

A Study on the Characterization of Otome Games

¹XiaoHan Zhang, ²Xinyi Shan, *Jeanhun Chung

¹Master's Course, Dept. of Multimedia, Graduate School of Digital Image and Contents,
Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea

²Ph.D, Dept. of Multimedia, Graduate School of Digital Image and Contents,
Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea

Lecturer, School of Fine Arts and Design, University of Jinan, Shandong, China

*Professor, Dept. of Multimedia, Graduate School of Digital Image and Contents,
Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea

¹zhangxiaohan0107@gmail.com, ²yarina.0122@gmail.com, *evengates@gmail.com

Abstract

In recent years, Otome Games, as a popular game genre, have a considerable number of players in the game market and gained high profits. This paper explores the characteristics and influence of Otome Games by analyzing the audience group characteristics, narrative structure, audiovisual design, and other aspects of Otome Games. The study shows that Otome Games attract young women through immersive relationship experiences and diversified plot directions, but there is a trend of templization in audiovisual design. Nevertheless, the genre's emphasis on high realism and sophisticated simulation systems continues to deliver a compelling immersive experience, making these games an integral part of players' lives.

Keywords: Otome Games, Dating Simulation, Interactive Narrative, Immersion

1. INTRODUCTION

Otome Games, as a kind of game developed for female gamers, have become one of the most important game genres in the gaming industry. These games are centered on providing an emotional experience, allowing players to interact with the characters in the game to promote the development of the plot. Players can choose different story endings according to their own wishes, and through realistic relationship simulation to gain widespread attention. With the increasing number of female gamers, the market size of Otome Games is also expanding. This study will analyze the group characteristics and narrative structure of Otome Games to reveal the way they attract and maintain players' interests, thus providing game developers with a deeper understanding of the needs of female gamers and helping them create more popular Otome Games.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Otome Games

Manuscript received: June 25, 2024 / revised: July 14, 2024 / accepted: September 5, 2024

Corresponding Author: evengates@gmail.com, Jeanhun Chung.

Tel: +82-2-2260-3767, Fax: +82-2-2260-3766

Professor, Dept. of Multimedia, Graduate School of Digital Image and Contents, Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea

Copyright©2024 by The International Promotion Agency of Culture Technology. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>)

Otome Games, also known as female-oriented relationship games, are relationship simulation games that target the female population and belong to a type of female-oriented games. The game is generally played from a female perspective or a third-party perspective. Players can experience an immersive love process by interacting with and establishing emotional relationships with multiple male characters, thus achieving emotional fulfillment.

2.2 Development History

In 1994, the Japanese company Koei released the first female romance game *Angelique*, marking the formal birth of the 'Otome Games' genre. This game not only gained immense popularity among female players but also established the framework and style of Otome Games. Subsequently, more and more Otome Games appeared in the Japanese market, creating a unique cultural phenomenon. From 1990 to 2000, these games began to appear on handheld game consoles like the Nintendo DS. With advancements in game technology, improvements in graphics and sound quality attracted more female players. The release of classic Otome Games such as *Harukanaru Toki no Naka De* and *Kiniro no Corda* significantly boosted the market position of Otome Games. In recent years, mobile Otome Games have emerged with the spread of the internet and smartphones. That allows players to enjoy games anytime, anywhere. The influence of Otome Games has expanded to the global market, with increasing numbers of players in Europe, America, China, Korea, and other regions. Game companies are launching multilingual versions to meet the needs of players in different regions. Otome Games are becoming increasingly diverse in content and form, incorporating more cultural elements and continuously expanding their influence.[1]

