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The Evolution and Cultural Impact of Otome Games

Audience, Market Trends and Interactive Narratives

Az otome játékok fejlődése és kulturális hatása

Közönség, piaci trendek és interaktív narratívák

Purpose: The article examines otome games¹ in terms of their history, critical reception, cultural significance and impact on the media market. Particular attention is given to the evolution of the genre in response to the changing needs of creators and audiences, the diversity of target groups and the awareness of developers regarding the messages conveyed in their games. Additionally, the study explores how otome games fit into the broader context of media designed for audiences who favour narrative-driven and interactive storytelling experiences.

Research methods: The research includes a historical analysis of the otome game genre, a review of market trends, and qualitative content analysis, with a special focus on LinLinLavender's channel as a case study to determine audience interests and recurring themes within the otome gaming community.

Conclusions: Otome games have filled a gap in the video game market by offering experiences tailored to players who seek emotionally engaging storylines and developed relational narratives. Data indicates a growing demand for more mature themes, new narrative structures and challenging gameplay mechanics. Otome games constitute a significant segment within interactive media, providing female audiences with a space to explore diverse narratives and story scenarios. The expansion of mobile platforms and the rise of independent games contribute to the continued growth of the genre, although accessibility and cost remain key limiting factors.

Originality: This article synthesises historical, market and community perspectives, offering a unique insight into the cultural significance of otome games in contemporary media and the role of female audiences in shaping this sector of the gaming industry.

Keywords: otome games, cultural significance, market trends, audience analysis

1 Otome is a subgenre of visual novel games targeted at a female audience, where the plot's main focus is on romance between the female protagonist and several, more often than not male, NPC (*non-player character*) love interests.

Célkitűzés: A tanulmány az otome játékokat² vizsgálja történeti fejlődésük, kritikai fogadtatásuk, kulturális jelentőségük és a médiapiacra gyakorolt hatásuk szempontjából. Különös figyelmet fordít a műfaj fejlődésére a készítők és a játékosok változó igényeinek tükrében, a célcsoportok sokszínűségére, valamint a fejlesztők tudatosságára a játékaikban megjelenő üzenetek kapcsán. Emellett a kutatás azt elemzi, hogy az otome játékok miként illeszkednek a narratív alapú és interaktív történetmesélést előnyben részesítő közönségek számára készült médiatartalmak szélesebb kontextusába.

Kutatási módszerek: A kutatás az otome játékok műfajának történeti elemzésére, a piaci trendek áttekintésére és kvalitatív tartalomelemzésre épül, különös tekintettel a LinLin-Lavender csatornára, amely esettanulmányként szolgál a közönség érdeklődési körének és az otome játékos közösségben visszatérő témáknak a meghatározására.

Következtetések: Az otome játékok piaci rést töltöttek be azzal, hogy olyan élményeket kínálnak, amelyek érzelmileg magával ragadó történeteket és kidolgozott narratívákat nyújtanak a játékosok számára. Az adatok szerint egyre nagyobb az igény az érettebb témák, új narratív struktúrák és összetettebb játékmenet iránt. Az otome játékok jelentős szerepet töltenek be az interaktív médiában, lehetőséget biztosítva a női közönség számára a különböző történetek és narratív forgatókönyvek felfedezésére. A mobilplatformok bővülése és a független játékok növekvő népszerűsége elősegíti a műfaj további fejlődését, bár az elérhetőség és a költségek továbbra is meghatározó korlátok maradnak. *Eredetiség:* A tanulmány történeti, piaci és közösségi perspektívákat ötvözve egyedi betekintést nyújt az otome játékok kulturális jelentőségébe a kortárs médiában, valamint a női közönség szerepébe a játékszektor alakításában.

Kulcsszavak: otome játékok, kulturális jelentőség, piaci trendek, közönségelemzés

1. Introduction

Historically, the video game industry has primarily targeted male consumers, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes within its content and development processes. This inequity over time gave rise to a specialised gaming genre focused on fulfilling the preferences and interests of female gamers. Originating in Japan, otome games – a subcategory of visual novels – emerged as a solution to this disparity, combining interactive storytelling with narratives centered on romance that are specifically tailored for women. The growth of this genre has created not only a significant niche for female gamers but also questioned conventional wisdom about gender-based gaming preferences.

