile games. Other companies which are operating social network service or media service related business also have tried to enter this market. Also some personal developers or small development teams have tried to produce a big hit game in such a fast growing and open market. The big and amazingly growing domestic market attracted many and various companies and people to enter mobile game industry in Japan.

### **3.3 Finnish mobile game industry**

Comparing to the history of Japanese game industry, the history of Finnish game industry is relative young. The oldest game company in Finland which is still existing is as old as 20 years. Due to the development of digital distribution through the Internet for mobile games, Angry Birds successfully became the first big hit mobile game from Finland in 2009. Following its huge success, a start-up boom started in 2011 and many young game developers expect they can produce another huge hit like Angry Birds and become another great game company like Rovio. Another great success in the mobile game industry of Finland is the significant achievement of Supercell in free-to-play monetization model in mobile games in 2012.

According to the report publish by Neogames (Neogames, 2015), there are more than 260 game companies in Finland and 179 game companies were established between 2011 and 2014. 38% of the game companies are located in Helsinki area. However, there are 7 game clusters out of Helsinki area in Turku, Tampere, Oulu, Kajaani, Koensuu, Kotka and Kouvola respectively with support from European Union. Besides, 85% of the game companies in Finland are developing mobile games. The total employees in Finnish game industry were reported to be around 2,500 people in 2014 and the total revenue of Finnish game industry was reported to be 1,800 million euros in 2014.

In the aspect of financial support, Finnish game developers seem to be in a relatively good environment from the aspect of public funding support. Most of the young mobile game development teams are supported by Finnish startup grant which can financially support the teams basic funding for 6 months (Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2015). Furthermore, Finnish government also provides an advanced chance for funding to game developers through a public organization called Tekes. According to the reports (Tekes, 2015), 23 to 43 game developers were chosen to be supported by the funding from Tekes per year from 2011 to 2014. The average amount for funding is 300,000 euros per game development company.

Furthermore, hub organizations in Finnish game industry perform well and play the key role in the development of the industry. The national hub organizations such as IGDA Finland or Neogames provide the function of information exchange or networking in the country. Other local hub organizations located in each major cities, including Turku, Tampere, Joensuu, Kajaani, Jyväskylä, Oulu and so on, offer chances for all game industry related professionals to exchange information and create opportunities in each city while provide connection to national or international hub organizations with upper level. Hub organizations in Finnish game industry activates the whole community in game industry and bring up more cooperation.

Nevertheless, most of the mobile game companies in Finland are small teams (Neogames, 2015). A typical basic game developing team is composed of a graphic designer and a programmer. In some special situation, even only one person can develop games as long as the person can cover both graphic design and programming functions. Sometimes there would also be game designers, marketing officer or business manager in the team. Generally speaking, most of the mobile game development teams are lack of marketing function, including product marketing, promotion and sales, marketing communication and so on. Many Finnish universities provide programs for game development (Neogames, 2015). However, it seems that the game-related education programs focus more on programming and design rather than game business (Ylä-Tuuhonen, 2013). This situation potentially brought out many game development teams and professionals into the industry who are relatively lack of knowledge in doing business in game industry and in surviving in such a competitive global mobile game market, which is the potential problem of Finnish game industry.

## 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Marketing and marketing communication

#### 4.1.1 Communication in marketing

The basic model of mass communications extensively recognized nowadays was developed in 1950s and well adopted by Fill (2009). The linear model of communications is composed of 7 elements and 2 main processes in the whole communication procedure (figure 3). The communication procedure starts from the messenger sender who may be an individual or an organization. The intended information is then encoded into a commonly transmittable and understandable style which is the message. The information source, encoding and message formation all happen inside the sender itself. When the message, the deliverable form, is transmitted to the receiver, the message is decoded and recognized by the receiver who may also be an individual or an organization. After this linear communication procedure, the sender may or may not have chances to observe or confirm the response from the receiver. In many cases, the information recognized by the receiver may be different from the information composed by the sender. The reasons may include inappropriate encoding process or decoding process. Noise in the message delivery process is another important factor that distorts the original information. This fundamental model of mass communication is the basic concept of communication procedure and also provides us important angles to look into marketing communication.

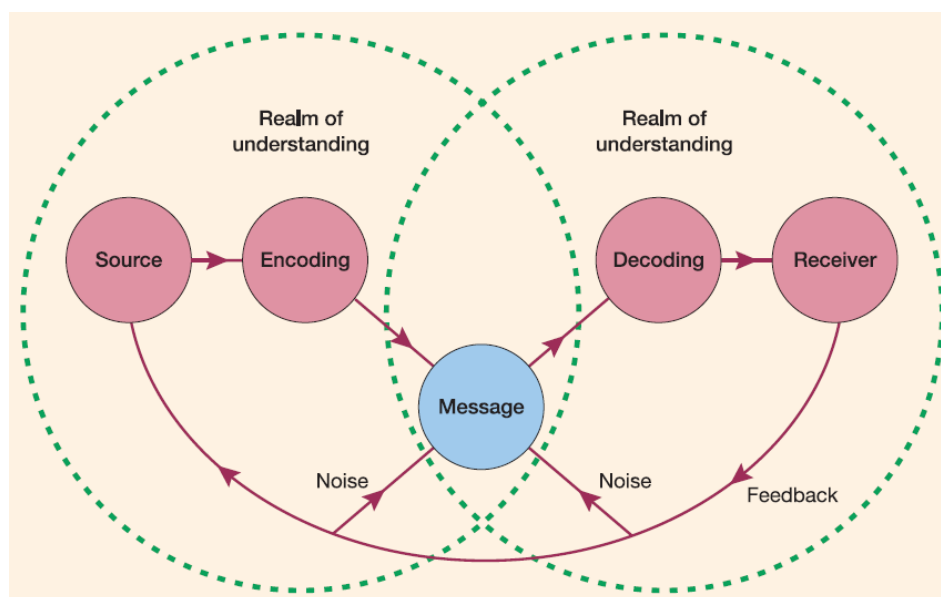


Figure 3. A linear model of communications (Fill, 2009).

Moreover, "Communication" is defined as "Sharing information with others by speaking, writing, moving your body, or using other signals" or "Talking about your thoughts and feelings, and help other people to understand them" on Cambridge dictionaries online (Cambridge University Press, 2015). According to these definitions, communication is related to information exchange among human beings. Communication happens among all human beings and it evolves to different directions in each scientific field. The specific phenomenon occurs in communication between different cultures is referred to the science of intercultural communication. The communication for effective education can be considered as the science of communication in education. The communication between the products or services and the customers can be considered as marketing communication. Duncan & Moriarty (1998) tried to define the position of communication in marketing. The authors described that communication in marketing has been planned and implemented for the purpose of persuasion. However, communication in marketing should be taken as a more interactive activity especially it's the human activity that links people together and create relationship. Communication plays the role to develop, disseminate knowledge among people.

The definition of marketing has been approved by American Marketing Association in 2013 as following.

*"Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."*

In another word, it represents that marketing as a general name of a kind of activity that provides value to customers, clients, partners or related people through creating, communicating delivering products and services. Being part of the basis of latest definition from American Marketing Association, Kotler & Levy (1969) described that marketing is involved with product development, pricing, distribution and communication. They also described that customer communication as a significant part in marketing activity. Furthermore, they expanded the concept of marketing communication from advertising and public relations to "everything about an organization", which means everything related to the impression of the organization, including the organization's physical building, employees, managers, news or articles on magazines. Through the definition of marketing from American Marketing Association and the concept from Kotler & Levy (1969), communication in marketing could be referred to the activity of connecting the customers and their understanding to the products or services provided by the organization and the organization itself, which is demonstrated by Hughes & Fill (2007) from another angle (figure 4). Hughes & Fill (2007) classified the communications between the organization and targeted audience to four genres: planned, unplanned, service experience-based and product experience-based marketing communications. This framework well covered the idea of Kotler & Levy (1969). Product or service development, pricing and distribution are related to product and service experienced-based

communications. Advertising and public relations can be considered as planned marketing communications, and organization's physical building, employees, managers, news or articles on magazines are in the category of unplanned marketing communications. This framework offers a clear view of marketing communication between the organizations and the targeted audience.

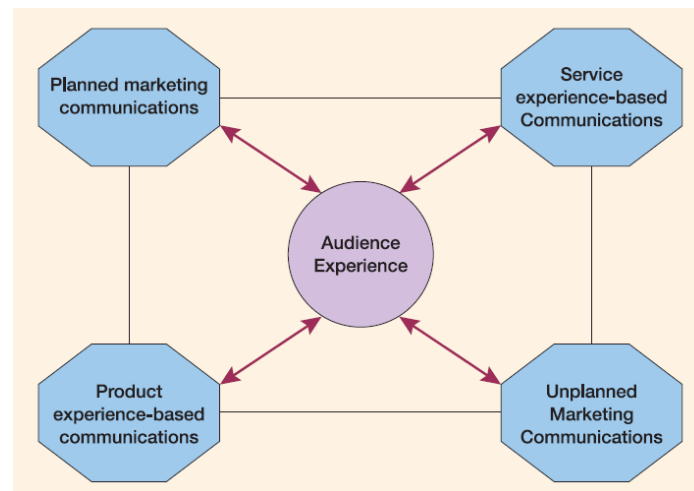


Figure 4. A macro-framework of marketing communications (Hughes & Fill, 2007).

Being similar with Kotler & Levy's concept, Duncan & Moriarty proposed a communication-based marketing model to control and unify the corporate and marketing message between the company and stakeholders (figure 5). In the case of a company which owns departments or teams with various functions, there could be various messages delivered from each department or team to different stakeholders. Without unification of the core meaning of the messages and without good organization of the messages, there may be some negative impacts to the brand value or the relationship to the stakeholders. This proposed communication-based marketing model could potentially help management of the company to recognize important elements related to marketing, marketing communication and stakeholder relationship management, such as corporate focus, processes and organizational infrastructure.

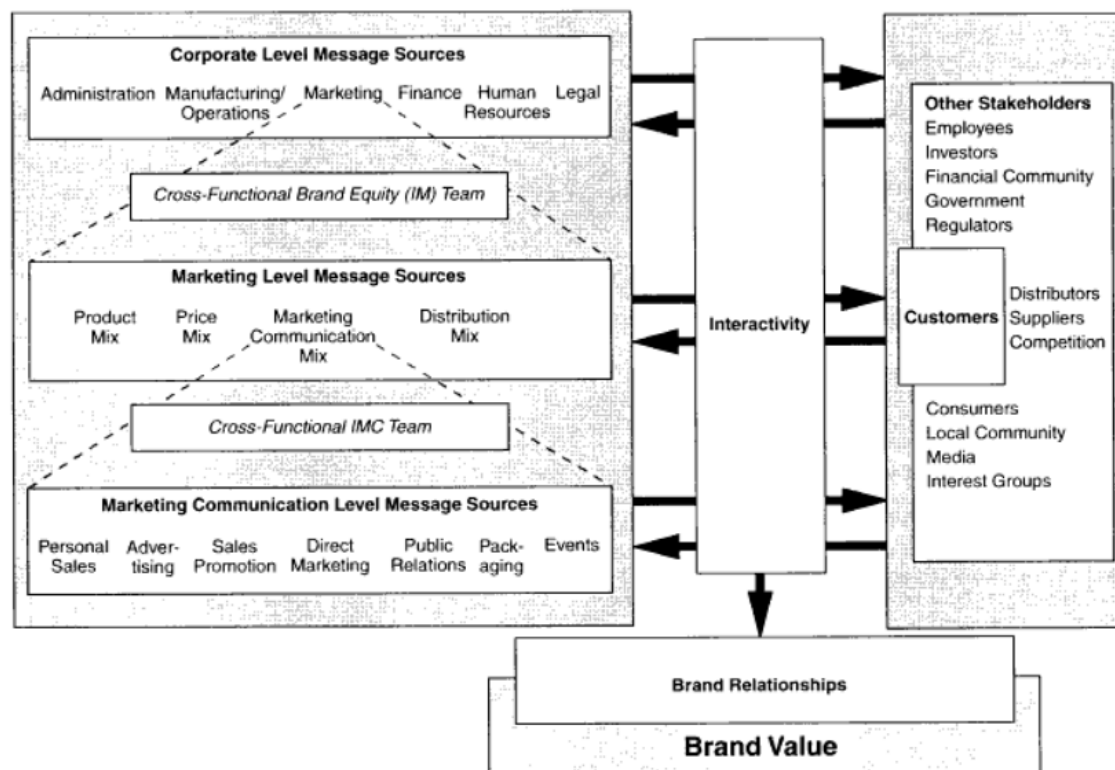


Figure 5. A communication-based marketing model for managing relationships (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998).