3. VISUAL PRESENTATION

3.1 Target Audience

The rapid development of Otome Games and the growth in the number of female players show the market's demand for such game genres. According to data from the Game Work Committee of the China Audio and Digital Association, as shown in [Fig.1], the proportion of women among mobile game users is close to 50%. The continued growth of this proportion promotes game companies to pay more attention to the female market. In 2017, *Mr Love: Queen's Choice* was produced by China's Stacked Paper Games, and emerged as a successful example of a game targeting the female market. Combining high-quality visual effects and a rich plot, the game quickly gained great popularity and financial returns in East Asia. The ten million downloads in the first month highlighted the strong market potential and purchasing power of female players. In addition, according to the age distribution of female-oriented game users, as shown in [Fig.2], the proportion of women under 25 years old reaches nearly 50%. The majority of players in this age group are students, who usually have more free time and interest in exploring romantic stories. 37.4% of women between 26-35 years old participate in the game, and most of the players in this group are women in the workplace, who are looking for the game's emotional support and mental relaxation. Female players in these two age groups need to be in the stage of exploring their emotional and social identity, so the romantic relationship theme in Otome Games is more able to attract their attention.

Furthermore, female players' demand for games is mainly reflected in three core aspects: emotion, aesthetics, and companionship. First of all, the emotional demand refers to the strong emotional involvement of players in the game world. Users want to get emotionally involved in the game interactions and stories, and seek emotional solace and fulfillment. Secondly, aesthetic demand refers to the details of the game's graphics, character costumes, art backgrounds, etc. The more beautifully these are designed, the higher the player's satisfaction. Finally, the demand for companionship refers to the process of development, and female players prefer games to find a sense of "companionship". The nurturing process of Otome Games fulfills female players' need for companionship. As players invest time and energy in cultivating a relationship with the characters in the game, the games become a part of their lives. In real life, the probability of finding a partner

that meets their ideal type is not high. Otome Games through the well-designed image of the male protagonist and the plot provide female players a place to repose emotion.[2] Game designers value players' emotional needs and continuously enhance the game experience to gain their sustained dependence. The male protagonists in Otome Games are designed with a variety of occupations and personality types, and their common characteristics are handsome appearance and emotional dedication to the female protagonist. This design satisfies the fantasy of some female players about their ideal romantic partners, allowing players to find characters in the game that match their ideal types. By continuously improving the immersion and personalized design of the game, Otome Games have successfully attracted a large number of female players and gained their lasting dependence. This unique form of gaming not only provides female players with emotional fulfillment but also allows them to find a unique form of entertainment in gaming.[3]

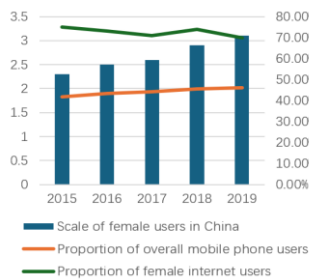


Figure 1. China's Female Game User Scale

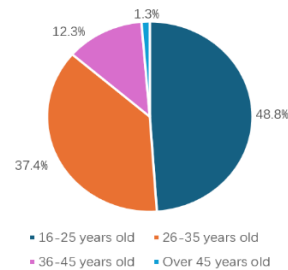


Figure 2. Age Distribution of Female-oriented Game Users in China

3.2 Interactive Narrative Structure

Generally speaking, the plot development of most games is shaped as a linear narrative structure, i.e., a complete story flow is built for the player, who explores the plot according to a fixed process. However, Otome Games adopt a different narrative strategy, utilizing multiple subplots to build a complete story framework. These branching plots center around one or more characters, detailing their daily lives and emotional entanglements. Unlike linear narratives, there is no causal relationship between the subplots in an Otome game, and players can choose different story paths according to their own desires, thus experiencing different emotional paths. [4, 5]

This form of narrative based on player interaction is called a “non-linear narrative”, which shows uncertainty and discontinuity in terms of theme and time. In the development of the plot of Otome Games, multiple nodes form a complex tree-like structure, in which each node carries one or more complete stories. Although they are independent of each other in terms of plot, they will eventually converge back to the main plot, and this non-linear node connection greatly enriches the diversity of the game plot. For example,[6] [Fig.3] shows the process screens in two Otome Games. The game designers provide a variety of nodes by adding dialog options, allowing players to choose their own follow-up actions.

