MOBILE LEGENDS: BANG BANG - DYNAMICS OF MOBILE GAME DEVELOPMENT THAT COLORING THE INDONESIAN GENERATION

By:

Si Ngurah Wahyu Dwi Suputra[1], I Putu Adi Saskara[2]
ITB Stikom Bali[1], Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa[2]

e-mail:

wahyudwisuputra@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang is a mobile game that has had a major impact on the young generation of Indonesia. Since its release in 2016, the game has grown rapidly and become part of popular culture, supported by increasing smartphone penetration and access to technology. The purpose of this study is to discuss the development of Mobile Legends in three periods: before COVID-19 (2016-2019), during the pandemic (2020-2021), and post-pandemic (2022-2024). This study uses a qualitative approach based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice, in this study analyzes how Mobile Legends shapes the social structure and cultural identity of the young generation of Indonesia. The concepts of habitus, capital, and arena explain how developers and player communities create social spaces that strengthen norms and cultural interactions in the digital world. As a result, Mobile Legends has a significant economic impact on social structures, opening up new opportunities in the gaming and esports industries and other impacts on Indonesian society.

Keywords: Mobile Games, Indonesian Youth, Cultural Identity, Mobile Legends, Social Practices.

INTRODUCTION

The development of technology has changed the entertainment paradigm, especially in the form of mobile games, which have become an integral part of the daily lives of Indonesian people. In recent years, Indonesia has become the main stage for the phenomenon of the development of the mobile game industry that has shaken the younger generation. Mobile games are no longer just entertainment in between free time, but have become a popular culture and lifestyle for Indonesian youth. One of the main factors driving the dynamics of the development of mobile games in Indonesia is the increase in accessibility of technology. As a country with rapid growth in smartphone penetration, Indonesia is fertile ground and an attractive market for the development of the mobile game industry. Since the early 2010s, mobile games have become an inseparable part of people's lifestyles, touching various age groups (Skinner et al., 2018). However, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, which was released in 2016, brought a breath of fresh air to the mobile game ecosystem in Indonesia. Mobile Legends: Bang Bang emerged as a striking phenomenon, dominating the mobile game market share which at that time immediately became one of the most popular games in Indonesia.

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang itself is a multiplayer online mobile game (video game) developed and published by Moonton, a game company from Shanghai, China. This game was released worldwide on July 14, 2016 (Novianti & Lawanda, 2023). Mobile Legends Bang Bang game is included in the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) online game genre, is strategic and is usually played by 5-10 people in 1 game. The creator of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang is a businessman named Justin Yuan. Justin Yuan is the CEO and founder of Moonton. Justin Yuan is a visionary and experienced figure in the gaming industry who successfully led the development team to create Mobile Legends, a MOBA game that combines elements of strategy and action in team battles (I. Irwanto, 2023). In 2021, Justin Yuan stepped down from his position as CEO of Moonton. However, his role and contribution in creating Mobile Legends and building the Moonton company are still recognized. Until now, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang continues to grow with updates and feature improvements that are continuously carried out by the development team led by Moonton.

The popularity of the Mobile Legends game is also inseparable from the strong character design that creates visual and emotional appeal to players. Several characters in Mobile Legends are designed by taking inspiration from popular culture, mythology, or historical figures. Such as Lapu-Lapu (Philippines), Minsittha (inspired by Kyansittha; Myanmar), Kadita (inspired by Nyi Roro Kidul; Indonesia), and Badang (Malaysia) (B. R. Irwanto & Wuryandari, 2023). This can make players feel connected to the character and add a cultural dimension to the game. The game also offers a variety of characters with different abilities and play styles. Players have the option to choose a character that suits their preferences and play style, creating a more personalized experience. This is what builds loyalty and increases the overall appeal of the game.