Lane Keller (2001) described marketing communication as the means by which firms to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers about the brands they sell. Although marketing communication can be broadly considered as the messages by words, graphs, photos, sound, video or any forms perceived by the customers, in the past decade it focuses much more on delivery of messages to the customers. The reason could be the explosive amount of information and the information channels due to the development of technology, which results in the further development of a new concept in marketing communication: integrated marketing communication.

#### 4.1.2 Communication strategy and marketing channels

As described by Hughes & Fill (2007), marketing communications can be classified into 4 genres. Nevertheless, the parts of product experience-based and service experience-based marketing communications are more commonly planned and executed by marketing managers rather than marketing communication managers, and the planned marketing communications are usually the focus of marketing communication managers since unplanned marketing communications are not able to be anticipated.

There are three major elements in planned marketing communications: tools, media and messages (Fill, 2009). Messages are the information that an individual or an organization wants their targeted audience to recognize. The messages are delivered by different methods through different channels. The

methods are also called tools which include direct marketing, public relations, personal selling, advertising or sales promotion as the typically representative ones. The channels are the media that form the road between the individual or organization and the targeted audience, which can be print, TV, broadcast, cinema or websites. In this research, the diversified and specific channels or media existing in mobile game industry will be further investigated.

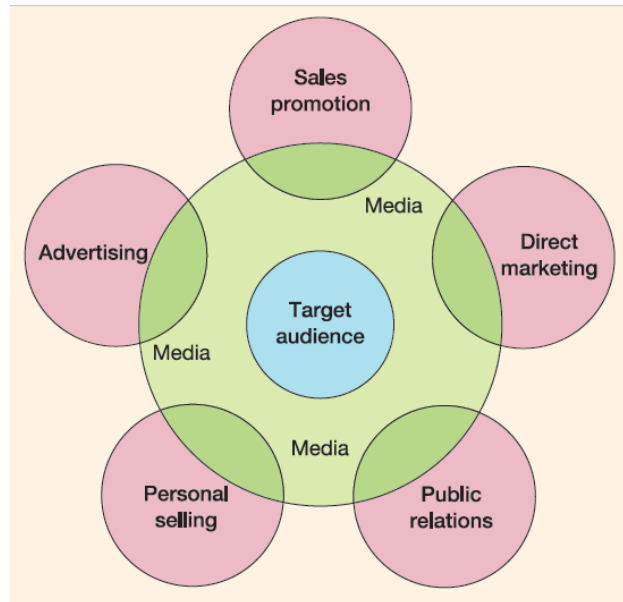


Figure 6. The interrelationships between tools, media and audience in planned marketing communications (Fill, 2009).

On the other hand, Mohr and Nevin (1990) proposed a model of communication for marketing channels and provided a theoretical framework that integrates channel characteristics, communication strategy and qualitative and quantitative channel outcomes to explain the potential critical factors in channel conditions and communication strategy and relationship between qualitative and quantitative channel outcomes (figure 7). The indicated extant channel conditions and elements in communication strategy offer great hints for the operation in marketing communication activities of mobile game developers.

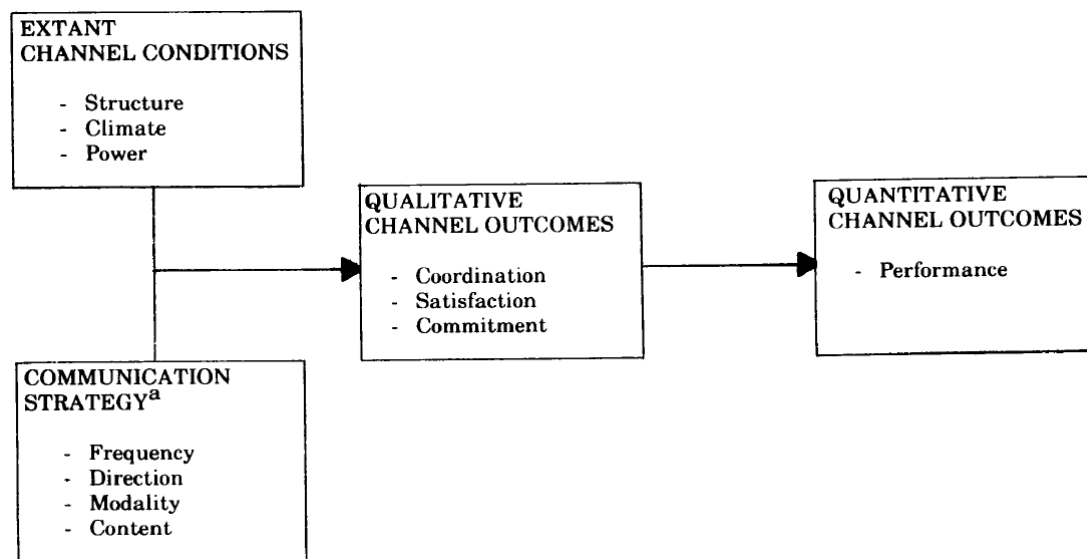


Figure 7. A model of communication for marketing channels (Mohr & Nevin, 1990).

The amount of communication is determined by the frequency and duration of contact between organizational members. Since a minimum amount of communication is necessary to maintain proper relationship, frequency of contact is one of the important indexes in communication strategy. Another element in communication strategy is the direction of communication: unidirectionality or bidirectionality. The third element in communication strategy is modality which means the medium of communication. It can be categorized to the style of information delivery: face-to-face, written, telephone or others. The authors mentioned there is another way to categorize on the basis of richness of information delivered: feedback, facial cues, language variety and personalization. A third way for categorizing was also described: formal, informal. The last element in communication strategy is content. Content represents the message transmitted in communication. Gross presented five different types of marketing information in 1968: physical inventory, promotional activities, product characteristics, pricing structure and marketing conditions. Frazier and Summers gave the idea to separate direct influence strategy and indirect influence strategy. Direct influence strategy uses direct communication to ask targeted people to act for something. Indirect influence strategy uses indirect communication to change their beliefs or attitudes. (Mohr & Nevin, 1990)

On the other side, conditions of channels are important in determining communication outcomes. There were three major conditions proposed by the authors: structure, climate and power. In the aspect of channel structure, it's distinguished to rational and discrete. For channel climate, it's categorized into supportive and unsupportive. About the power balance of the channel, symmetrical and asymmetrical are the two main conditions. These three conditions of channel were proposed to be related to the four elements in communication strategy as shown in table 2.



Conditions	Communication Facets			
	Frequency	Direction	Content	Modality
<b>Structure</b>				
Relational	Higher	More bidirectional	More indirect	More informal
Market	Lower	More unidirectional	More direct	More formal
<b>Climate</b>				
Supportive	Higher	More bidirectional	More indirect	More informal
Unsupportive	Lower	More unidirectional	More direct	More formal
<b>Power</b>				
Symmetrical	Higher	More bidirectional	More indirect	More informal
Asymmetrical	Lower	More unidirectional	More direct	More formal

Table 2. Relationship between channel conditions and communication facets (Mohr & Nevin, 1990).

#### 4.1.3 Marketing communications decision-making process

The presented framework for marketing communications decision-making helps understand the whole process in marketing communication activity cycles (Shimp, 2010). In order to run a marketing communication program, “What” is needed to be decided as the first step. To decide the fundamental conditions, including target, position, objective and budget, is the first step. The second step is the “How”. The questions would be “how to implement?”, “how to mix elements?”, “how to create messages?”, “how to select media?” and “how to establish momentum?” The first and second steps determine the basic and core plan of marketing communication activity. Implementation of the plan brings the outcome of the activity, which aims at enhancing brand equity and affect potential user behavior. In mobile game industry, the goal of enhancing brand equity is more emphasized by relatively big game companies which have already established their brand in the market (MMDLabo, 2016). On contrast, for those relatively smaller mobile game companies and teams, the goal of marketing communication activity aims more at affecting potential user behavior to acquire more players to try their games. After a certain amount of outcome come out, a review and evaluation process for the marketing communication activity/program is necessary to measure the variance between expectation and results, to think of the possible improvement for the program, to evaluate the return versus investment of the program. Through this evaluation process, a modified and improved version of marketing communication program will be ready for next implementation (Shimp, 2010). Although there are many and various factors in this cycle process, this framework provides an overview of general marketing communication activity process.

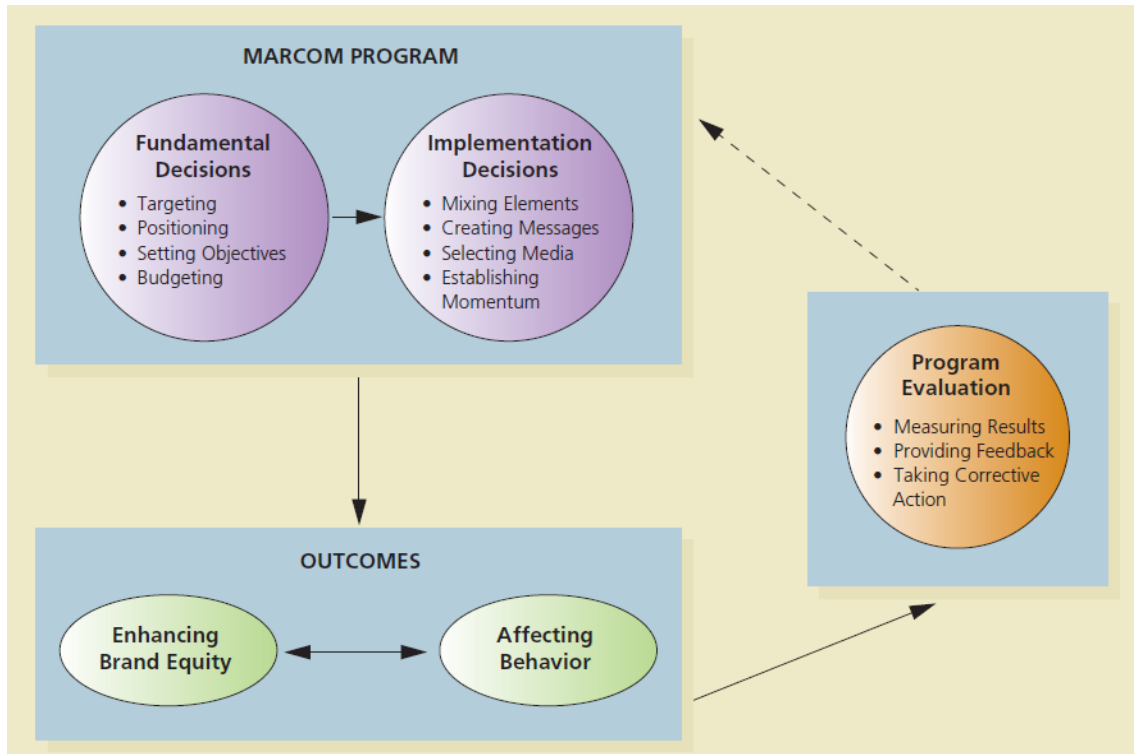


Figure 8. Marketing communications decision-making process (Shimp, 2010, p. 20).

