

Research on Otome Games' Impact on the Identity Construction of Chinese Women

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Abstract:

This paper explores the impact of otome games, a genre of relationship simulation games, on the identity construction of Chinese women. By examining the popularity and cultural implications of otome games in China, it aims to understand how these games influence women's self-perception, confidence, and social roles. A survey was conducted involving 60 participants, both otome game players and non-players, with data analyzed using correlation tests. The results suggest that the more time women spend playing otome games, the more they experience enhanced confidence and self-awareness. Additionally, these games foster increased independence and diminished concern for male evaluations. However, concerns arise regarding the potential isolation from real-life relationships. Besides, this paper discusses the proper measures that would foster or reduce the influence of playing otome games, providing advice for the government, the game community, and individuals. This paper argues that otome games have a profound effect on female identity construction, offering both empowerment and challenges and highlights the importance of fostering balanced gender perspectives in gaming narratives.

Keywords: Otome Games; Gender Role; Female Consciousness Development

1. Introduction

In recent years, a kind of game called Otome Games has grown in popularity. Otome games, also known as female-orientated love games, are relationship simulation games that target the female population. The target players are usually male characters, and few games can be played with female characters. The world's first otome game, *Angelique*, released by KOEI in 1994 in Japan, was the genesis of the genre. On 20 December 2017, a mobile game called *EVOL*

× *LOVE* was released, distinguishing it from the Japanese cassette game and marking the entry of the Otome game into China. Besides, this game is still running so far.

In today's light-speed development of Otome games, more and more game companies have launched this genre of games. Some representative games such as *Light and Night*, *Love and Space*, and *Beyond the World*, occupy most of the otome game players in the market. According to "Top revenue from female-ori-

ented games on iOS channels in March 2024”, Love and Space has 12,7278.5 thousand turnover, which is 36.77% of the whole revenue of the otome game market. Besides, Beyond the World and Light and Night’s revenue is 96467.8 and 19081.4 thousand each, occupying 27.87% and 5.51% of the market.

The number of female players in otome games in China has reached 24.1% of the total number of females, which means that among 100 women, there are 24 who play or have played the otome games, and the number is getting larger and larger. So the impacts of otome games on Chinese women are getting more and more important and should be taken into consideration. The impacts can be divided into two main parts: female identity construction and their value of love and marriage. This essay will majorly focus on the deep influence on identity formation that the games have on females in China.

Identity construction refers to the process through which individuals or groups form and develop their self-identity. It involves shaping and understanding one’s identity through social interactions, personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and internal cognition. Additionally, it has huge importance in judging individuals’ ability in social interaction, personal way of viewing things, internal cognition, and confidence. Identity construction is a dynamic and complex process, which could be easily influenced by factors like family, friends, and events. Change in one’s identity construction may affect his or her self-esteem and therefore affect their development and future achievement. Moreover, the social structure may even change because of changes in individuals.

Female is a big part of China’s society and is necessary to be considered. Researching female identity construction is helpful in both every female individual and the whole market of otome games or even the society structure in China. First, it can reveal how these games shape and reflect the self-identity and social roles of female players. Second, it helps understand the role of otome games in cultural dissemination and gender perceptions, as well as their impact on female cultural consumption and identity. Finally, this research can provide insights into the broader influence of digital entertainment and media on gender identity. Therefore, this is a topic well worth delving into and is highly meaningful as well. A thorough exploration of this subject provides significant insights for the study of female identity in China and the broader social structure.

2. Literature Review

Otome games, a genre of interactive narrative focused primarily on romantic relationships, have garnered significant attention for their unique appeal to female audiences. These games provide a platform for women to engage in

storytelling, explore their identities, and navigate emotional experiences through gameplay. Research indicates that otome games can have profound effects on players’ emotional satisfaction, self-perception, and social connections.