But behind its popularity, Mobile Legends has reaped controversy, being sued by Riot Games for alleged copyright infringement. Riot Games accused Mobile Legends of plagiarizing the games League of Legends (LoL) and Wild Rift. (Hardiansyah, 2022). The lawsuit was filed in 2017 and 2022 claiming that Moonton had committed copyright infringement, including aspects of the logo, characters, map design, hero design, and monster design. With the many controversies that accompanied the emergence of Mobile Legends, this game did not lose its fans. In fact, this game won several prestigious awards such as Google Play Best of 2016, e-Sports Industry Awards 2017, The Game Awards 2017, 2018 Indonesia Game Awards, 2018 Asian Games, The International Mobile Gaming Awards Southeast Asia (IMGA SEA) 2018, 2019 Indonesia Game Awards, 2020 The Esports Awards, and 2021 The Esports Awards. These awards and nominations reflect the industry and community's recognition of Mobile Legends as one of the most successful mobile games globally and has an important place in the world of esports. This study aims to understand the dynamics of mobile game development, especially Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, which is one of the most popular games in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with analysis based on the theory of social practice proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. The theory of social practice by Pierre Bourdieu is a deep theoretical foundation for understanding how individuals shape their identities, values, and behaviors through everyday practices. Bourdieu, (1977), in his work entitled "Outline of a Theory of Practice" emphasizes that these practices not only reflect individual preferences, but also create and maintain social structures. This theory emphasizes the importance of social context in shaping individual actions and choices. Bourdieu uses the concept of "habitus" to describe the internal structure of an individual which includes a collection of knowledge, beliefs, and action tendencies acquired through social experience.

Bourdieu's theory of social practice plays a key role in unpacking the complexity of social structures and power dynamics, and can detail how everyday practices reflect and reinforce social inequalities, and how social structures influence these practices such as the Mobile Legends game phenomenon. This theory of social practice can be formulated as seen in Figure 1.

$$Social\ Practice\ =\ (Habitus\ x\ Capital)\ +\ Arena.$$

Figure 1. Social Practice Formula
Source: (Khoirudin, 2020)

As seen in Figure 1, it can be explained as Bourdieu's thinking, habitus is the initial foundation in the development towards social practice. After the clash of Habitus occurs, a second formula is needed which is capital as the feet and hands to realize a friction of Habitus. After realizing it, of course, a Realm (Arena) is needed as a place to execute the pattern or result of the clash of Habitus and assistance from Capital to occupy the Arena. So, if this happens, then the last practice is as the final conclusion of Bourdieu's thinking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics of Mobile Legends Game Development: Bang Bang Among the Indonesian Generation

The dynamics of the development of the Mobile Legends Bang Bang game in Indonesia are divided into three periods, namely;

1. First Period: Before COVID-19 (2016-2019)

Mid-2016 saw the beginning of the emergence of the Mobile Legends game: developed by Moonton. As a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game for mobile devices, Mobile Legends was designed to bring the MOBA experience to a wider audience. With a user-friendly interface and thrilling gameplay, the game immediately caught the attention of players around the world, especially in Indonesia, making it not take long for Mobile Legends to achieve success.

Especially in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, the game has built a solid fan base. This is the beginning of the formation of a new community within the scope of gamers in Indonesia. This success is driven by attractive graphics, easy-to-understand game mechanics, and availability on commonly used mobile devices due to the penetration of smartphone technology in Indonesia (Permassanty & Irawan, 2018).

Of course, this encourages Mobile Legends: Bang-Bang game developers to continue to enrich the player experience by adding new heroes, maps, and game modes. Regular updates are a driving force, maintaining player interest and making Mobile Legends a dynamic game. The Mobile Legends player community continues to grow rapidly, also driven by streaming and content on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook Gaming. Streamers and professional players become idols among viewers, increasing the popularity of the game. Local tournaments also help strengthen the community and stimulate the growth of the Mobile Legends e-sports game community which indirectly creates a collective identity.

Despite its success, Mobile Legends also faces challenges. The controversy with Riot Games surrounding the claim that the game copied the design and concept of similar games. Of course, this dispute is part of the dynamics of tight competition in the gaming industry arena. This dispute and challenge certainly cannot stem the development of this game which continues into the next period (Hardiansyah, 2022).

2. Second Period: COVID-19 Time (2020-2021)

COVID-19 has changed the way people interact with entertainment, including gaming. During this time, mobile games, including Mobile Legends, have seen a significant surge in players. Activities are mostly done at home, making gaming one of the main entertainment options. The pandemic has had a positive impact on e-sports, and Mobile Legends is no exception. Online tournaments and no physical audience have become the new norm. Mobile Legends teams have achieved incredible achievements, and the game has become increasingly recognized as a major platform for e-sports players. On the other hand, the pandemic has caused Mobile Legends to experience a significant shift in its role. The game is not only a form of entertainment, but also a major tool for maintaining social connectivity amidst isolation (Rizkiyani & Gunawan, 2023). This shift in roles causes a phenomenon of shifting behavior and social functions.