#### 4.1.4 Theoretic frameworks and research questions

From the reviewed theories and frameworks, it is clear that there are basic processes in communication and in delivering marketing communication messages to the audience. While considering the linear model of communications as the basic process for delivering marketing messages, it supposed to be the same or similar between the marketing communication strategies between Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers. No matter they are Finnish or Japanese nationality, the source of messages is all from mobile game developers and publishers and the receivers are all mobile game players. How could it be possibly different in the process of encoding and decoding between the marketing communication strategies of Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers were focused and investigated in this study. At the same time, it is understood that marketing communication is not simply messages planned. The marketing communication messages are also composed of experience from the product, the service or even from the employees and the organization itself. Since marketing communication could be so different from many aspects, there could be some specific aspect relevant to the difference of the marketing communication strategies between Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers.

On the other hand, the channels for marketing communication activities are one of the important parts in planned marketing communications. There are various types of channels used in marketing communication activities. Some of them are traditional, and some of them are developed with latest technology.

Since mobile game industry is the one which applies new technology commonly in its development, the latest channels for marketing communications could be very different between the industry in Finland and Japan. Furthermore, the differences of marketing communication channels can be further analyzed into detailed aspects such as the structure, climate or power of the channel, frequency, direction, modality or content of the communication strategy and coordination, satisfaction or commitment of the channel outcomes. These features could potentially help our understanding in the difference in the marketing communication channels used by Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers.

## **4.2 Marketing communicational strategy for mobile games**

Marketing strategy for mobile games could cover very broad areas ranging from game design, graphic design, social media connection, price, name of the game for App Store optimization, video assisted marketing, etc (Apptamin 2013). As described by Hughes & Fill in 2007, marketing communications can be categorized into planned and unplanned marketing communications and produce or service experience-based marketing communications. From another angle, we may also consider that marketing strategy can be separated into two parts: product marketing and marketing communications, where product marketing covers product and service experience-based marketing communications and marketing communications covers both planned and unplanned parts. Game design, graphic design, visual effects, background music, sound effects or social media connection functions inside the game app can be categorized as product marketing, which is to produce a game that fits to the needs of the market and delivers users the experience which the game developer wants to provide. On the other hand, price, name of the game or video assisted marketing belong to the part of marketing communication, which is to package the product and deliver marketing messages to targeted audience in a planned style.

When a mobile game product is planned to be launched in foreign markets, the localized marketing communication strategy becomes one crucial part in marketing strategy for the game to be successful overseas since it usually takes much more resource to customize the idea, story, graphic for each local market after launching the game than to customize and implement the marketing communication strategy. Usually, marketing communication strategy is to effectively and efficiently convey marketing message and game experience to potential game players through various media and channels. The examples of major marketing media and channels for marketing communication in mobile game industry are described in following sections.

#### 4.2.1 Developer-controlled marketing media on app stores

Online app stores are the most common way for mobile devices users to browse, choose and download apps and mobile games. The major app stores, including Apple App Store and Google Play, offer app and mobile game developers to demonstrate their apps and games through various media: icon, title, searching keywords, screenshots, game description and promotional videos (figure 9 and 10). App and mobile game users can also understand the functions and features of each app or mobile game through these media on app stores effectively and efficiently.

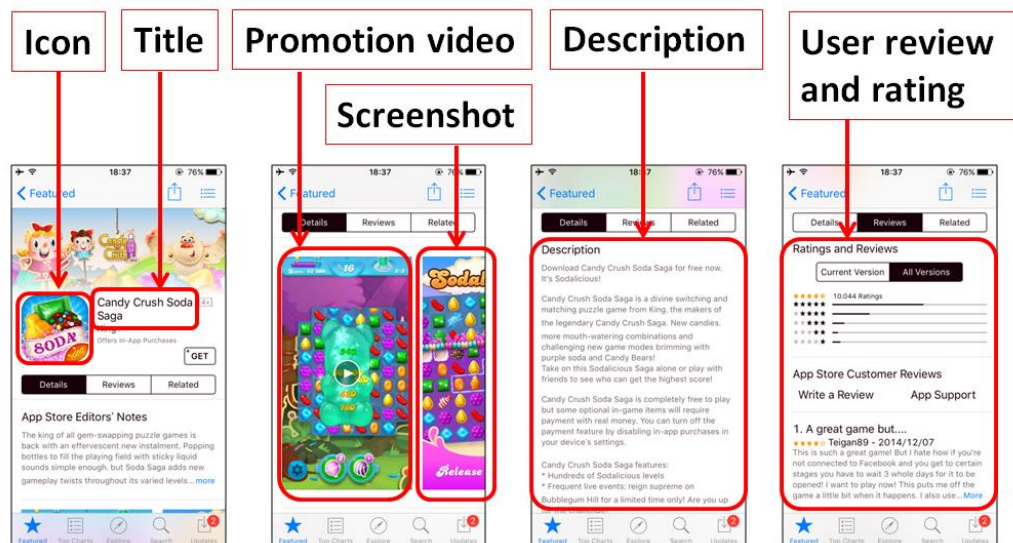


Figure 9. Marketing communication media on Apple App Store.



Figure 10. Marketing communication media on Google Play.

#### 4.2.1.1. Icon

The icon is the small photo used to represent the game app on online stores or on cell phone. The icon gives the first visual image of the app product to users. On app stores, such as Apple App Store or Google Play, icons are shown on the list of apps to help users recognize the function of the apps (Apple Incorporation, 2016 & Google Incorporation, 2016). A game app icon needs to be able to show the category of the game effectively so that it's clear for users to recognize. An engaging icon image can potentially raise the click rate of the app, which also attracts more users to access more information of the app and increase the download number of the app. It's also important to be noticed that icon and title are the only available information of an app on the app list of app stores (figure 11).

There are several major styles for icons. Using the image of the main character in the game is one major style for mobile games, especially for role playing games. Another style is to use a shocking word in the icon to attract attention of users through users' imagination. Besides, the same icons were commonly used on app review websites or other media. Although it's not considered as trademark, the icon functions as the trademark of the app. The icon is commonly used by journalists and media when they need a symbol for the app. In this case, the icon of a popular game may play the role of branding much more than engaging users. (Kemper, 2014)

#### 4.2.1.2. Title

The title of the game is the first contact between the game and users in the form of texts. A title is usually the shortest sentence used to describe the features and functions of an app. Besides, on the app list on app stores, icons and app titles are the only available information for users to recognize before they click on the app to access the full page and more information of the app (figure 11). Hence, a title that uses words with more impact and easily understandable meanings may impress users more, increase the click rate of the app and help users to access the information they need. Furthermore, the words used in the title are recognized as keywords of the game by the search engine in the app stores as well. As a result, using words that bring impact to users and help search engines recognize the game category is important.

Moreover, even though the limited length for the title for App Store or Google Play on the app page is long enough in a general sense, the displayed length of the title on the store app list is much shorter. The length of the title displayed on the app list is around 20 to 25 bits, and the extra words will not be shown on the app list pages. As a result, it's also important to place important words in the beginning part of the title in order to make it visible and recognizable on the stores. (Doshi, 2015; Hughes, 2016; Kemper, 2014; Palsovic, 2015)



Figure 11. App list on Google Play

#### 4.2.1.3. Keyword

App Store of Apple provides mobile game developers and publishers options to set up keywords for their game. Keywords represent the important features of the game. Good keyword setting help search engine in the app store recognize the game's category accurately and help users find the game easier. However, it's necessary to note that most search engines on online app stores don't allow keywords being set similar to the name of other games, especially popular games, to avoid misleading users. However, there is no keyword setting on the app store of Google Play. It is considered that Google is superior in search engine and its keyword searching capability is good enough to cover all text materials on the app page that there is no need for game developers to set up keywords by themselves. (Doshi, 2015; Hughes, 2016; Palsovic, 2015; Rampton, 2015; Rhodes, 2015)

Furthermore, there were several surveys indicated that there is a large portion of app users find new apps through keyword searching. In 2014, 47% of USA mobile phone users found their new apps through keyword searching on Apple App Store and 53% on Google Play (Peres, 2014). It's reasonable to consider it an effective and efficient way to find a new app if the mobile phone users want to find an app in a specific category and a specific function. For instance, if the user wants to find a fishing game, he/she could easily find the group of apps that are about fishing and game by searching the keywords of "fishing" and "game". Similarly, "city", "simulation" and "game" are also the potential good keywords to search city building games. Therefore, we can understand that keywords are important channels for game developers and publishers to approach game users and also for gamer users to approach specific games as well.

#### 4.2.1.4. Screenshots

With similar function to the icon to represent the visual effects of an app, screenshots are images taken from the game play scenes. Screenshots are bigger than icon in size and are represented with multiple images, which makes



screenshots easier to convey playing experience and more specific information from the app to mobile phone users. Major app stores such as App Store and Google Play allow game developers or publishers to place up to five images as screenshots on the app page in app stores. On the basis of a research in Japan, 65.5% of mobile phone users checked screenshots before they download the app (Mixi Incorporation, 2014). This result indicates the importance of screenshots as reference for mobile phone users which choosing apps or games to download.

Besides, nowadays screenshots are more used as a part of marketing materials. In order to deliver more engaging playing experience to players, marketing officers of game companies or teams usually add texts as slogans or figures of main characters on the screenshots to emphasize the features of the game app. As an important part of marketing materials on app stores, how much impact can the screenshots bring to players is important to attract players and raise click rate. (Doshi, 2015; Kemper, 2014; Rhodes, 2015)



Figure 12. Screenshots of Clash Royale published by Supercell.

#### 4.2.1.5. Game description

Game description is the texts offered by game developers or publishers and displayed on app pages in online app stores to describe the features of the game. There is not specific writing style for game description. As long as the game description can convey the message of the game concept to players and attract players, any writing styles are allowed. However, the writing skill required is relatively high. The words used need to make it able to stimulate imagination of players. (Doshi, 2015; Kemper, 2014) Usually, the first several sentences of game description are engaging words to attract players to read more. Then there are several points describing the major features of the game together with several sub points respectively. The features, for example, could be “real-time multi-player battle” or “more than 100 challenging stages”, etc.

#### **4.2.1.6. Promotion video**

Promotion video is a popular and effective way to convey the game concept and the marketing messages to players. Promotion video usually covers a wide range of game-related videos, such as trailers usually offered by game developers or publishers or game play videos produced by Youtubers. However, the promotion video here is defined to exclude game play video. Promotion video is referred to officially made videos by game developers or publishers for commercial purpose. Since now it's available to upload a video on Apple App Store or Google Play app store to introduce the game to players, game developers or publishers usually utilize game trailer videos integrated with impressive visual and music or sound effects to display the major features of their games to engage game players. With visual movement and supportive sound, a video is generally considered to be more effective to convey game playing experience than static materials such as icon, title, game description or screenshots, even though it takes more resource to produce. (Doshi, 2015; Patil, 2016; Rhodes, 2015; Singh, 2016)

Furthermore, the creativity of the video is also a key element. If the promotion video is produced with a very nice story or funny point, the video may be shared to friends, family members or colleagues through internet video platforms or social network services, which will be a very significant and influential channel to distribute the marketing message to potential game players.

### **4.2.2 Other marketing communication channels for mobile games**

Except those marketing communication messages placed on online app stores, there are other marketing communication channels existing in the market. These channels are mostly owned by third parties and need partnership, cooperation or financial payment for mobile game developers and publishers to use those channels to deliver marketing communication messages to the audience in the market.

#### **4.2.2.1. Game playing video and video sharing platform**

Live game play videos are a new trend in mobile game marketing communication strategy in the world. The difference from promotion videos is the participation of the third party. Common gamers only enjoy the game play, but they usually don't record the game play nor share the game play videos to others. However, because of the development of video sharing platforms and the high-speed data transfer service nowadays, it's much easier to upload game play videos and share them to others. Some small number of game players love to record their game play videos and share their videos to others. Those live game play videos are commonly recorded with oral explanation and visual demonstration, and it's commonly not official and not for commercial purpose. The peer-to-peer effect and interesting oral explanation for game playing increase the effectiveness of conveying game playing experience. On some popular



online video sharing platforms, such as Youtube in many countries or Niconico in Japan, sharing game playing videos has become a new industry. People who earn their lives by recording, uploading and sharing videos online are called “Youtubers”. More and more Youtubers are involved in game playing videos. Some popular Youtubers may have channel follower as many as several millions, which makes it a new and powerful marketing channel for game developers and publishers.