This paper discusses otome games as a cultural and media phenomenon, dealing with their development, audience interaction and representation. It traces the origins of the genre, tracing them back to the early work of Japanese companies like *Koei* and its seminal title *Angelique*. It further traces the development of the genre in response

2 Az otome a vizuális regényes játékok női közönséget célzó alműfaja, ahol a cselekmény fő hangsúlyja a női főszereplő és számos, leggyakrabban férfi, NPC (non-player character, nem játékos karakter) szerelmi viszonya.

to changing market conditions and media analyses, highlighting the genre's increasing popularity in Western markets.

A central aim of this study is to understand the motivations and tendencies of players of otome games, analysed through the woman perspective. Using content analysis of LinLinLavender's YouTube channel, a specialised platform for otome gaming, this study tries to find out the themes and features that attract most the audience. By placing these results in a wider academic context, this work endeavours to enrich the discourse about gender representation in games and the broader cultural value of otome games.

This paper highlights how otome games have the potential to become more than a form of entertainment; they may function as avenues in the empowerment of women and the reformation of conventional narratives within gaming culture. The paper also indicates possible areas of growth for the genre, stressing the importance of accessibility, diversity and innovation in appealing to an evergrowing global audience.

2. Rethinking stereotypes in games for women: Perspectives and market dynamics

As Sherry Turkle argues: "If you market to girls and boys according to just the old stereotypes and don't try to create a computer culture that's really more inclusive for everyone, you're going to just reinforce the old stereotypes" (Cassell-Jenkins 1998: 18). Historically, toys have reinforced societal roles: girls played 'house', while boys engaged in games of 'war'. Consequently, feminist scholars argue that games rooted in traditionally feminine themes risk teaching young female players to accept patriarchal norms (Cassell-Jenkins 1998). Moreover, they argue that empirical research in this area is hard to conduct due to the children's tendency to react based on social responses rather than real interest.

Tina N. Richards provides a different take on this. She argues that since female gamers enjoy and 'consent' to this type of content, such activity can be taken as a way of "a reclaimer of the feminine and a re-interpreter of gendered content" (Richards 2023: 169). To strengthen her argument, Richards points to several reviews from female gamers who – without caring about the possibly controversial nature of games such as otome games – say that they are simply satisfied with and like experiencing a game. Hyeshin Kim takes a positive view: "Women's games are significant not simply because their existence potentially empowers the player with the understanding that she can be the normative, dominant audience, but also because she can experiment with and enact various female identities and female fantasies through the medium of electronic games" (Kim 2017: 183).

It is cutting women and girls off from enjoying games aimed at them just because the themes might look stereotypically female that creates more problems. Firstly, it discourages content catering to a female audience for fear of criticism, stagnating innovation in this regard. Secondly, it marginalises those who genuinely enjoy such games. If play helps children to understand social roles, then the enforcement of an alternate standard could very well have similar results in making girls feel coerced

into adopting interests traditionally associated with masculinity – a change brought about by feminist critique rather than personal choice. Patricia Flanagan, founder of HeR Interactive, asks the rhetorical question: “If a product appeals to its target audience and introduces them to technology, why criticize it?” (Murray–Kliman 1999: 24). Production must continue to create better titles for women to delve deeper into the market and make it better. Hence, it is very important to add to the already known information about female players by researching and gathering statistical data to give support for the development of future games centred on women.

Recent market statistics show almost parity in the number of female and male video game players. In the USA, women make up about 48% of players to men’s 52% (The Entertainment Software Association 2024); in Poland, it is 47% to 53% (IQS 2024) and in Asia, it is 37% to 63% (Niko Partners 2023). These statistics show that women, once marginalised in the gaming world, have come to be a very strong force in the industry and now represent a substantial audience to be targeted.



Figure 1: Angelique gameplay segment

Source: W1 s. a.

Reports say the most popular genres with female players include match three games (e.g. Candy Crush), family/farm simulators (e.g. The Sims, Stardew Valley), casual puzzle games (e.g. Angry Birds), atmospheric exploration games (e.g. ABZU) and interactive dramas (e.g. The Walking Dead) (Yee 2017). In contrast, the least popular genres with female audiences are sports (e.g. FIFA), tactical shooters (e.g. Squad), racing (e.g. Forza), first-person shooters (e.g. Call of Duty) and grand strategy games (e.g. Stellaris). These preferences dovetail with results published by ENC Focus (see: Murray–Kliman 1999), which found that female players generally eschew violence and repetition in games.

Examining these preferred genres provides insight into gameplay elements that are likely to have particular appeal for female players, including relationship-building, potential romance, creative activities (as in family/farm simulators), simple mechanics (as in casual puzzles) and strong, engaging storytelling (typical of interactive dramas). Many of these elements are central features of Japanese otome games, further underlining their relevance to female players within contemporary gaming culture.

