

Research on the Feminist Emotional Communication in Otome Games

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the unique cultural carrier of otome games, delving into the manifestations of feminist emotional communication, the impact on players, and the challenges and problems faced. By analyzing the feminist elements reflected in the character construction, narrative, and interactive mechanisms of otome games, this study reveals its positive role in disseminating feminist ideas, enhancing the self-identity of female players, and enriching emotional experiences. At the same time, it also points out the limitations and challenges brought by commercialization, depth of communication, and external social environments. The aim is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural value of otome games, optimize their feminist emotional communication effects, and contribute to the construction of a more equal and inclusive social and cultural environment.

Keywords: Otome Games; Feminism; Emotional Communication; Character Shaping; Player Experience.

1. Introduction

In the era of digitalization sweeping the globe, otome games have emerged as a brilliant cultural star in the game market, rapidly rising in popularity and attracting a large number of female players, weaving a virtual world full of fantasy and emotion. At the same time, feminist thought is thriving in every corner of society, with women increasingly concerned about their representation, emotional expression, and value demonstration in cultural products. They desire to break the long-standing gender shackles and strive for an equal and diverse cultural space [1]. As a cultural product directly targeting female audiences, otome games naturally become an important stage for the dissemination of feminist emotions.

This study aims to deeply analyze how otome games subtly disseminate feminist emotions and meticulously explore the multidimensional impacts of this communication. On one hand, by excavating the differences in feminist emotional communication between otome games and other types of games, it reveals the unique cultural value and communication patterns of otome games. On the other hand, it pays attention to the individual level of self-awareness shaping, emotional satisfaction of female players, and the positive promotion of feminist cultural dissemination and industry development at the social and cultural level [2]. This not only helps to deepen our understanding of the connotation of game culture but also provides valuable references for the game industry to better cater to the needs of female audiences and create a positive and healthy cultural atmosphere [3]. As American sociologist George Herbert Mead said, "Through role-playing, individuals can better understand and internalize social and cultural values." The feminist emotional communication in otome games is undoubtedly an important way for female players to "role-play" in the virtual world and thus perceive and disseminate feminist values.

2. Feminist Theoretical Foundations of Otome Games

2.1. Definition, Development History, and Characteristics of Otome Games

Otome games, designed specifically for female players, revolve around elements of romance and character development to construct game narratives, allowing female players to experience emotional interactions and character growth in a virtual world. They differ from the broad settings of general role-playing games and the simple modes of pure dating simulation games, instead integrating the two organically to provide a unique gaming experience for female players.

2.2. Elaboration on Feminist Theories

Feminism has gone through multiple stages of development, giving rise to various schools of thought, each with its profound core viewpoints. Liberal feminism advocates for equality between men and women in terms of rationality and capability, pursuing equal opportunities for women in education, employment, and other fields. As Simone de Beauvoir exclaimed in "The Second Sex": "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. [4]" It aims to break the shackles of social customs on women's development. Socialist feminism links the oppression of women to the capitalist social structure, advocating for the liberation of women through certain transformations.

In the contemporary field of cultural communication, feminism has clear demands, desiring to break the ubiquitous gender stereotypes in traditional media, discarding the one-sided image of women as weak, dependent, and emotional, actively presenting the diverse images and rich emotions of women, and striving for equal discourse rights in cultural expression.

3. Manifestations of Feminist Emotional Communication in Otome Games

3.1. Feminist Embodiment in Female Character Shaping

3.1.1. External Image and Personality Traits

In the world of otome games, the appearance of female protagonists is as colorful as a canvas, discarding a singular standard of beauty. They are no longer the traditional image of long hair and delicate features, but instead exhibit a diverse style with short, neat hair and distinct facial features.

In terms of personality traits, the female characters in otome games also break the stereotypes, showing a rich diversity. They are brave and decisive, as seen in the protagonist of "Unsettled Case Files," who fearlessly investigates complex case puzzles with her wisdom and courage, unraveling the truth thread by thread. There are also gentle and empathetic characters who use their warmth to affect others and heal those around them. These varied female characters together construct a vibrant and authentic spectrum of female images, allowing players to see that women are not limited to a single personality label but are as colorful as a kaleidoscope [5].