In Japan, the starting point of game playing video as an industry is around 2008 to 2010 (KAI-YOU, 2015). Accompanied with the development of online video sharing platforms, some game players started to recorded game playing videos with their own oral explanation and sometimes together with their face recorded. There are various styles of game playing videos, including indication of the points of how to efficiently complete stages in games, talking about interesting topics in the videos, demonstrating teamwork in the multi-player games or playing the games under special rules, etc. Some people watch these video in order to learn the advanced techniques in the games and some people watch them for enjoying special characteristics and atmosphere of the Youtubers in the videos. For instance, Hajimeshacho, one of the most popular Youtubers, now has 3.2 million followers on his channel in Japan. Hikakin has 3 million and Max Murai has 1.5 million followers on Youtube in Japan. (Yamparala, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.2. Game ranking chart on App Store or Google Play**

Major online app stores provide app ranking charts for users to find popular apps easier. App ranking charts are slightly different from different app stores, but the major functions are very similar. Apps are categorized by their functions, and there are app ranking chart in each category. Game is one of the categories on app stores that own the most number of apps among other categories. As a result, there are sub-categories in the game category, such as Action, Adventure, Racing, etc.

Although the logistic mechanism for ranking position on App Store and Google Play are different, higher ranked positions roughly means more download number in a specific period of time, more daily/weekly/monthly active users or longer average activated time of the app on users’ devices. A large part of game players choose and download new mobile games according to the rank of games listed on the chart on App Store or Google Play. Generally speaking, the ranking chart on the higher hierarchy of the category system is more influential. For mobile games, the overall ranking is the most important and the game ranking chart is the second. Then it comes the ranking in each sub-category. Since there are a significant number of users who choose their new games from the ranking chart, higher ranking position represents more download numbers and more profit. Hence, game developers and publishers usually try to raise the position of their games on the ranking chart as a part of marketing strategy.

In some markets, there are services provided for mobile game developers and publishers to buy download number. Due to the logistic mechanism for ranking position on online app stores, the download number of a specific app in a specific period of time is generally considered as an important factor that influences ranking position. A higher ranking positions means higher chance for market exposure since a large portion of app users choose their new app from the top positions on the ranking chart. As a result, some mobile game developers or publishers take the strategy to pay to acquire a certain amount of initial download number to push up their game apps to a higher position and expect that users will download their game apps because of the fact that their game apps are at the higher ranking positions, which will bring sufficient profit to cover the cost of initial download number acquisition. This strategy is generally called “Boost advertisement” in Japan. (Palsovic, 2015; Rampton, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.3. Recommendation of online app stores**

Since online app stores are competing to each other, they try to pick up and recommend valuable apps to their users as a part of differentiation. Major online app stores such as App Store and Google Play also recommend good apps on their stores. The ways and styles of recommendation are changing and evolving very fast nowadays. Currently, there are several major categories of recommendation: new and updated games, personal recommendation according to your actions recorded on the system, popular brand or other specific features. The number of app in each featured category varies from 15 to 30 according to different app stores. The app list for recommendation will be refreshed each week. App developers or publishers don't need to pay anything to be picked and there is no way for app developers or publishers to pay to do so.

The apps for recommendation are chosen on the basis of the internal criteria of Apple for App Store and Google for Google Play. Although the criteria are not opened, it's commonly believed to be relevant to the value of the app that it can deliver to its user, such as functionality and usability, including smooth motion and operation in the app, easiness in usage, high user rating or good response and support to customer complaint. Since it doesn't cost anything for the game developers or publishers to be featured and it represents a great number of download of the game app while being featured, being featured on app stores has almost been the only way for small game developing teams or companies who have highly limited marketing budget to acquire the least sufficient users for sustainable business operation and the very basic step for big publishers who aim for huge success. The recommendation of online app stores offers a great chance for market exposure without any direct cost, which is considered as an important marketing channel even though the control of this channel is very weak and highly unpredictable for game developers and publishers. (Tsuchimoto, 2015; Yip, 2015; Young, 2015)

#### 4.2.2.4. User review and rating on online app stores

App Store and Google Play or game review websites provide app review functions to allow game players or app users writing their experience or opinions of the games/apps they played/used. The review function is composed of two parts: rating the app with a number from one to five and posting their experiences on the review board. The rating grade is the direct reflection of the game quality from players. The peer-to-peer effects and real experience are considered as an important way in marketing communication strategy with high impacts to potential game players. Researchers showed that online reviews of game users brought influence to less popular games, which also implied the importance of player review for games (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). In Japan, another research also showed that 76.2% of mobile phone users cared about how other users reviewed the app before they download it (Mixi Research, 2014). Besides, the rating grade as a number is also a common and easy way for other users to judge the game before downloading it since a number is very efficient and effective to recognize and understand through the online app stores. It's commonly recognized among game developers and publishers that a good game will be rated at least 4 for a free-to-play mobile game and 4.5 for a premium mobile game.

Furthermore, Google Play offers mobile game developers or publishers chances to reply to the reviews on their games. Mobile game developers or publishers can give comments or ask for further questions for identifying the problem. This procedure is also considered as customer support in game business operation. Especially in relatively big and critical markets such as Japan, the quality of customer support is believed as one of the key points for a game to survive in the market. (Doshi, 2015; Hughes, 2016; Kemper, 2014; Palsovic, 2015)

#### 4.2.2.5. Gaming media

Gaming media have been one of the common ways for game players to access gaming information for tens of years. As a traditional magazine in gaming media in Japan, Famitsu is one of the most influential gaming media in the market. Although game players now have much more choices to access gaming information including TV, online videos, social networks, and so on, online and offline gaming media are still playing an important role in delivering professional gaming information to game players. According to the development of the Internet, online gaming media now have been the major players in gaming media, and most traditional offline gaming media have started or shifted their media business online. Online gaming media, usually as websites, provide gaming information with various functions or styles to game players, including introduction article of new games, game reviewing articles, game rating, game recommendation, game relevant news or game ranking to make game players access specific gaming information more efficiently. Recently, some gaming media also started to operating game playing video channels at the same time to raise

the influential power of their media. In the industry, a large number of game websites exist in different markets written in their own local languages.

Although the form and style of gaming media are changing fast, the relationship between gaming media and game developers and publishers don't change significantly. Gaming media are the channels for game developers and publishers to deliver marketing messages to game players who are customers of game developers and publishers. There are several potential ways for game developers or publishers to cooperate with gaming media. One most desired way on the side of game developers and publishers is to offer the information of their games to gaming media and let gaming media post the information free of charge. The other major way is to pay gaming media for advertisement or posting articles. Other ways are like holding event together or implementing campaigns together, etc. Since the online advertisement networks are highly developed, which can bring much higher efficiency and effectiveness, gaming media are considered channels to post the story or game information from game developers and publishers to game players with a highly cost-effective way, especially for small development teams or publishers whose marketing resource is highly limited. As a result, the successful approach to these gaming media is considered as one of the keys to successfully launch mobile games. (Rhodes, 2015; Yamparala, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.6. Pre-launch registration service**

Pre-launch registration services are online platforms that provide a space for game developers or publishers to release information about new games before the launch of games. Game players can access the information of the latest games and register for those games that they want to receive an email when it's launched. The style of pre-launch registration platforms are similar to online app stores where icons, titles, screenshots, promotional videos and game description are displayed. Pre-launch registration service is a marketing channel for game developers and publishers to deliver marketing messages and acquire users before the launch of games. Pre-launch registration services also provide in-game gifts or benefits to motivate users to register for pre-launch games.

There are several pre-launch registration services existing in Japan. However, most of them need mobile game developers or publishers to pay for each user registration for their games, which is a significant cost (Moriyama, 2014). Yoyaku Top 10 is one of the most popular pre-launch registration services in Japan. It owned more than 600,000 registered users and more than 1 million times of pre-launch registration by users in April 2015 (Adways, 2015). According to the data published, the retention rate of game players acquired through the pre-launch registration service of Yoyaku Top 10 is higher than organic users (Social Game Info, 2014). All these data show that pre-launch registration services could be potentially effective marketing communicational channels for mobile game developers or publishers to deliver their marketing messages, promote their games and acquire users. (Yamparala, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.7. Press release**

To issue press release is a traditional way to deliver information to the stakeholders in the market. Press release can be issued by game developers or publishers themselves or through press release services. Press article is written by game developers or publishers, or the article can be produced by specific professionals. Then the article is sent to each media, distributors, partners and other stakeholders by game developers or publishers themselves, or the article is can also be delivered through press release delivery services where the press article is transferred to stakeholders potentially more efficiently. With good stories or ideas written in the press, information can possibly be delivered through media with very low cost. Starting pre-registration, launching games or starting marketing campaign are the common timings for issuing press release. Generally speaking, press release is considered an official channel for game developers or publishers to deliver written marketing messages to the market. (Patil, 2016; Rhodes, 2015; Yamparala, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.8. Social media**

Through the online sharing power, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+ or LINE are channels to convey marketing messages to potential game players with relatively low cost. Social media are believed as the best platforms for viral marketing strategy. As long as the marketing contents are attractive enough and bring positive meaning for sharing, explosive effects through social media are expectable. Furthermore, the relative low cost of operating marketing campaign on social media is another benefit for game developers and publishers to deliver their marketing messages to users. Besides, social media also provide communication platforms with an interactive style between game developers and publishers and game players, which helps game developers and publishers to manage their customer relationship and obtain feedback for their games. Additionally, it is important to note that the advertisement on each social media is excluded from the definition of social media in this study.

Different social media own very different features, which is important to be considered while integrating social media into marketing communication strategy. Twitter allows users to be anonymous, which makes users share the information without considering too much about their credibility. Facebook is used worldwide, which may bring higher impact cross countries. LINE is the major social media in Japan, Korea and Taiwan, which may facilitate marketing campaign in these countries. Google+ is integrated in Google's search engine, which may bring positive influence on more market exposure on Google's search engine. (Patil, 2016; Rhodes, 2015; Singh, 2016)

#### **4.2.2.9. Online advertisement: Advertisement networks and social media advertisement**

Online advertisement has been one of the most fast developed marketing channels in game industry. Accompanied with the technological development in an amazing speed, the online advertisement has grown to one of the biggest market in game industry. In the beginning of the Internet development, online advertisement was simple pictures on websites to show advertisement. However, nowadays several key technologies were developed to efficiently and effectively deliver advertisement to targeted game players. First key technology is the tracking system on the Internet. The actions of users taken online are recorded for analysis such as the keywords searched on search engine, which kind of website browsed, or what kind of product bought, which are all recorded and analyzed to know the profile of each user. Then the specific advertisement will be delivered to the website the specific user is browsing, which raises the accuracy of user targeting and increased the efficiency of advertisement. The second key technology is advertisement network (ad network). Before the technology was developed, advertisement providers need to get contact with each website in order to put their advertisement on the website. However, the technology of as network put all websites as a media pool and all advertisement providers as an advertising pool. Then together with the user tracking and analyzing technology, specific advertisement will be extracted out of the advertising pool and put onto the specific website of the media pool to target a specific user. Furthermore, these technologies don't only exist on websites, but also on mobile apps and games. Mobile apps and games also become important channels for advertisement. The format of advertisement also changed drastically from static banner to creative videos in just several years. For example, Google is one of the ad network giants in the world. Google covers ad network on websites, called AdSense, mobile ad network, called AdMob, and advertising platform for all searching engine interface, website media and mobile channels, called AdWords. Other major ad networks are Vungle or Applovin in USA and nend in Japan.

On the other hand, social media advertisement is another new rising channel. Giant social media such as Facebook, Twitter or LINE own their users in their social media platform. These social media services collect the features of their users and track and analyze the behavior of their users on their platforms, which offers the similar concept of user targeting to the previously described ad networks. The more convenient point is that many social media services offer any individuals to do advertisement with budget as low as a couple of dollars, which gives more chances to small game developers and publishers to try out their marketing messages and products in the market.