3. Research methods and process – Examining women’s perspectives in otome games

3.1. Core characteristics and distinctions

To grasp the concept of otome games, it is essential to first understand the broader category they fall under: visual novels. Visual novels are a genre of Japanese games that typically utilise a choice-driven format, where the decisions made by players significantly affect the story’s progression. However, it is important to note that choice mechanics are not a strict requirement for a game to be classified as a visual novel. These games primarily use textual narration to present events, character thoughts and dialogue (Finley 2023). As Toiya Kristen Finley describes, visual novels “have static backgrounds and character art, or backgrounds and character art with limited animations. VNs can have a variety of mechanics” (Finley 2023). Otome games represent a unique subgenre of visual novels, characterised by several key features: The protagonist is always a young woman. The setting often takes place in a school, fantasy, or historical context. A central gameplay element revolves around romance, allowing the protagonist to form relationships with various non-playable characters, referred to as “love interests” (LI). The choices made by players influence the development and conclusion of these romantic storylines. These characteristics help distinguish otome games within the broader category of visual novels, offering a focused narrative experience centred on romance and character relationships.

3.2. The origins and development of otome games: A case study of Koei and Angelique

The otome genre has its beginnings in 1983 (Famitsu 2015), thanks to the innovative work of Koei (now Koei Tecmo), a Japanese company involved in video game publishing, production and development. At that time, Keiko Erikawa, Koei’s co-founder and the only woman in the team, noticed a lack of games aimed at female players. She envisioned creating titles specifically for women, which led to the birth of the Neoromance series. Until then, Koei’s offerings had mainly catered to male gamers, overlooking a significant portion of the potential audience. Erikawa recognised this gap, stating: “Some people in the company said, ‘The market is small, so even if we create something for women, it won’t sell’, but I thought, ‘The market exists’. I am glad I persisted” (Famitsu 2015). Beyond reaching this new audience, Erikawa was also driven by a desire to carve

out more opportunities for women in the gaming industry. To realise this vision, Koei set out to hire female developers, but this was no easy task given the limited number of women in STEM fields at the time. Consequently, the company brought on individuals with backgrounds in the humanities instead of those with technical or game development skills, which lengthened the process of building a team and launching their first game. Additionally, the team had to navigate the challenge of creating a product for a market that had not been previously explored. During this time, shōjo manga – Japanese comics targeted at young female readers – was gaining traction. While shōjo is more of a demographic category than a specific genre, it features recognisable traits, such as a stylised “kawaii” art style, a young female protagonist, and a strong romantic storyline often involving a male love interest (typically a bishōnen, or “beautiful boy”). This genre served as a crucial reference point for Erikawa’s team, as they believed that if shōjo manga could thrive in print, it could also find success in the digital realm.

Koei’s newly formed all-female development team, Ruby Party (Ruby Party Neoromance Games 2024), set out to create *Angelique* – the inaugural title in the Neoromance series (Kim 2017: 174). The character designs, including that of the main character *Angelique*, were crafted by manga artist Kairi Yura (Kim 2017), who drew inspiration from the classic shōjo manga protagonist, such as *Candice White* from *Candy Candy* by Kyoko Mizuki. Similarly to *Candice*, *Angelique* is portrayed with blonde hair tied with ribbons and striking green eyes, highlighting the impact of shōjo aesthetics on the game’s design. The groundwork laid by Koei and Erikawa with *Angelique* not only initiated the otome genre but also paved the way for greater female representation both in the gaming world and beyond.

While Ruby Party’s *Angelique* is credited with pioneering the otome genre, its mechanics and gameplay are quite different from those found in modern otome titles. Although *Angelique* includes aspects of the visual novel style, it mainly functions as a straightforward strategy game. Players are required to manage stats and plan their actions carefully to achieve the best results. In contrast, later otome games shifted towards a more narrative-driven format. That said, there are exceptions within the genre that explore different mechanics. For example, dating simulators often focus on accumulating points rather than player choices, similarly to *Angelique*; JRPGs (Japanese Role-Playing Games) may incorporate combat systems; and farming simulators can blend relationship-building with farm management. Still, most of the gameplay in contemporary otome games adheres to the visual novel format (Richards 2023: 38), emphasising choice-based storytelling that draws players into engaging narratives.