Cheng Meng found that otome games give female players the ability to decide freely, giving them a chance to fulfill their inner emotional needs and have opportunities to escape from pressure under the patriarchal society [1]. Besides, Tingli Liu and Xin Cheng stated that female identity was becoming more and more various and three-dimensional, fighting against male-dominated culture. However, the current stage of otome games’ explanations of the male gaze and traditional female stereotypes are not complete and mature [2]. The paper above focused mainly on the relationship and change between female power and the patriarchal society. To express personal opinions from a different aspect, Yang Xiaohong and Chen Jingjing mentioned that as female users choose and experience different women-oriented games, they place greater emphasis on their identity positioning within the game world. They gain affirmation through their character roles and interactions with other players, allowing them to experience a sense of identity recognition in the virtual gaming environment [3]. Another paper put forward that as women’s intimacy with male characters increases in games, the mimetic interactions between players and virtual game characters may be directly transformed into romantic interactions, thus weakening women’s perception of real-life relationships [4]. Yuxin Wang and Zhongyang Yang proposed that women play a decisive role in the development of otome game stories, improving women’s self-trust and satisfaction, and enabling players to improve their self-confidence and sense of virtue in real life [5]. Additionally, Tong Wang argued that otome games serve not only as entertainment but also as a space for female’s meaningful personal exploration and connection [6]. Some researchers used specific games to elaborate their ideas. For example, Yirou Wang expressed her statement using the game Love and Producer, saying that players can immerse themselves in romantic relationships and experience emotional satisfaction unlike in the real world, which is a special advantage and feature that otome games own [7]. The work of Kearney delves into the psychological effects of engaging with romantic narratives in otome games. Kearney posits that these narratives can influence players’ expectations and beliefs about real-life relationships, often leading to both positive and negative outcomes. The immersion in idealized romantic scenarios may lead to heightened expectations, which can affect players’ satisfaction in their personal relationships [8]. Further examining the genre, Sato emphasizes the role of agency in otome games. She notes that many otome games empower

players by allowing them to make choices that affect the storyline and character relationships. This sense of agency can enhance players' confidence and provide a satisfying sense of control over their narratives, which is particularly impactful for young women navigating real-life relationships [9]. Moreover, Schott and Horrell investigate the cultural implications of otome games, suggesting that they challenge traditional gender roles by presenting female characters who are complex and multidimensional. Their findings indicate that otome games not only entertain but also encourage players to rethink societal norms regarding femininity and romance [10].

Though many researchers have discussed this area, few of them issued a solid and completed research finding on the relationship between the time of playing the otome games and its influence on female players' identity construction development.

3. Methodology

The main method used in this academic paper is a survey, as well as correlation analysis and Likert 1-7 scoring. The questionnaire faces females in China, being disseminated to females who play otome games and those who do not. Every question has seven options, which are scored from one to seven, representing the level of agreement from low to high. The questionnaire is available in the mini program "Questionnaire Star", and in a fixed spread direction to a fixed king of viewers. The questionnaire has been collecting data for a month, resulting in 62 samples in total. The valid data sample number is 60, and the rest 2 samples are recognized as invalid data due to two deciding principles: the answers show clear regularity and all the answers are the same. For the valid data, scores of each question have been collected and analyzed through correlation tests. In the experiment, the researcher pretended that the time Chinese females spent on otome games was the independent variable, and the change in their attitudes towards identity construction after playing the games was the dependent variable.

4. Result

The study included a total of 60 participants, with 30 indi-

viduals who engaged in otome games and 30 who did not. Among the players, the frequency of gameplay varied significantly. Specifically, 46.67% of the otome game players reported playing daily, while 13.33% played 1-2 times per week. Additionally, 6.67% played 3-4 times per week, another 6.67% played more than five times per week, and 3.33% played 3-4 times per month. The remaining players reported engaging in gameplay less than once a month.

In terms of time spent on each gaming session, 43.33% of players indicated they typically spent less than one hour per session, while 36.67% spent 1 to 2 hours. A smaller proportion, 13.33%, reported spending 2-4 hours, and 6.67% indicated they spent more than four hours per session.