Online advertisement offers game developers and publishers full control of the marketing campaign to deliver their marketing messages. However, the major issue of using online advertisement for marketing communication strategy is the cost. (Singh, 2016; Yamparala, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.10. Cross promotion**

Cross promotion is a promotional method to introduce new apps in current installed apps. For example, a mobile game developer/publisher has launched five mobile games already and acquired 200,000 users. Then when the developer/publisher plans to launch the sixth mobile game, the company can place recommendation to the new game in the existing 5 games. Then a part of the current 200,000 users will be led to the new game and raise the user number of the new game. Cross promotion is considered as an effective way to acquire users especially for those games in similar categories. Additionally, cross promotion can also be considered as a proper channel to build up the brand for the game developer/publisher. However, cross promotion can only be applied for those mobile game developer or publishers who had successfully launched several mobile games. (Singh, 2016)

#### **4.2.2.11. Others**

Other channels such as direct email, conference attendance or physical events or traditional advertisement on newspaper and magazines are potential methods to deliver marketing messages to game players. However, due to the cost and efficiency, most of them are limited to those giant or specific game developers and publishers who have abundant marketing budget and are willing to build up brand image. (Hughes, 2016; Rhodes, 2015)

### **4.3 Summary**

Marketing communication covers a wide range of activities that deliver or produce interactions to or between the audience. Communication is an activity that messages are delivered from the source to the receiver through a series processes of encoding, delivery, decoding and feedback while influenced by noise. Although this linear model of communication plays the basic role in marketing communication, the messages to audience and how the audience experienced could be produced from multiple aspects. Except the planned marketing communications, the experience obtained from service or product itself could be a critical factor in marketing communication activities and this is not direct messages based but experience based. Other unplanned marketing communications includes various ways and levels. The corporate level messages may include administration, operation or others. The marketing level message may be composed of price, distribution or others. Besides, the interactions of the corporate of organization and its various activities to its stake holders also send direct or indirect messages to the audience, which also creates and establishes its brand value as well.

Although marketing communication covers such a wide range of activities in marketing, marketing channels play an important role in planned marketing

communications. How the channels or the media can facilitate the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies such as sales promotion, direct marketing or public relations is the key to the performance of marketing communication activities. Then looking into the channels themselves, it was proposed that several conditions of the channel and the strategy for communication could also affect the outcomes qualitatively and quantitatively of the channel. Those features were described to be structure, climate and power for the conditions of the channel, and frequency, direction, modality and content for the conditions of the communication strategy. According to these features in the channel conditions and communication strategy conditions, the channel could be evaluated qualitatively in the aspects of satisfaction or commitment and quantitatively from its performance. All the information and activities from the basic communication to the execution of marketing communication activities with specific channels are taken into consideration of decision making process of marketing communications.

Except the general frameworks and theories for communications, marketing communications and marketing communication channels, a certain number of marketing communication channels have been developed so far in the mobile game industry. It can be divided into two aspects: one that can be directly controlled by the mobile game developers and publishers and the other one that cannot be directly controlled by the mobile game developers and publishers. The prior channels includes the texts, photos and videos provided for the game product on the online stores, and the later one is composed of channels that are operated by third parties. Through the literature review, it is clear to understand the existing marketing communication channels existing and being used in current days. However, how Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers could plan and execute marketing communication strategies differently through different channels is not clear yet and it would be the focus of this study.



## 5 RESEARCH METHODS

### 5.1 Quantitative and qualitative methods

One different way to express “Quality” and “Quantity” can be described as “Words” and “Numbers” (In Glassner & In Moreno, 1989). While describing something, such as a phenomenon, a process, a fact or an item, people choose “Words” or/and “Numbers” to identify them for communication. When choosing a word to describe, it gives a property for the phenomenon, process, fact or item. Nevertheless, the word represents a relative scale for the property based on shared experience or definition of the word among people. Accordingly, even though people could potentially understand the meaning of the word through the shared experience or definition, it may not be precise nor absolute.

On the other hand, a number is an absolute amount of something. Numbers can be precisely compared and clearly defined. Although numbers are convenient to use in precisely representing a certain amount of some property or comparing a kind of property clearly, the meaning of the numbers is still based on the definition of the property that is given by people, which becomes the key point in using numbers in description. As a result, it is important in the definition of the property that is used together with numbers. Without clear definition of the property, numbers may even mislead the readers in an unexpected way. (In Glassner & In Moreno, 1989)

The process of scientific research is a process, that can be either simple or complicated, short or long, to find out facts or truth that are undiscovered. In such a process that researchers are facing unknown worlds, researchers design methods to understand what is happening in the phenomenon or process. After executing the methods, researchers obtain some information which is the findings from the phenomenon or process. The findings from the phenomenon and process could be new discovery which could be positive or negative to the expectation of researchers. Researchers then accumulate more findings to confirm if the information they obtained from the phenomenon or process forms some rules or some patterns. In order to confirm the found rules and patterns, researchers collect a certain amount of data under the same conditions, where quantitative method is used more often. Under an unknown situation, researchers need to know what exists and how it looks like. After knowing the property of the phenomenon or process, researchers could define more precisely or compare the property with numbers or quantitative methods. (In Glassner & In Moreno, 1989)

Qualitative and quantitative methods are the two wheels to approach the fact or truth of a phenomenon, a process or an item. By identifying the meanings through words and the measuring the amount or level with numbers, the process of research can be balanced such as a balanced dynamic system (figure 13).

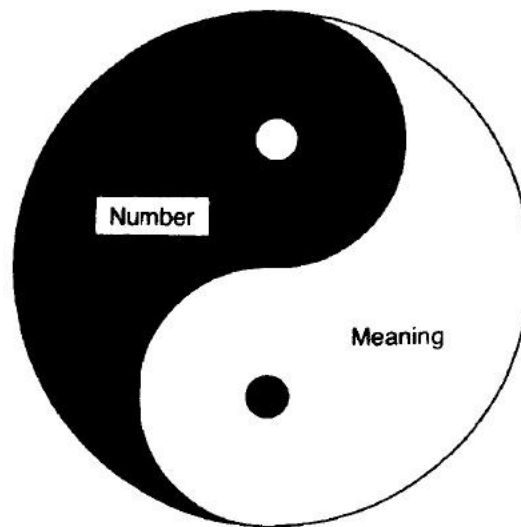


Figure 13. Quantitative and qualitative data in dynamic balance (Dey, 1993, p. 30).

### 5.1.1 Qualitative approach

The field of marketing communication strategy for mobile games is very new and fast developing. Especially according to the development of technology, the strategy or methods to do marketing communication for mobile games may change even every year. Since the overall situation in marketing communication of mobile games has not been studied well so far, this study aims at discover the current strategies, approaches used by mobile game developers and publishers. In order to discover the property of the marketing communication strategy used by mobile game developers and publishers currently, this study takes qualitative approach.

## 5.2 Data collection

### 5.2.1 Candidate selection

In this study, 9 mobile game developers and publishers were picked up for interviews (table 3). 6 are located in Japan and 3 are from Finland. All mobile game developers or publishers at least launched one mobile game on App Store of Apple or Google Play of Google before the day of interview to ensure their experience in launching mobile games and implementing marketing communicational strategy. All total download number of all games of each mobile game developer or publisher must be higher than 100,000 to demonstrate the effectiveness of their marketing communicational activities. All mobile game developers, publishers or the correspondent mobile game business scale match EU SME standards. Interviews were done with CEOs, Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) or mobile game business directors in each firm through face-to-face,

online meeting or email styles. The criteria of candidate selection were listed up as following:

- Mobile game developer or publisher
- Headquarter locates in Japan or Finland
- Launched more than 1 mobile game on Apple App Store or Google Play
- Total download number is more than 100,000
- SMEs that match EU SME standards

Company	Nationality	Interview style	Interview date	Number of employees
A	Japan	Face-to-face	8 July 2015	2
B	Japan	Online meeting	2 Nov 2015	4
C	Japan	Online meeting	8 Dec 2015	1
D	Japan	Online meeting	16 Dec 2015	9
E	Japan	Email	18 Nov 2015	10
F	Japan	Email	23 Nov 2015	2
G	Finland	Face-to-face	9 Nov 2015	4
H	Finland	Online meeting	13 Nov 2015	2
I	Finland	Email	25 Nov 2015	7

Table 3. 9 mobile game developer or publisher companies in this study.

### 5.2.2 Structured, semi-structured and unstructured interview

There are many forms of interviews existing. The form of qualitative interview depends on the number of participants in each interview, different interview style or different interview media, etc. Besides, there are merely completely structured or completely unstructured interviews. In human conversation, it's very common to have more questions from the conversation in order to gather more insightful perspectives, which would be partially unstructured. On the other hand, it's also seldom to have completely unstructured interviews. A certain direction and topic of the research commonly leads the interview and the questions in the interview to a partially structured form. Nonetheless, the form of qualitative interview could roughly be discussed in three forms: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Brinkmann, 2013) .

In structured interviews, the way to ask questions is standardized, which leads to answers that can be compared among interviewees or even further quantified. Interviewers are supposed to read the questions exactly word by word to the interviewees. Interviewers are also trained not to give further information except the questions, not give any response from the answers of interviewees. Although structured interview is useful in some purposes, it doesn't take the advantage of the dialogical potential of knowledge production in human conversation.

Unstructured interviews are basically to give a topic and let the interviewees talk in most of the time. The interviewees would have freedom to talk everything they want to say in the interview and the interviewers would only ask some questions to clarify some parts of the answers from the interviewees. Unstructured interviews are potentially more useful in gathering information as much as possible surrounding a topic, a phenomenon or a process.

Semi-structured interviews are probably the most widespread formats in social and human science researches. It takes both advantages of structured and unstructured formats. Semi-structured interviews give the interviews certain directions to focus on specific issues while give a flexible space for the conversation to be developed and potentially produce more related information from the conversation.

This study takes the format of semi-structured interview. In order to make the interview focus on the marketing communication part of the whole marketing strategy rather than the marketing part of the product, the interview in this study is semi-structured to make interviewees concentrate on the part of marketing communication of their mobile games. In the other aspect, the knowledge of marketing communication strategy of mobile games is not yet well studied and there may be some potential new information from some interviewees. Hence, the semi-structured interviews in this study also give space for interviewees to derivatively describe what the interviewees know which is not expected by the interviewers.

### **5.2.3 Focus of interview**

This study aims to discover how Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers did marketing communication activities for their mobile games. Several topics are focused in the interview. The first part of this interview is the basic information of the company and the interviewee, which is helpful to understand how the variance in the background of the companies and interviewees is. The second part of the interview focuses on how the companies did marketing communication activities and how effective they felt to the activities they did. The last part of interview is related to the future direction of marketing communication activities of the companies. The detailed question lists in English and Japanese are attached in Appendix 1.

## **5.3 Data analysis**

One basic process of qualitative data analysis was described to be composed of "Finding a focus", "Managing data", "Reading and annotating", "Categorizing data", "Linking data", "Connecting categories", "Corroborating evidence" and "Producing an account" (Dey, 1993, p. 8). There are also other methods in qualitative data analysis, such as the interpretive method that focuses on the role of patterns, categories and descriptive units (Patton, 1980), the network approach

that emphasizes on categorization (Bliss, Monk, & Ogborn, 1983), the quasi-statistical approach that brings the concept of "pattern coding" (Miles & Huberman, 1984) and grounded theory approach that is related to "coding data" in analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, even though there are various methods in qualitative data analysis, the core parts of these methods are relevant to data categorization and category connections (figure 14).