Seeing this, Mobile Legends developers responded to the situation or phenomenon by maintaining creativity and maintenance on the game. Developers also partnered with celebrities and utilized innovative marketing campaigns to stay connected with players and expand the user base during the isolation period.

During this time, streaming platforms have become more relevant than ever. Mobile Legends professional streamers and players have become increasingly recognized icons, and online matches attract viewers from all walks of life. The increasing use of technology and attention to in-game security have come into the spotlight. Mobile Legends must continue to adapt to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for players, while maintaining the integrity of e-sports competitions. Based on the description above, it can be said that during this period, Mobile Legends continues to maintain its game user community with various marketing activities. The only thing that has changed is the way the game developer maintains the game user community and increases game usage time, such as improving safe services, increasing partnerships with celebrities.

3. Third Period: Post-Covid-19 (2022-2024)

With restrictions easing, Mobile Legends continues to build on its foundation of success during the pandemic. E-sports tournaments continue, and Mobile Legends is becoming increasingly well-known in the global market. Consolidating achievements and global influence are the main focus of the developer. Post-COVID-19, Mobile Legends faces new challenges along with growth opportunities. Increasingly fierce competition, changing trends in the gaming industry, and technological evolution are factors that require continuous adaptation and innovation.

Of course, this makes Mobile Legends in this period not return to its previous role. Instead, this game has become an integral part of the digital identity of Indonesia's young generation. With the emergence of larger and more well-known content creators, streamers, and online tournaments, Mobile Legends has created a stage for a strong digital identity. Players involved in this community utilize social platforms to expand their influence and cultural capital. Indirectly, this is a cultural transformation. Rahma & Fajar, (2022) stated that the digital presence of Mobile Legends is a significant factor in the formation of online and offline identities of players. The formation of this identity needs to be maintained by game developers for the development and growth of the game in the future.

The Role of Mobile Legends Games in Forming Social Structure and Cultural Identity in the Indonesian Generation Based on Analysis of Social Practice Theory

Looking at the dynamics of the development of the Mobile Legends Game from 2016 to 2024 towards the Indonesian generation, it can be said that this game has a role in forming social structures and cultural identities, even Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, has become a key

element in forming social structures and cultural identities among the young generation of Indonesia. This phenomenon not only creates entertainment activities, but also involves players in social practices that have an impact on the construction of culture and identity. This can certainly be analyzed using Bourdieu's theory of social practice which includes three main concepts: habitus, capital, and arena as seen in Figure 2.
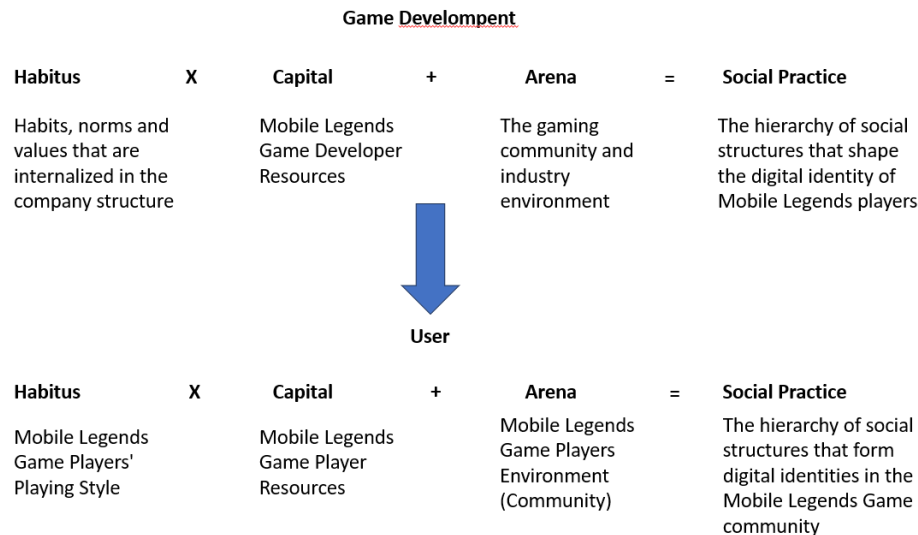
Game Develompent