When asked whether playing otome games contributed to an increased awareness of strong female protagonists, over 75% of players responded positively, choosing to agree or strongly agree on options. The average score for this question was 5.37 on a 7-point scale. Furthermore, regarding the perception of otome games as playing a positive role in shaping the image of modern, independent, and confident women, 46.67% of participants selected "strongly agree," corresponding to a score of 7. The average score for this question was 5.93. Additionally, 53.33% of participants strongly agreed with the statement that they became more confident and less concerned about others' opinions after engaging with otome games, yielding an average score of 6.28. Notably, over 80% of players rated the statement "Do you believe that the plot development and character interactions have inspired your personal growth?" with a score of 5 or higher, resulting in an average score of 6.45.

These findings suggest that otome game players perceive the genre as influential in promoting awareness and representation of empowered female characters.

The results of the survey show a clear trend by applying correlation tests. Among the total 60 valid answers in the data set, almost 80% of the questionnaire data show a positive relationship between female players' confidence(C) and the time they spent on the otome games(T). Besides, there is also a positive correlation between female players' confidence(C) and the frequency they play the games(F). Detailed data is shown in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1. Correlation between game frequency and the total confidence score of otome game players

		Total Confidence Score of Otome Game Players(C)	Game Frequency(F)
Total Confidence Score of Otome Game Players(C)	Pearson correlation	1	0.306
	significance(two-tailed)		0.1
	sample size	30	30

Game Frequency(F)	Pearson correlation	0.306	1
	significance(two-tailed)	0.1	
	sample size	30	30

Table 2. Correlation between total confidence score of otome game players and time spent of gaming

		Total Confidence Score of Otome Game Players(C)	Time spent of Gam- ing(T)
Total Confidence Score of Otome Game Players(C)	Pearson correlation	1	0.271
	significance(two-tailed)		0.147
	sample size	30	30
Time spent on Gaming(T)	Pearson correlation	0.271	1
	significance(two-tailed)	0.147	
	sample size	30	30

5. Discussion

One of the results indicates that female players report a significant enhancement in their female protagonist consciousness, which emphasizes women's agency and abilities as protagonists in the story, often involving self-awareness, confidence, and a sense of control over their lives, after engaging with otome games. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors in the design and narrative structure of these games. Otome games such as *Beyond the World*, allow players to assume the role of a female protagonist navigating romantic relationships and personal challenges. The interactive nature of these games enables players to make choices that influence the storyline and character dynamics, fostering a sense of autonomy. During the time players play the games, they not only find entertainment but also experience shifts in self-perception. Because these games often model female characters who have qualities like resilience, decisive, and independence, they can inspire players to try to make decisions on their own, promoting a more assertive and confident self-image in real life. Besides, the players can form a more inner-directed identity. In order to develop these advantages for female players, games should continue to portray diverse representations of strong female characters, ensuring that players see a range of experiences and backgrounds. Encouraging community discussions around the themes and characters in these games can also help players contextualize their experiences and reinforce their learnings in real-life scenarios. Furthermore, integrating workshops or forums that encourage players to reflect on their experiences can solidify their insights and empower them to apply these lessons in their everyday lives. For example, following gameplay, players could engage in discussions about the characters' decisions and relate them to their own challenges, reinforcing the connection

between gaming and personal growth.

Another finding reveals a significant trend indicating that female players who engage with otome games over extended periods report increased self-confidence and a diminished concern for evaluations from male peers. It is highly related to the games' running mode: the female protagonist is primary, while the male characters are more like the positioning of service, and unconditional pursuit of the female protagonist. When players open the game, they will enter a virtual world, where everyone here loves them, cares for them, supporting every decision they make. They do not need to listen to their husband or father's instructions, and every choice they make and every word they say are certainly right. This mode of game can be seen as a revolt against patriarchal society. With plenty of praise and love in the games, players can ignore the bad comments males make about them, escaping from the mood of being controlled by others. Thus, they become more and more self-centered and cannot be easily shaken. However, while the reduction in concern for male evaluations can lead to empowerment, it may also inadvertently foster a sense of isolation or alienation from males in reality. If players overly prioritize their independence and disregard constructive feedback from others, it might create an unbalanced perspective on relationships, leading to misunderstandings or strained interactions with men in their lives. In order to maintain the good impact of Otome games on female players, managers may use this advantage as an aspect of advertisement, inviting more and more females to join in, and building up their self-confidence. Additionally, developers can implement mechanics that reward players for making choices aligned with their values, thus reinforcing the importance of self-acceptance and personal growth. On the other hand, to mitigate potential negative outcomes related to reduced concern for male