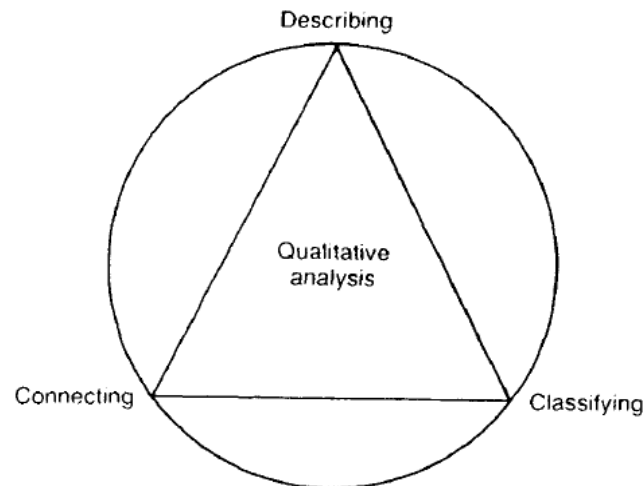


Figure 14. Data description, classification and connection as the core parts of qualitative analysis. (Dey, 1993, p. 32)

One of the important beginning steps in qualitative analysis is description. Description of the phenomena under study forms the basic understanding of the data. Next to description, context plays an important role to both connect the description to the background information and give more precise meaning to the description. Context helps to raise understanding in and between description of the data and the study. After giving meaning to the description through context, it's necessary to develop conceptual frameworks to make the descriptions in the study intelligible, which can be further developed to produce interpretation and explanation. In order to develop the conceptual framework, classification is one of the methods. In the process of classification, data are broken up and linked up again, which also produces a basis for comparison and practical reasoning. At the end, the classified data are logically reconnected again through different angles or aspects under the subject of the study.

In this study, the data analysis was done through this process. The focus of the data analysis is how the mobile game developers and publishers did their marketing communication activities. The interview questions were designed to obtain the material to describe the phenomena in marketing communication activities of mobile game developers and publishers. Then their marketing communication activities were described under the existing marketing communication channels in the market and categorized into the classifications described in chapter 5. The reasons why the mobile game developers and publishers did and did not do each marketing communication activity were interpreted and explained as the findings in this study.

## 6 RESULTS

### 6.1 Difference in utilization of marketing communicational channels

The marketing communicational channels applied by nine Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers were listed up in table 4. In table 4, the major fifteen marketing communicational channels were listed up. “◎” is defined as those marketing communicational channels that were tried and expected to be effective. “○” means those channels were tried but not expected to be effective. “△” represents that the channels were not mentioned in interviews, but the information of using the channels can be found on webpages on the Internet or other secondary data source.

Marketing communicational channels	Japanese mobile game developers or publishers						Finnish mobile game developers or publishers		
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Game playing video and youtubers	○		◎	○		○	○	○	○
Game ranking chart (buy downloads)					◎	◎			
Recommendation of online app stores		◎				◎	◎	△	
User review and rating on online app stores									
Game websites	◎	◎	△			◎		◎	◎
Pre-launch registration service	○	◎		◎		◎			
Press release	◎	◎		◎		◎		◎	◎
Twitter	○	◎	○	○	◎	◎	◎	○	
Facebook	◎	◎				◎	◎	○	◎
Google+	○								
LINE	○					◎			
Other social media									
Online advertisement	○	○		○		○	○		
Cross promotion				◎				◎	
Others		△				◎			◎

Table 4. The marketing communicational channels utilized by Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers.

◎: Marketing communicational channels that were tried and expected to be effective

○: Marketing communicational channels were tried but not expected to be effective

△: Marketing communicational channels were not mentioned in interviews, but the information of using the channels can be found on webpages on the Internet or other secondary data source.

From table 4, several major differences can be observed between Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers in their marketing communication activities. Game playing video and youtubers were used as a minor marketing communicational channel for most Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Buying downloads for higher ranking positions on the ranking charts of online app stores was only performed by Japanese mobile game developers and publishers. Acquisition of recommendation by online app stores is an important marketing communicational channel for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers, but only a part of them can acquire it. User rating and reviews on online app stores is potentially important as a marketing communicational channel. However, none of these nine Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers had considered it as a significant channel. Game websites were considered as important marketing communicational channels by around half of the Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Pre-launch registration services were only done by Japanese mobile game developers and publishers. Two of third of all companies issued press release for their games. Most of Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers tried to use Twitter as a channel, even though only some of them felt it effective. For other social media, Facebook was used by half of the companies and Line was only applied by a part of Japanese companies. Over half of Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers tried to do online advertisement, but no one felt it could be as effective as a major marketing communicational channel. One Japanese and one Finnish mobile game developer or publisher used cross promotion to deliver marketing messages.

## **6.2 The channels both widely used by Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers**

### **6.2.1 Game playing video and youtubers**

In this study, how mobile game developers and publishers in Japan and Finland utilized different channels for marketing communication was investigated. Game playing videos and youtubers have been one of the latest channel to deliver marketing communicational messages. Top youtubers own millions of followers, which may bring very high efficiency and effectiveness in delivering marketing messages to targeted potential game players. In the case of company C, company C had a cooperation agreement with the agency of a top youtuber, which brought high positive effect to deliver marketing messages to millions of followers, which was described as following:

*"I only did one video through Mr. Hikakin. Since he is such a famous youtuber, the effect was very large. He also influenced other players to upload their own game videos to Youtube. Elementary school and junior high school students love to watch game playing videos, and they like to share this information to their friends." (Company C)*

However, most other of Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers tried and failed to obtain effective results. Company D described that they didn't have satisfactory results after used a youtuber and his/her channel, which is as following:

*"We tried to use a youtubor once before, but the effect was bad. We didn't use youtubers again so far. If it's famous youtubers, maybe it's effective. But the youtuber we used was not so famous, the results looked not so effective. We all know that famous youtubers cost a lot." (Company D)*

One potential reason to explain the unstable effectiveness of youtubers is the cost. Hiring a top youtuber for a 10-minute video may cost as much as 1 or 2 million yen (1 million yen is around 8,500 euros) in Japan. Although the effectiveness from applying a top youtuber can be expected to be relatively high, the initial cost is pretty high for small game development teams or publishers.

On the other hand, the unstable effectiveness of each youtuber is another potential risk. Youtubers attract followers through various styles of game playing videos (KAI-YOU, 2015). Different styles of game playing videos and different characteristics or atmosphere of the youtuber may not always match the games well to give positive impacts in delivering marketing messages. An action game may need a youtuber who is good in playing games rather than a group of youtubers who have been attracting followers through their funny talks. A role playing game may need a youtuber who can describe the game with an attractive way rather than a youtuber who don't really like stories. The high potential and uncertainty of effectiveness may be the reasons why most Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers tended to try this channel but didn't want to invest too much resource in this channel.

### **6.2.2 Game websites and press release**

Some of both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers chose to issue press release and get contact with game websites to deliver their marketing communicational messages to potential game players. Game websites were considered as the traditional channels to approach game players since game websites provide game related information to their readers who are mostly game players, which make game websites good channels for mobile game developers and publishers to deliver their marketing messages.

There are several major potential advantages for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers to choose game website as their marketing communicational channels. First obvious advantage is the huge



reachable game-related readers. The top game websites in Japan such as famitsu.com can reach 6.8 million times of user visits in a month only from desktop computers on the basis of estimation of SimilarWeb ([www.similarweb.com](http://www.similarweb.com)). By adding estimation of access from mobile devices, the total visit number per month could potentially reach 34 million. There are a lot of other game websites existing, including Appbank ([www.appbank.net](http://www.appbank.net)) in Japan which is estimated to have 21 million times of visits per month. Through the power of a huge user base, game websites are powerful marketing tools for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers from the angle of marketing games. Company A mentioned that their mobile was reviewed and featured on famitsu.com and Appbank and they felt that the buzz effects from the media could be huge potentially.

*"After the game was launched, it started to grow in a month. We also got contact with app review sites and got some posts on their sites. Then we got more response through review sites. We didn't spend any money so far at that time. The biggest review sites were Famitsu App and Appbank."* (Company A)

Company H mentioned:

*"Major gaming media exposure and videos from youtubers may help us in some ways. The media stuff probably the biggest one."* (Company H)

The other advantage of utilizing game websites as marketing communicational channels is the low cost. By searching on the Internet, even a personal developer can produce a list of major game websites in one day without spending budget. Besides, mobile game developers or publishers can send emails to these websites to introduce their games, to ask for game review or to ask for posting an article about their games, which is basically free of charge. The relatively low cost makes game websites as an important channels that a large part of mobile game developers or publishers would like to try. Company B described as following to support this point:

*"The game was posted on around 6 or 7 media. Some came from my personal connections to media, and some other media who posted the game by themselves. Personal connection is still pretty useful in this aspect. I didn't spend lots of money on this."* (Company B)

Nevertheless, game websites are not simply marketing tools for game developers and publishers. Game website operators aim at providing valuable information to game players. The information basically needs to be objective, knowledgeable and critical so that it can satisfy most readers, acquire more readers and differentiate from competitors. Moreover, there are hundreds of new mobile games are launched every single day, which means those major game websites may be bombed by tens or hundreds of emails from mobile game developers and publishers every day. As a result, the key point to effec-

tively use game websites as a marketing communicational channel would be highly related to the quality of information in the email sent to game websites. The email needs to be engaging and attractive for those journalists to pick up, or it would just be ignored. This may be the critical issue for mobile game developers and publishers since it may be wasting time sending emails to game websites without an amazing story.

Comparing to sending emails to game websites to introduce mobile game products, issuance of press release is a formal and potentially more effective way than simply sending emails to game media. There are press release delivering services existing to help people deliver their article of press release to cooperated media. Those press release delivering services for USA or Japan can be found through the Internet with cost range from zero to thousands of US dollars per issuance, such as ReleaseWire and SBWire for USA and PR TIMES and Dream News for Japan. Since some of these press release delivering services qualify the contents of received press release application, emails from these press release delivering services may represent higher credibility than random emails from game developers or publishers for journalists or media.

4 out of 6 Japanese mobile game developers and publishers issued press release to promote their mobile games, and similarly 2 out of 3 Finnish mobile game developers and publishers also did so.

Company A mentioned:

*"We did press release first and updated our official website and Facebook page. Our press release was shared through Facebook for quite many times. We didn't aim for that though."*

Company B mentioned:

*"I also sent press release to many media and ask some journalists through my personal connections. I used a press release service from App Marketing Labo to deliver press release to 60 gaming media."*

Company H mentioned that their publisher issued press release for them and Company D, F and I also described that issuing press release is one of the basic marketing communication strategy for their mobile game.

In Japan, there are more than 60 game websites and more than 10 kinds of press release delivering services. Since the cost is relatively low, Japanese mobile game developers or publishers tend to send emails to game websites to introduce their games or issue press release in order to raise marketing exposure. High-end press release delivering services cost 30,000 yen per issuance and cheap ones cost 10,000 yen for unlimited issuance for a month, which are considered as effective channel for delivering marketing communicational messages with relatively low cost. For Finnish mobile game developers or publishers, although there is no evidence showing that they tend to issue press release in foreign markets such as USA or UK, some of them issue press release in Finland

to raise their reputation in their home country, and some of them issued press release in USA through local publishers in America. Although the countries and markets are different, the performance under the effectiveness and cost looks reasonable for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers to try.

### 6.2.3 Social media

Most Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers tried to use social media as their channels for marketing communication. The first potential reason is the low cost. In most cases, it doesn't cost anything to operate channels on social media except the time and efforts of the teams. Since financial resource is commonly highly limited for small or medium-size mobile game developers or publishers, it is reasonable to choose social media as the channels for marketing communication.

Nevertheless, the utilization of social media varies very much among different social media. Twitter owns 320 million monthly active users in the world and is the most commonly used social media for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers (Twitter, 2015). Company D designed Twitter button in their game to make the game-related messages be shared through Twitter easier:

*"We designed Twitter button in the game in order to make the action for sharing through social network service (SNS) easier. It also has pushing function to recommend users to share in some interesting scenes in the game. The sentence for twitting was prepared and installed in the game, so the sentence will be used when users tap the Twitter button in the game." (Company D)*

Besides, company E said that the anonymity of Twitter makes the users feel more comfortable to share information without worrying too much about their reputation.