3.1.2. Character Growth and Autonomy

The growth trajectory of female characters in otome games is like an inspiring struggle history. They are not the weak waiting to be saved but are strong individuals who overcome numerous difficulties and achieve their goals through their own efforts and choices. Taking "Love and Night" as an example, the female protagonist starts as a newcomer in the fashion design field and, through continuous learning of professional knowledge, faces various design challenges and industry competition, insists on her own style and philosophy, and keeps involving her works, eventually establishing herself in the fashion world and gaining her own glory. At the same time, in the game world, female characters possess a high degree of decision-making autonomy. When players control the characters, they can make choices based on their own will in the face of various complex situations.

3.2. Feminist Emotional Communication in Narrative

3.2.1. Theme Selection

The narrative themes of otome games are like a mirror, reflecting the diverse pursuits and value manifestations of women in real life. Common workplace struggle themes, such as in "Love and Producer," showcase the protagonist's tenacious spirit and excellent leadership abilities in the competitive entertainment industry, allowing players to feel that women can also shine in the professional field [6].

There are also themes of pursuing dreams, where many female protagonists hold dreams in art, science, and other fields, and overcome obstacles on the road to realizing their dreams. It is worth mentioning that some games involve women's social issues, such as "Unsettled Case Files," which interweaves some manifestations of gender discrimination in legal cases. The female protagonist uses her legal knowledge to speak for victims of gender injustice, guiding players to pay attention to and think about real-life women's rights issues and disseminating feminist ideas through such plots.

3.2.2. Narrative Perspective and Structure

The narrative perspective centered on women is a highlight

of otome games. It is like a magical key that allows players to deeply empathize with the emotional experiences of female characters and strongly resonate with the game world. Compared to game narratives centered on male perspectives, the female perspective can more delicately display the subtle psychological changes of women in emotional relationships and their self-exploration and confusion during the growth process.

In terms of plot structure, otome games skillfully present the nuances of women's emotional changes through multi-threaded narratives and choice branches. For example, in "Travelers in Time," the choices players face in different time and space determine the emotional trajectory with different male characters. Each choice is accompanied by internal struggle and weighing, fully displaying women's thoughts and growth in complex emotional relationships and life situations.

3.3. The Role of Game Interaction Mechanisms in Feminist Emotional Communication

3.3.1. Resonance of Player Agency and Autonomy

Otome games grant players a great deal of autonomy in choice, allowing them to act like painters with a brush, painting the fate and emotional development of game characters according to their own wishes. This reflects the game's respect for the diverse emotional needs and values of women. Some players may prefer a slow and steady cultivation of feelings, enhancing their relationships through warm daily interactions; while other players may prefer a passionate and romantic love mode, and the game provides corresponding plot paths to meet their expectations. This encourages players to boldly explore in the virtual world a feminist lifestyle that aligns with their inner expectations.

3.3.2. Community Interaction and Emotional Resonance

Online communities related to otome games are like a warm family, where players share their gaming experiences and discuss their understanding of feminist emotional elements, creating a strong atmosphere of emotional resonance and greatly enhancing the effectiveness of feminist emotional communication. In official forums or player chat groups, players can often be seen discussing how a female character's growth experience in the game has inspired them or their insights into the feminist ideas conveyed by certain plot segments.

4. Problems and Challenges in Feminist Emotional Communication in Otome Games

4.1. The Balance Between Commercialization and Feminist Ideas

In today's fierce market competition, some otome games, in pursuit of commercial interests, have appeared to cater excessively to the market's vulgar demands, which to some extent weakens the purity of feminist emotional communication.

Maintaining a clear understanding and correct value orientation is essential for game developers to achieve a positive interaction between game commercial success and adherence to feminist core values, avoiding a disconnect between ideology and practice. Developers should recognize that feminist ideology will not hinder the commercial development of games but will instead enhance the cultural quality of the game. Finding a balance between commercial

interests and feminist ideology is crucial for games to succeed in the market and truly become a powerful tool for disseminating feminist culture.