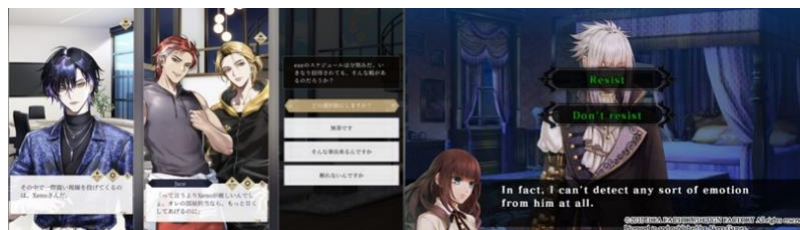


Figure 3. Dialog Options

3.3 Templated Audiovisual Design

Character Design: Otome Games usually use an art form similar to that of anime. The male protagonist is usually a typical “beautiful man”, which is in line with the Japanese culture's aesthetics of male beauty, and the character has delicate facial features and perfect body proportions. In addition, through the diversified design of facial features, Otome Games express the different character traits of the characters, thus enhancing the diversity of the game character image. For example, <Table 1> lists the appearance design features of different characters in the games *Mr Love: Queen's Choice* and *Light And Night*. Different expressions such as five-feature morphology and hair color strengthen the character's personality traits and satisfy the player's diversified visual experience. However, this design mode has also indirectly led to the characteristics of high similarity of characters in the current Otome Games.[7]

Table 1. Appearance Design

	Aloof Type	Lively Type	Gentle Type
Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have thin, Long eyes - Corners of the mouth downward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big eyes - Warm hair color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corners of the Eye Down - Corners of the mouth up
Mr Love: Queen's Choice			
Light And Night			

Color application: Since the characters and backgrounds in Otome Games are mainly presented through static images, and only simple expression and action changes are made through 2D image alternation when it is necessary to express emotions, color plays a crucial role in accentuating the characters' emotions and promoting the plot changes. Most of the graphics of Otome Games often use soft colors to create a romantic and warm atmosphere. Common colors include pink, light blue, and lavender, which have their own uses in different scenes and atmospheres. Among them, pink is often used to present a warm or sweet feeling, and is widely used in the heroine's costumes and scenes to make the overall picture more soft. Light blue is often used to express a serene or dreamy atmosphere, commonly seen at night or during the character's inner monologue, giving a sense of calmness and comfort. Lavender is often used in mysterious scenes or elegant character designs because it conveys a sense of mystery and nobility. In addition, cold colors such as gray and black are often used to express sadness and loneliness due to their dark characteristics, enhancing the depressing and sad atmosphere in sad scenes. Warm colors such as yellow and red, are used to convey warmth and enthusiasm, and are usually found in cheerful scenes to increase the energy and joy of the character or image.

Auditory Design: In the field of gaming, the presentation of visual aesthetics usually dominates, while the sense of hearing mainly plays a supporting role to enhance the overall gaming experience. However, in Otome

Games, the core goal is to make players feel a sense of romantic immersion, so auditory design is also an important part of building immersion in the game. Auditory design in Otome Games mainly includes character dialog dubbing, game background music and game sound effects (e.g. footsteps, rain, etc.), which together enhance the authenticity of the game atmosphere and make it easier for players to feel immersed. Among them, the character dubbing part is especially important. Through the secondary modeling of the voice actors, the characters in the game become more realistic. Details such as the tone of voice, tone and speed of characters' speech not only show the character traits of different characters, but also affect players' understanding of the plot and characters.[8] Therefore, music and character dubbing play an important role in connecting emotions in Otome Games, and are an indispensable part of the process of creating a perfect relationship experience.

3.4 High Realism

Generally speaking, the more authentic something is, the more it is likely to elicit empathy from people. so Otome Games use a variety of highly realistic simulation systems. For example, in *Mr Love: Queen's Choice*, the cell phone interface is designed to be almost the same as reality, and players can interact with the male protagonist through the cell phone. This includes not only call functions but also WeChat-like communication software. As shown in [Fig.4], players can reply to messages by selecting a preset text, so that even when the communication interface is not open, they can still see each other's message alerts, just like on the real cell phone screen.[9]