After the success of Ruby Party, many other companies started to tap into the female gaming market. In 2002, Konami (now known as Konami Digital Entertainment), which had previously focused on dating simulators for male players (like the original *Tokimeki Memorial*), launched *Tokimeki Memorial Girl’s Side* for PlayStation 2, a game tailored specifically for female gamers. In 2005, Idea Factory made its entry into the market with an adaptation of the beloved series *Fushigi Yuugi* (Excite 2025). The following year, in 2006, the studio released *Hiiro no Kakera*, a comprehensive visual novel. The game’s success prompted the establishment of a new division within the company, Otomate, which was dedicated to creating otome games. Otomate made its first appearance in 2008 with *Hakuoki*. By 2010, the development of otome games

had expanded to portable consoles, particularly the PlayStation Portable (PSP), allowing players to take their favourite characters with them wherever they went. During this time, Broccoli studio launched *Uta no Prince-sama*♫ (also known as *Uta☆Pri*), which kicked off the idol game phenomenon – idol rising games continue to be popular today. A significant addition to the gameplay was the inclusion of rhythm-based mini games, where players could strive for high scores. *Uta☆Pri* also introduced various genre-specific tropes and character archetypes, such as giving each idol a unique colour and featuring characters with distinct personalities (for example, a prince and a character with multiple personalities). Interestingly, after the anime series *Uta no☆Prince-sama*♫ *Maji Love 1000%* aired, the game's popularity among women surged even further, resulting in a spike in Broccoli's stock. In 2012, an *Uta☆Pri* live concert took place, solidifying the title's prominence within the otome genre.

The creators of otome games have started to explore new approaches and variations within the genre, leading to a growing variety of titles. For instance, in 2011, PigeonNation Inc. launched *Hatoful Boyfriend: A School of Hope and White Wings*, a game that lets players pursue romantic relationships with pigeons.

In 2014, Otomate decided to release its titles for PlayStation Vita (PS Vita), acknowledging that the improved audio and visual capabilities of the PS Vita were better suited for the demands of the otome genre compared to the PlayStation Portable (PSP). This decision was soon followed by other studios specialising in otome games, making PS Vita the main platform for future releases. However, in 2019, the production of PS Vita titles was halted, prompting otome developers to shift their focus to the Nintendo Switch (Moriya 2019).

As smartphones became increasingly popular and essential in daily life, many otome games were adapted for mobile platforms (e.g. *Tokimeki Restaurant*☆☆☆, a spin-off of the *Tokimeki Memorial Girl's Side* series). This transition provided players with significant convenience, as they no longer needed to invest in consoles, which, like the PSP or PS Vita, could eventually be phased out. Mobile devices also contributed to the rise of idol-raising games, such as *Ensemble Stars!* by Happy Elements K.K. These games centre around collecting character cards and enhancing their stats. While the narratives in these games may not always be explicitly romantic, players often develop emotional connections to the idols, buy related merchandise, attend events and engage in 'shipping' – pairing characters in fan-created relationships.

3.3. An analysis of LinLinLavender's YouTube channel

This context of otome games from a women's perspective undoubtedly feeds into the YouTube channel of a content creator named LinLinLavender, who has been actively making content since 2017. Her channel is solely dedicated to otome games, covering both the technical and entertainment aspects: the game mechanics and introductions for new players of otome games, as well as entertainment-educative content. This study seeks to contribute to the academic debate on women in video games through an investigation into the topic of motivations and cultural significance for women who are fans of otome games. The research material was collected in 2024, and this period served as the basis for the analysis.



Figure 2: LinLinLavender's Top 10 Steamy Otome Games video

Source: LinLinLavender 2022f

LinLinLavender is considered one of the most recognisable content creators focusing on otome games in the English-speaking YouTube community. Her channel, active since 2017, had approximately 13,200 subscribers as of January 2025. On average, each of her videos receives around 10,000 views, with some significantly exceeding the number of subscribers. This suggests that individual videos may be viewed multiple times by the same users or that the content reaches a broader audience beyond the channel's direct subscriber base. The channel's popularity and the consistent level of audience engagement were key factors in its selection as the subject of this analysis. For the purpose of this analysis, nine of her most popular videos were selected (in 2024) and viewed in relation to their content and viewer responses as of January 2025. This viewing attempted to answer the research question of what female viewers are looking for in this genre of games.