4.2. The Issue of Communication Depth and Audience Understanding Differences

Although current otome games incorporate many feminist elements in form, there is still a significant lack in communication depth. Some games' plots and character shaping are often superficial, simply piling up some feminist concepts and appearances, failing to lead players to think and discuss feminism more deeply.

For example, in some otome games, female characters seem to have independent careers and pursuits, but in the plot development, they always rely on male characters to solve problems easily, not truly showing the process of women overcoming difficulties with their own strength, making the so-called "female independence" just a slogan in form. In the depiction of gender relationships, it only stays on the surface of equal interaction, lacking in-depth exploration of gender power relations and the true emotional demands of women in relationships.

4.3. Constraints of the External Social Environment

Otome games also face many constraints from the external social environment when disseminating feminist emotions, which to some extent hinders the full play of their positive role.

Firstly, traditional gender concepts still existing in society form a significant barrier to the dissemination of feminist emotions in otome games. Some public opinions misunderstand, prejudice, or even resist the feminist expressions in games. Some people believe that emphasizing feminism in games is "creating gender confrontation," or feel that the independence and strength shown by women in games do not conform to traditional female images. Secondly, in different cultural contexts, the dissemination of feminist emotions in otome games faces adaptability challenges. In some more conservative cultural regions, traditional gender concepts are deeply rooted, and the acceptance of the feminist ideas conveyed in games is relatively low [7].

In the face of these external social environment constraints, it requires the joint efforts of game developers, player communities, and all sectors of society. Game developers need to actively strengthen communication with all sectors of society, explain the positive significance of feminist emotional communication in games to the public through offline events and cultural lectures, eliminate misunderstandings and prejudices; at the same time, when spreading across cultures, they should study the cultural characteristics of the target market in depth and adjust the game content and communication methods according to local conditions, spreading feminist ideas in a more gentle and acceptable form. Player communities can share their positive understanding and feelings about the feminist elements in the game on social media, creating a good public opinion atmosphere and aiding in the promotion of the game. Society at large should also strengthen the publicity and education of feminist culture, creating a more inclusive and open social and cultural environment to facilitate the dissemination of feminist emotions in otome games.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Through a comprehensive and in-depth study of the feminist emotional communication in otome games, we can clearly see its manifestations, impacts, as well as the problems and challenges it faces.

In terms of manifestations, otome games, through the careful shaping of female characters, show the diversity of women's external images, the richness of personality traits, and the autonomy of character growth, breaking traditional gender stereotypes; in narrative, by using a variety of theme choices and unique narrative perspectives and structures, they skillfully integrate feminist ideas into players' emotional experiences; at the same time, game interaction mechanisms provide strong support for the dissemination of feminist emotions, with player autonomy in choice and community interaction creating an atmosphere of emotional resonance that further strengthens the spread of feminist emotions in the game [8].

From the perspective of impact, otome games have a positive and profound impact on female players, not only helping players enhance their sense of self-identity and meet emotional needs but also guiding players to change behaviors and concepts in real life, promoting the internalization of feminist ideas at the individual level; at the social and cultural level, it has expanded the dissemination range of feminist culture with its own advantages, promoted the formation of a more inclusive and equal gender culture environment, and provided beneficial insights for the game industry and related cultural industries in presenting feminist culture.

However, it cannot be ignored that otome games also face many problems and challenges in the process of feminist emotional communication, such as the balance between commercialization and feminist ideas, the limitations of communication depth, and the constraints of the external social environment [9], all of which affect the dissemination effect and the full play of its value to a certain extent.

Overall, as a unique cultural carrier, otome games have an irreplaceable and important role in the dissemination of feminist emotions, opening up new paths for the development of feminist culture in the digital entertainment field and contributing positively to the promotion of gender equality in society [10].

As feminist thought continues to deepen in society, players' demands for feminist emotional elements in games will also increase. Otome games are expected to innovate in content and form, such as more deeply integrating social real-life issues, not limited to the current common workplace and emotional aspects, but also involving more complex and important social issues like women's participation in politics and gender equality in the field of science and technology, allowing players to think deeply about these issues through game plots; in terms of interaction, they can use emerging technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality to provide players with a more immersive and realistic experience of feminist life, allowing players to more directly feel the practice of feminist ideas in different scenarios.

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