The game's dating system allows the player to increase the character's favorability by giving gifts, and the characters will also respond instantly to the player's touch commands, such as touching the head or hand to trigger the corresponding actions and lines. In addition, the more protagonist will regularly use sweet words of love, caring words, and sharing about life to enhance the romantic atmosphere with the player. Meanwhile, the game also simulates special events or festivals in the real world, such as birthdays and Valentine's Day, so that players can spend romantic time with their in-game partners. This design not only provides a free and varied relationship experience but also makes the social interactions in the virtual world highly consistent with real life, which greatly enhances the authenticity of the game and the player's sense of immersion.[10]



Figure 4. Mr Love: Queen's Choice

4. CONCLUSION

In modern society, all kinds of survival pressures in life lead to people's emotional loss. Some people are reluctant to take the extra time to meet their emotional needs in this environment. As a love simulation game designed from the perspective of women, the Otome Games successfully fills the emotional gap of players through its perfect experience, so that players can seek emotional support and companionship in the game. So it attracts a lot of female gamers.

To summarize, one of the charms of Otome Games lies in their interactive narrative structure, which

provides players with a wealth of choices and thus enhances the replay value of the game. This form of visualizing text and then transforming it into interactive content opens up a new form of game narrative. At the same time, through careful characterization and use of color, Otome Games create a virtual world full of romantic atmosphere. However, the consequent problem of stereotyping the visual design style resulted in increased game similarity. Nevertheless, with the continuous progress of technology, the authenticity of the game simulation tends to be closer to reality, and the interactive experience has been continuously improved, all of which makes Otome Games still occupy an important proportion of players in the gaming field. In the future, it is crucial that the developers of Otome Games remain attentive to the evolving demands of players and the dynamics of the game market. Continuous innovation and improvement will be essential in catering to the emotional needs of a broader audience of female players and sustaining the genre's relevance and appeal in the future.

REFERENCES

- [1] ManLi Wang, "Analyzing the development history of Japan's Otome Games market[J]," *Mass Literature*, No.2, pp. 227-228, April 2020. DOI: CNKI:SUN:DZLU.0.2021-04-113.
- [2] YuRong Han, XingYu Wang, "Traceability, Genres and Patterns of Female-Oriented Games Explained[J]," *Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China)*, No.6, pp. 141-146, 2020. DOI: CNKI:SUN:XDCB.0.2020-06-026.
- [3] YuXin Wang, "A Study of the Consumption Behavior of the Otome Games Funky Groups," MA thesis. Nanjing Normal University, 2019. DOI: 10.27245/d.cnki.gnjsu.2019.001686.
- [4] YuFei He, Ting Liao, "The Immersive Aesthetics of Interactive Fiction for Otome Games[J]," *Internet Literature Research*, Vol. 6, pp. 140-149, 2023. DOI: CNKI:SUN:WLUO.0.2023-01-011.
- [5] Xiao Meng, "A Study on the Emotional Narrative of Chinese Female-oriented Games: Focused on Love and Producer," Ph.D. Thesis. SeJung University, 2023.
- [6] YongQi Yuan, "A study on Storytelling Structure of Otome Games' Narrative: Focusing on Overlapping Actantial Model in *Love and Producer*," MA thesis. Kyung Hee University, 2022.
- [7] Kyung-Hwa Lee, Chul-Ho Paik, "Analysis of Male Character Design's Stereotype through Otome Game - Focusing on Ensemble Stars," *Journal of the Korean Game Society*, Vol. 17, No.2 pp.45-54, 2017. DOI: 10.7583/JKGS.2017.17.2.45.
- [8] JiaLin Chen, "Semiotics, Self, Ritual: Study on Emotional Interaction of Female Gamer in Otome Game," MA thesis. Huaqiao University, 2020. DOI: 10.27155/d.cnki.ghqiu.2020.000907.
- [9] Zhen Li, "Subculture and Emotional Compensation: An Analysis of Otome Games Mechanics," *Media Criticism*, Vol. 9, pp.221-228, 2019. DOI: CNKI:SUN:MJPP.0.2019-00-017.
- [10] CongYi Zhu, "The Influence of Co-presence and Participation in Otome Games on Love Satisfaction: Focusing on Love in Light and Night," MA thesis. Ewha Womans University, 2023.