evaluations, it is vital to promote a balanced perspective on relationships. Games should incorporate scenarios that depict healthy communication and collaboration between genders, emphasizing mutual respect and understanding. By presenting narratives where female protagonists engage constructively with male characters, players can learn the importance of valuing diverse perspectives without compromising their self-esteem.

The feedback individuals receive from their interactions with others can influence their identity construction. The results of this study indicate that female players experience a significant influence on their mindsets within the gaming community, which contributes positively to their identity construction. By engaging with multifaceted characters and storylines, female players can reflect on their own values, desires, and social roles. This immersive experience facilitates the exploration of personal identity, enabling players to adopt and experiment with different aspects of their identities in a virtual context. Moreover, the supportive community often found in otome gaming spaces encourages dialogue and shared experiences among players. This communal aspect can reinforce positive identity construction by fostering a sense of belonging and validation. Players often discuss their experiences, share insights, and celebrate personal growth, which can further enhance their self-esteem and self-identity. The implications of this finding are substantial. A more refined identity construction among female players can lead to increased confidence and a stronger sense of self in real life. As players navigate the complexities of relationships and personal challenges within the game, they may develop skills and insights that translate into their offline interactions. This positive transformation can contribute to greater social awareness and emotional intelligence. Conversely, this refined identity construction can also have potential downsides. If players become largely reliant on the validation received from the gaming community, they might struggle with identity discrepancies between their online personas and real-life selves. This misalignment can lead to anxiety or identity confusion, particularly if societal expectations conflict with the identities explored in the gaming context. To avoid this situation from happening, game developers and the community should encourage critical engagement, which means players are not allowed to be so polarized and extreme in the players' community. Additionally, encouraging offline connections for female players is also a good choice to increase their identity construction in real life as well, but not only in the game world.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored the significant impact otome

games have on the identity construction of Chinese women, focusing on how these interactive, romance-based games influence players' confidence, self-perception, and social roles. Through a survey and analysis of data from 60 participants, the results showed that women who engage with otome games frequently experience a notable enhancement in their self-confidence, a heightened sense of female empowerment, and a reduced concern for male evaluations.

One of the key findings is the emergence of a "female protagonist consciousness" among players, where women assume active, decision-making roles within the game narratives. This aligns with the portrayal of strong, independent female characters in otome games, which seems to empower players in real life by fostering a sense of autonomy and resilience. These games provide a platform where women can explore their identities in a safe, controlled environment, helping them develop greater self-assurance and assertiveness, which may carry over into their real-world interactions.

However, the study also highlights potential concerns. As otome games allow players to immerse themselves in idealized romantic scenarios where the female protagonist is constantly pursued, supported, and validated, there is a risk that some players may become overly detached from reality. The reduced need for validation from male counterparts, while empowering in many ways, could lead to alienation from real-life relationships, creating unrealistic expectations or diminishing the value of constructive feedback in personal interactions. This may result in identity discrepancies between the player's online persona and real-life self, potentially leading to feelings of isolation or dissatisfaction in their real-world social dynamics.

To address these concerns, it is essential for game developers to create balanced narratives that not only empower female players but also encourage healthy interactions between genders. Games could benefit from including scenarios that promote mutual respect, communication, and collaboration between male and female characters. Additionally, the gaming community could further support identity construction by fostering discussions that relate players' in-game experiences to real-life situations, ensuring that the empowerment gained through gameplay is both constructive and transferable to the real world.

In conclusion, otome games serve as a powerful medium for personal exploration and identity construction among Chinese women, offering both opportunities for empowerment and challenges that must be navigated carefully. Further research should explore the long-term effects of otome gameplay on women's real-life relationships and identity development, providing insights that could inform the future development of this growing genre.

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