Habitus	X	Capital	+	Arena	=	Social Practice
Habits, norms and values that are internalized in the company structure		Mobile Legends Game Developer Resources		The gaming community and industry environment		The hierarchy of social structures that shape the digital identity of Mobile Legends players

User

Habitus	X	Capital	+	Arena	=	Social Practice
Mobile Legends Game Players' Playing Style		Mobile Legends Game Player Resources		Mobile Legends Game Players Environment (Community)		The hierarchy of social structures that form digital identities in the Mobile Legends Game community

Figure 2. Implementation of Social Practice Theory

Through the habitus of game developers that includes habits, norms, and values that are internalized in the company structure. In the context of Mobile Legends, Moonton as the main developer, has a habitus that reflects a focus on innovation, responsiveness to user feedback, and dedication to the game community. Regular development of new features, continuous improvement, and active communication with the community are part of Moonton's habitus. This creates a company culture that is open to change and user-oriented.

Meanwhile, Mobile Legends developer capital includes economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Economic capital is reflected in investment in developing quality game technology and content. Social capital includes networks of collaboration with players, game communities, and industry partners. Cultural capital is reflected in a deep understanding of player tastes, global game trends, and game designs that are in line with the target cultural identity. Investment in esports tournaments, collaboration with influencers, and regular updates reflect Moonton's effective use of capital. The friction and interaction of habitus and developer capital in the game community and industry arenas creates a hierarchy of social structures that strengthen the position of the Mobile Legends game in the game market and indirectly creates the cultural identity of Mobile Legends players.

On the other hand, Mobile Legends game users create a habitus that is reflected in playing habits, strategies used, and norms in the gaming community. Afnizal et al., (2023) stated that habitus in the game creates a shared understanding of how the game should be played. For example, certain strategies or special languages that are only understood by the Mobile Legends player community indicate the existence of a habitus that is jointly formed in this game.

Meanwhile, the capital of Mobile Legends game users can be seen in various forms. For example, economic capital is reflected in the purchase of virtual items or character skins. Social capital emerges through the relationships and networks that players build in the game community, while cultural capital is reflected in a deep understanding of game mechanics and characters.

Research by Rizkiyani & Gunawan, (2023) shows that Mobile Legends players invest their capital in various forms to enhance their gaming experience. For example, players can spend money to buy in-game items or build social relationships through participation in tournaments and discussion forums. The friction of habitus and user capital in the game user community environment can form a new social structure hierarchy among game users and indirectly form cultural identity.

Based on both perspectives, it can be said that both game developers and users can form strong social structures and cultural identities. Social Practice Theory suggests that the friction between habitus, capital, and arena creates a "social space" where rules, values, and societal hierarchies can be formed and maintained. The Mobile Legends community not only functions as a gathering place to play, but also as a place where social norms in the game are established and maintained. In summary, Mobile Legends has a crucial role in forming social structures and cultural identities among the Indonesian generation. Through the lens of Bourdieu's Social Practice Theory, we can describe how this game becomes an arena where gaming habitus and social practices develop, creating unique digital and cultural identities. In this context, it can be said that Mobile Legends is not just a game, but a complex phenomenon that shapes and reflects the dynamics of Indonesian society and culture.

CONCLUSION

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang has been a pillar of the mobile gaming industry for the past few years. By charting its history through three distinct periods – before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic – we can understand the roles and developments that have shaped this gaming phenomenon. Reliable sources and user experiences provide a comprehensive picture of how Mobile Legends has evolved from a mere game to a global icon in the e-sports and entertainment industry. Cultural identity is also manifested through Mobile Legends, as a result of the distinctive characteristics and culture of the game adopted by players. Through its online community, Mobile Legends has become a space where players can express and celebrate their cultural identity, creating symbols and language that reflect pride in a particular cultural identity.

On a broader scale, Mobile Legends has a significant economic impact on the social structure, opening up new opportunities in the gaming and esports industry. Thus, Mobile Legends not only affects the social structure in the player community, but also has a greater social impact in Indonesian society.

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