*"Twitter worked quite well. Some more buttons in the games would be good. Many students are using Twitter, and the feature that you don't need to use real name on Twitter also facilitated sharing actions."*

Furthermore, the feature of Twitter to limit text length to 140 characters in each post potentially makes each post as a short message rather than a deep article, which also promotes Twitter as a channel for quick and easy sharing. Data provided by PeerReach demonstrated that USA, Japan and UK are the top one, two and four markets that own the most active Twitter users in 2013, which implies the potential effectiveness to use Twitter as a marketing communicational channel for USA, UK and Japanese markets (PeerReach, 2013).

In the other way, Facebook wasn't used as much as Twitter as a channel for marketing communication by Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers even though the monthly active users on Facebook is 1.55 billion

which is much higher than those of Twitter (Facebook, 2015). The possible reasons can be considered as the difference in features between Facebook and Twitter. One important feature is the anonymity. Facebook requests users to use real name for their account, but Twitter doesn't. Hence, Facebook users may care more about their reputation while trying to sharing out information. Moreover, the connection on Facebook tends to be real friends, which may make people hesitate to deliver business related messages through the network of their real friends on the basis of the motivation to keep the relationship as simple as friends but not business partners. Although some features of Facebook prevent it from being a channel for marketing communication as popular as Twitter, some other features of Facebook may be the reason why there are some mobile game developers and publishers willing to use it as a marketing channel. One potential reason is the stronger connection of real friends. Because of the limited resource in budget and manpower, small game developer team or publisher team need to ask their friends for help in many situations. In this case, Facebook may be a proper channel to ask friends to spread out important information. The description of Company A supports as following:

*"The most effects came from buzz. Others such as user's word-of-mouth on Twitter and Facebook is more effective in our feeling. We got 100 Facebook likes on our first press release." (Company A)*

Furthermore, Facebook offers community or fan page functions. Due to the much bigger user base on Facebook in USA, UK and Japan than Twitter (Statista, 2014), operation related communities or participation in relevant communities or operation of fan pages may provide more chances for market exposure and marketing message delivery for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Company G mentioned that Twitter and Facebook are the major marketing communication channels for them:

*"We relied very heavily on Twitter and Facebook. We tried to be active on customer support. They are very good channels to respond to the problems and questions from users." (Company G)*

Company G also described how social media channels are challenging for them and how they managed to operate the channels:

*"At the same time, it's very challenging, because you have to be very active to keep the conversation going on the social media channels to engage them. When you get many followers on your channels, you won't be able to reach out to all of them. We tried to have a schedule for posting. As a small team we had sparse updates. People are waiting for contents and no matter what we release, people still feel it not enough. We do as much as we can, and we develop as much as we can. We tried to promote these things on these channels to keep the conversation going and get some feedback." (Company G)*

Other social media are relatively weak as channels for both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Although Line possesses 58 million registered users in Japan (LINE Corporation, 2015), Line is a social media mainly used for online chatting but not for information sharing (Senoo, 2014). Therefore, it is relatively difficult to spread out information on Line as a marketing communicational channel. In the case of Google+, the relatively small user base is the potential problem. It was estimated that monthly active user number of Google+ was 3.5 million, which is almost 1% of the user base size of Twitter (Gallagher, 2015). The small size of use base potentially makes it weak to be an effective channel. Nevertheless, Company A felt that Google+ performed well in Taiwan:

*"We also got shared on Google+ for 740 times. So these are why we felt the sharing culture in Taiwan is much stronger than Japan." (Company A)*

An interesting phenomenon was observed in the case of Company B. In most small and medium size mobile game companies or teams, there is no social media influencer in their teams. However, there is one social media influencer in Company B and the influencer owns more than 3,000 connections on Facebook to the most corners in the mobile game industry in Japan. Besides, this influencer has stayed in Google Japan and Rakuten for a couple of years, which also increases his credibility as an social media influencer in the mobile game industry in Japan.

#### **6.2.4 Online advertisement**

Online advertisement is a fully controllable channel for mobile game developers and publishers. However, the disadvantage is the cost and the risk is the return over investment on the advertisement. Especially in SMEs, the financial resource is commonly highly limited, which makes the risk for investing on online advertisement for marketing much bigger than big companies. Company E said that the average budget of marketing communication activities for each game is only 500,000 yen. Company F explained that the usage of online advertisement would be depending on the budget scale of the project. Company G also mentioned the financial aspect of online advertisement:

*"I think Facebook is a very good and low-risk channel for small publishers since now advertisement will be very expensive in the coming holidays, but it's still good for us to know whom we are reaching out. Other than that, we used some standard ways like banners or interstitial campaigns. We did in a very small scale for user acquisition. The most pay-off way is word of mouth and improvement of the game." (Company G)*

In mobile game industry, it's common to calculate cost per installation (CPI) to evaluate the performance of each marketing communicational channel. As it was mentioned by Suckley in 2015, the CPI of USA/Canada was \$2.41 for iOS apps and \$1.81 for Android apps, and the CPI for Japan was the highest in

the world, which was \$2.63 for iOS apps and \$1.67 for Android apps. Under this situation, as long as the revenue earned from each download cannot exceed the CPI, it's not profitable to invest in advertisement, which is demonstrated by Company B:

*"I don't plan to do other promotional activities before I confirm the effects of current activities. If it's like social games that create 500 yen revenue per download, I would be able to do advertisement. However, according to the feature of our current game, the budget for advertisement is at most 100 yen per download. In that sense, we can't afford to do advertisement on ad networks. I would rather keep asking media for app review and doing small advertisement on Twitter, Facebook and Adwords by myself." (Company B)*

The situation is similar in Company D in both the aspect of limited financial resource and the effectiveness of online advertisement:

*"If we didn't get a good hit on the game, we don't pay for advertisement. Basically we only pay a very small amount of money for advertisement and see how it works." (Company D)*

As a result, it is more common and reasonable for small scale mobile game developers and publishers to start online advertisement after accumulated a certain amount of profit from the launched games but not invest a large proportion of resource in online advertisement at the beginning.

### **6.3 The channels used only by Japanese or only by Finnish mobile game developers and publishers**

#### **6.3.1 Game ranking chart (buy downloads)**

Interestingly, the importance of the ranking position on the ranking chart of online app stores is not the same for Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. In a report published by MobileDevHQ (2014), it discovered how mobile phone users found new apps in USA. Through a survey of 350 iPhone users, it demonstrated that 47% of the users search the app in the App Store, 15% of the users were recommended by friends or family members, 11% of the users knew the app from websites and only 10% of the users found the new apps from the ranking chart on App Store. On contrast, similar research in Japan showed that 66.6% of mobile phone users check the recommended apps by online app stores and the ranking chart to choose new apps to download (Mixi Research, 2014). The fact that how mobile phone users find new apps different in USA and Japan may be the reason why Japanese mobile game developers and publishers considered the position on the ranking chart of online app stores as one of the important marketing communicational channel but not

Finnish mobile game developers and publishers. Japanese mobile game developer and publisher, Company E revealed as following:

*"With the steps of game release, boost advertisement, the number of download increased since last December (2014). If the performance is good, app will be further updated and more budgets will be added for boost advertisement. Boost advertisement is the most efficient strategy. Since our games are mainly casual games, the performance of ad network advertisement is not good enough to cover the cost. Although we also tried word-of-mouth and buzz marketing, it was very difficult. So far boost advertisement is still the best strategy according to performance and cost index." (Company E)*

Comparing to the ignorance of Finnish mobile game developers and publishers to the position on app ranking chart on online app stores, Japanese mobile game developers and publishers paid more time for this. Some Japanese mobile game developers and publishers even tried to discover those factors which can raise the position on the ranking chart (AppMarketingLabo, 2013). Furthermore, there are even services developed in Japanese mobile game industry for mobile game developers or publishers to pay for buying download number to raise the ranking position on the ranking chart. Japanese mobile game developers and publishers may tend to believe that a higher position on the ranking chart on online app stores would increase market exposure for their mobile games while delivering a marketing communicational message, "Our mobile game is very popular and the high ranking is the evidence. So you should check it out, too!" However, buying downloads to raise ranking position seems to violate the rules of App Store of Apple, which makes it controversial to operate ranking chart as a marketing communicational channel in Japanese mobile game industry.

### **6.3.2 Pre-launch registration**

Although there are lots of pre-launch registration services existing in Japan for mobile games, the most influential one is "Yoyaku Top 10" since it provides services to mobile game developers and publishers free of charge and also owns significant number of visitors to their website (Social Game Info, 2014). The reason why Yoyaku Top 10 started isn't clear. It is supposed to be related to a trial of new promotional business of an advertisement agency since the operating company is originally operating mainly in online advertisement business (Adways, 2013). Shortly in two years, Yoyaku Top 10 has grown to the top pre-launch registration service in Japan and most mobile game developers or publishers use it to acquire users before launch their games.

Most Japanese mobile game developers and publishers in this study have or are willing to do pre-launch registration for their mobile games. Company F express that they have done pre-launch registration. Company A and B both described that they utilized pre-launch registration to acquire initial users for their mobile games. Company E explained that they are willing to do pre-launch registration if they can get a bit more man power for the game project.

Company D revealed that pre-launch registration has been a basic step in their game launching process:

*"We have a basic pattern. First, we do pre-launch registration on Yoyaku Top 10. Then we issue press release." (Company D)*

On contrast, Finnish mobile game developers and publishers don't recognize pre-launch registration services as important marketing communicational channels for their games, even though there has been pre-launch registration services existing in the US market (Ikeda, 2014). One of the services, Pre-Launch.Me is growing fast in USA (Adways, 2015). However, the total user number of the service is estimated to still be relatively few, which makes it not an attractive or effective option as being chosen as a marketing communication channel for their games, even though the effectiveness in the future could potentially be high.



## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The global mobile game market has been growing drastically in the past years, and it also has been much more competitive in major markets, especially in USA and Japan. As a result, one of the keys to succeed in these markets is effective and efficient marketing and marketing communication strategy. How the marketing strategy of mobile game developers and publishers could fit into the targeted markets is now the key to determine if the mobile game developer or publisher can survive and develop in the future. In order to discover this issue, it is investigated according to the following questions:

- What is the marketing communication strategy used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers respectively?
- What are the effective marketing communication channels used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers respectively?
- What are the differences between the marketing communication strategies used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers?
- What are the differences between the effective marketing communication channels used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers?

Facing different market and markets with different features, how differently, how effectively and how efficiently Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers choose and execute their marketing communication strategies?

### 7.1 Confirmation of marketing communication models and frameworks

According to Hughes & Fill (2007), the communications between the organization and targeted audience can be classified into four categories: planned, unplanned, service experience-based and product experience-based marketing communications. In mobile game industry and markets, planned marketing communication is connected to the marketing communication strategy planned by mobile game developers and publishers, and unplanned, service experience-based and product experience-based marketing communications rely most on the mobile game product itself. Many Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers believe the key to the success of a game is composed of

two steps: a great game and a good strategy to deliver messages to the audience. The performance of “a great game” would directly affect the effectiveness of unplanned, service experience-based and product experience-based. The strategy to successfully deliver messages to the audience is to let as much audience as possible to receive the messages from the mobile game products or mobile game developers or publishers with as low cost as possible.

With relatively less budget for game development and marketing activities, many Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers try to deliver their marketing communication messages through those marketing communication channels that are relatively low cost, such as social media channels, press release or online gaming media, etc. Through these relatively low-cost channels, most Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers expected that their mobile games could let the audience obtain experience that are effective enough to let the audience spread out their influence to others, which would be an effective way to deliver marketing messages with extremely low cost. In the marketing activities of mobile game developers and publishers, the most significant and resource-consuming parts are the development of a high-quality game and the delivery of marketing messages to the audience. By referring the communication-based marketing model (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998), the brand value is built mainly on the product mix and marketing communication mix since the price of mobile games in the market doesn't vary a lot (Brodie, 2016) and the distribution of mobile game is basically through the Internet.

The focus of this study, which is the marketing communication channels used by Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers, can be directly connected to the personal sales, advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing which is proposed in the model of interrelationships between tools, media and audience in planned marketing communications (Fill, 2009). Each important marketing communication channels used by the Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers in this study is highly related to the effectiveness and efficiency to deliver marketing communication messages to the audience, which connect directly to personal sales, advertising and sales promotion, etc. This demonstrates the same meaning in Fill's (2009) idea in planned marketing communications. The investigated marketing communication channels in this study equals to the media in Fill's description.

The model of communication for marketing channels proposed by Mohr & Nevin (1990) is strongly confirmed in this study. The companies investigated in this study built up their own strategy for marketing communication according to the types and features of their game products and their experience to each channel. Those channels existing in the market owns various features, including cost effectiveness, time consumption, reaching range, etc. Besides, the relationship and personal connection from mobile game developers and publishers to the channels could be another potential factor to affect the performance and effectiveness of the marketing communication activities. Together with the different strategies of developers and publishers to each game product and different channels, the qualitative and quantitative results could be evaluated.

## **7.2 Difference in effective marketing communication channels**

### **7.2.1 Difference in budget and own experience**

From this study, it's clear that the major marketing communication strategies used by small and medium-sized Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers are game playing video and youtubers, game websites, press release and social media such as Twitter, Facebook. However, the effective marketing communication channels used by mobile game developers and publishers vary a lot among different companies, especially in those marketing communication channels that need more budget relatively. Game playing video could cost only little to produce. However, low-cost game playing video could be difficult to reach the high quality to match the high expectation from the game players. Spending high cost to produce game playing video is another significant financial pressure to small and medium-sized mobile game developers and publishers. Similarly, using youtubers as marketing communication channels faces the same situation. Using a famous youtuber who owns millions of followers could be powerful, but could also cost over the planned budget. Under the situation that small and medium-sized mobile game developers and publishers are usually lack of financial resource, issuing press release, getting contact with game websites and operating social media become the main stream in the utilized marketing communication channels since these channels consume relatively low cost by spending more time of the developers and publishers.

Besides, each company has its own conditions and experience while using each marketing communication channel. When a mobile game developer or publisher has a plan to do cooperation with the agency of a famous youtuber, the channel of using youtuber would be an effective channel for this mobile game developer or publisher. In this case, this mobile game developer or publisher would feel that the channel of youtubers is more effective than other channels. Similarly, when a mobile game developer or publisher has long experience and good performance from buying downloads to raise position on ranking charts, the channel of buying downloads would be the most effective one for the developer or publisher. Again, when a mobile game developer or publisher spends sufficient human resource and time to operate social media, such as an official Twitter account or a Facebook fan page, this developer or publisher would consider social media as the most effective channel for them. How the strategy of the mobile game developers and publisher could be well applied to the specific channels efficiently and effectively is the key to successful marketing communication activities.

### **7.2.2 Difference in the marketing communication strategy**

In the other hand, by considering the difference between the marketing communication activities of Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and pub-

lishers, Japanese mobile game developers and publishers focus on Japanese market first, which makes Japanese mobile game developers and publishers utilize more marketing communication channels that are effective in Japan without considering the effectiveness of those channels in other overseas markets. On the contrast, since Finland is a very small market, Finnish mobile game developers and publishers focus more on major western markets, such as USA and European markets, which leads Finnish mobile game developers and publishers to reach out to the channels in different overseas markets or overseas publishers. Nevertheless, it's very similar to both Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers that the performance of each channel is considered as one of the most important factors to determine the following usage of the channel.

### **7.2.3 Difference in user preference in channels**

Although mobile game developers and publishers choose the marketing communication channels under consideration of their strategy for their game products and their experience on each channel, there are still some difference in using marketing communication channels between Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers identified in this study. One is to buy downloads to raise the ranking position on the ranking chart of Apple App Store and Google Play. Due to the feature of Japanese game players, Japanese game players rely on the ranking chart of online store to find new mobile games more than the game players in USA, which makes the special market of buying downloads develop in Japan. In this case, the feature of how mobile game players find new mobile games determines the effectiveness of this channel in different markets. The other one is the existence and influence of specific channels in the specific markets. Pre-launch registration is a significant service in Japan and is helpful to acquire users with relatively low cost (with the service plan free of charge). Pre-launch registration service is not a significant service in USA, although it's growing in the market. Since pre-launch registration service is not influential in USA, Finnish mobile game developers and publishers are not aware of the importance of this channel and tend to ignore it. Similarly, the social LINE is a popular messenger app in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Nonetheless, the influence and penetration of LINE in other countries, including European countries and USA, are very low, which also make LINE a channel that would be easily noticed and utilized in Japan but ignored in Finland by mobile game developers and publishers.

## **7.3 Managerial implication**

Through this study, it is understood that most SMEs mobile game developers and publishers are generally lack of financial resource. As a result, the budget scale for using a marketing communication channel and the potential perfor-

mance are the keys for SMEs mobile game developers and publishers to pick up a channel in their marketing communication activity. Most of interviewed Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers have tried multiple marketing communication channels. However, most of them started with channels that cost relatively less at the beginning such as game websites, pre-lunch registration service, press release or social media.

The other key in choosing channels for marketing communication activity for SMEs mobile game developers and publishers is their own experience on the specific channel. Those who own a certain amount of experience on specific channels tend to use the channels. This is considered to be related to the efficiency in marketing communication activity. Since SMEs mobile game developers and publishers are generally lack of financial resource and time, they tend to focus on the efficiency of choosing and using specific marketing communication channels. Nevertheless, this study didn't cover the influence of language capability of the SMEs mobile game developers and publishers when they enter an international market.

By considering the difference of different markets, users have different preference in using different channels for receiving the messages related to mobile games. Some channels such as game ranking charts on app stores, pre-launch registration services, social media like LINE are more preferred by Japanese mobile game users, which is one of the important differences of Japanese market. Therefore, the understanding of the user preference in media channels can be important to enter an international market.

For SMEs mobile game developers and publishers, the budget could be generally highly limited, but the experience of using different marketing communication channels could be learned from other developers and publishers. Learning the details of how other SMEs mobile game developers and publishers used specific marketing communication channels effectively and efficiently could bring potential chances of utilizing new effective and efficient channels or making current using channels more effective or efficient. On the other way, discovering the user preference in media channels could be more difficult. The language capability and the familiarity of the culture of specific international market of the SMEs mobile game developer or publisher could be the key to discover the user preference in media channels in the specific international market. Acquisition of a staff who owns the capability or establishment of partnership to a partner who owns the capability could be the potential way to understand the user preference in media channels of the specific international market.

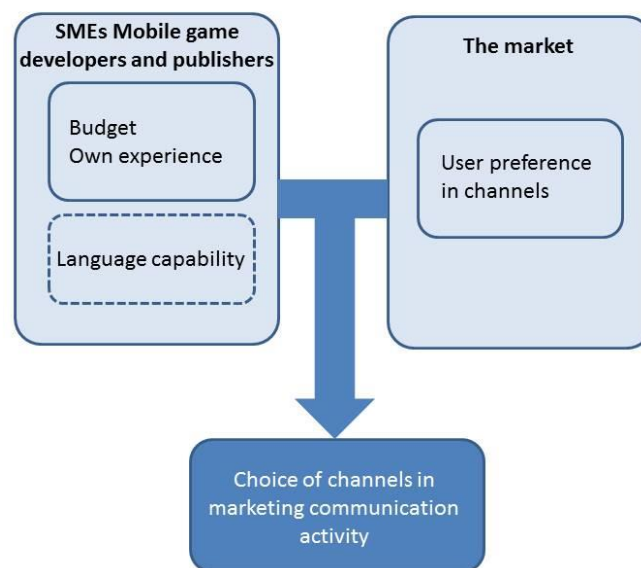


Figure 15. Factors that influence choice of channels in marketing communication activity of SMEs mobile game developers and publishers.

#### 7.4 Study limitation and future research

Although this study investigated and revealed what are the marketing communication strategy and effective marketing communication strategy used by Finnish and Japanese mobile game developers and publishers, the reliability and validity of this study is still highly limited.

First, there are only 9 interviewees in this study to represent mobile game developers and publishers in 2 different markets, which may not be reliable enough to be representative. More samples can be applied for future research to verify the results concluded in this study. Secondly, the criterion of a mobile game developer or publisher launched a mobile game acquired more than 100,000 downloads could be still too few to be defined as a popular game. With relatively low number of download as a criterion of choosing mobile game developers and publishers as interviewees, the marketing communication strategy they used may not be really effective enough to be applied on other developers or publishers. Taking mobile game developers and publishers who launched games with more download number could raise the validity of the conclusion from this study. Furthermore, this study took download number as the standard for definition of effective launch of one or multiple mobile games, which is not directly related to the operation of mobile game developers and publishers. Since revenue and profit are the most important factors for mobile game developers and publishers to run their businesses and maintain operation, revenue should be also considered as a criterion for choosing a candidate interviewee,

because the revenue of each mobile game is directly connected to the performance of the game and also the marketing communication strategy. Besides, the budget used for each marketing communication channel of each mobile game developer or publisher and the produced performance of each marketing communication channel was not investigated. The cost performance efficiency was not investigated quantitatively but rather qualitatively, which may cause variation and error from the real situation. Identification of budget and performance of each used marketing communication channel of each mobile game developer or publisher could be integrated into future research for further clarification. Another aspect that was not investigated in this study is the influence of language. Although the language used by Japanese mobile game developers and publishers in Japanese market is a single language: Japanese, but while Finnish mobile game developers and publishers launch their games targeting the major market, USA, the English language is not their mother tongue. This difference in language capability of mobile game developers and publishers may cause some potential difference in planning marketing communication strategy and choosing marketing communication channels. In future research, language difference from the target market and the mobile game developers and publishers should also be considered and included.

## 7.5 Summary

Therefore, through this study, it can be understood that there are several important factors that affect how Japanese and Finnish mobile game developers and publishers determine which marketing communication channels to use. 1) First is the type and feature of the game product. Only when the type and the feature of the game product match the feature of the channel, the performance of the channel can be maximized. 2) The second factor is the experience and the know-how of mobile game developers and publishers in operating or utilizing the channels. Higher experience and more practical know-how to specific channels make mobile game developers and publishers perform better in the channels, which also make the mobile game developers and publishers to use the same channels more often. 3) The third one is the existence and significance of specific channels in specific market. Without existence and significance, the channels could be ignored easily while the marketing manager in the developer or publisher team is making plan for marketing communication activities. 4) The last one is the behavior of the users in the specific market. When the behavior of users is different in different markets, it's necessary to understand the situation and applied the best or better channels to approach the users.

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## APPENDICES

### Interview questionnaire

#### Background

- Job title, job description, brief career for far
- Scale of mobile game business, number of employees, average age, revenue scale
- Major customers, age of major customers, major gender
- Major competitors
- Position of your company in the market (Game category, core/casual, multi/single player, etc)

#### Marketing communication strategy

(How did you deliver your marketing messages to the potential players?)

- Launch date
- Number of download
- Download number over time
- The most effective/efficient marketing communicational strategy
- What are the marketing activities at different time points (before, at, after launch)?
- What is the standard for choosing marketing activities?
  - Press release (external service used?)
  - Game related websites
    - Pre-launch registration
    - News sites
    - Review sites
  - Youtuber game play video
  - Promotional video
    - Which channels used?
  - SNS
    - Facebook
    - Twitter
    - Line
    - Others
  - Blogs
  - Emails
  - Advertisement
    - Media, internet, agencies
- Marketing officer
  - What are the points you would take care of in planning marketing activities? What is the main difference among those marketing channels you used?
  - How did you package your products (games) with your marketing messages to make it attractive to potential game players? Did

you try to make some stories for the product or for marketing activities?

#### Future

- Which part will you focus on for marketing communication in the future in your company?

What may be the most effective or efficient method (or something new you want to try) in marketing communication in your opinion? Why?