The commentsphere in digital media is a dynamic communication space in which users actively participate in co-creating the digital media sphere through comments. It is a multidimensional environment defined by Anna Teler and Aleksandra Urzędowska (2024) as a platform where users can express their opinions on specific topics. The commentsphere is more than a collection of textual interactions; it is a complex and often multi-layered structure, characterised by the stratification of communication, such as 'comments on comments'. Its asynchronous nature allows for a variety of reactions, from emotional outbursts to structured arguments. An important feature of the commentsphere is that its axiological subtext-comments often contain evaluative language rooted in cultural and emotional contexts. This makes the commentsphere a space for both individual expression and the creation

of broader social narratives. In the present article, the commentosphere is considered from a general and contextual perspective, as a full-scale analysis of comment sections is not the primary aim of this study. However, the authors recognise the relevance of this area and intend to explore it in greater depth in future research, with a particular focus on fan community interactions within otome game fandoms.

The number of comments in the commentosphere serves as a useful indicator for assessing the popularity of a given topic. For example, the topic of women in video games, explored in LinLinLavender's YouTube videos, has generated a great deal of discussion and debate, as evidenced by the large number of comments (and reactions) these videos attract.³ Topics that address feminist perspectives in games often generate polarised responses, reflecting the controversial nature of the discourse. While supportive comments may emphasise the importance of gender equality and representation, opposing viewpoints often reveal resistance or critique. The large number of comments indicates strong user engagement, serving as a barometer of social interest and emotional involvement. However, the variety of responses – from constructive dialogue to hostile exchanges – underscores the dual role of the commentosphere as both a space for meaningful interaction and a battleground for opposing ideologies.

The first video to be analysed is entitled *Top 10 Steamy Otome Games* (LinLinLavender 2022f).⁴ Its popularity might seem to be a contradiction in terms, as most otome games conventionally bank on more innocent, almost virtuous, romantic storylines – an influence carried over from shōjo, which inspired this game subgenre. In this video, LinLinLavender will go over a subjective ranking of titles with a raised level of romantic intensity, such as *Tengoku Struggle*, *Dance with Devils*, *Cupid Parasite* and *Piofiore*, in an appeal to players seeking narratives with elements of mature suggestiveness. That 'steamianness' can be in many different forms: the tone of the storytelling, interactions between characters, voice acting, or visual presentation (computer graphic art).

Given the strong response of viewers for this video, one would imagine that, surely, there must be a visible part of the otome audience, looking for mature engagement with the games – though not necessarily explicit. Indeed, a great many commenters were invigorated by this more subtle take on romance, considering these scenes as adding a welcome layer of excitement to gameplay and enhancing the story. Such scenes are generally cherished as milestone markers, amplifying the sense of closeness between characters and making the feeling of romance even more complex.

Another video, *The Decline of a Genre? – The History of Otome Games 1983–2022* (LinLinLavender 2022d), talks about the history in the development of otome games from their roots to the present. LinLinLavender gives a breezy overview of otome history that complements the more in-depth discussion found in Section 3.2 of this paper. She discusses the growth of the genre and what could be considered its decline, as suggested by the title. Contrary to that implication, the video does show that otome sales did see a lull after 2013, but interest does appear to have rebounded around 2020. This is in line with titles like *Piofiore*, *Café Enchanté*, *Collar X Malice* and *BUSTAFELLOWS*

3 For example 124 comments in LinLinLavender 2023.

4 By the term 'steamy' the author means games with less innocent, more suggestive themes, both in the plot and characters – but not strictly erotic.

becoming more accessible in Western markets. It is not unlikely the pandemic may have broadened the reach of otome, finding players seeking deep, character-driven narratives – escapism that provided companionship during lockdown. Many of the otome games have now been officially translated, due to growing interest from Western audiences – a promising era for this genre's expansion in new markets. Comments from viewers include both seasoned fans who began playing during otome's early years and newcomers drawn to the genre more recently, with many expressing surprise at the historical insights shared.

Next, the video *FREE Otome Games: Recommendations for Beginners* (LinLinLavender 2022b) will take a look at some recommendations for people new to otome games, listed off in categories of light-hearted, humorous, fantasy, horror/mystery, serious and “too good to be free”. While these indie (independent) games often have smaller budgets and thus shorter gameplay and limited production teams, they are unencumbered by major publishers, allowing for creative experimentation and unique game mechanics. Such games are simple gateways for newbies, allowing them to try the genre without investing money. The high viewership of this video, which ranks third most-watched under LinLinLavender, would suggest that there would be a strong interest among viewers in exploring more unusual otome games – be it to acquaint them with the genre or to expand their gaming experience.

The fourth most viewed video on LinLinLavender's channel is *ALL English Otome Games and Announcements Nintendo Switch EARLY 2022 – Otome Game Recommendations* (LinLinLavender 2022a), so 2022 must have been a good year for otome. This video is to inform of all the otome games that have been localised for the Nintendo Switch so that otome game veterans will be able to find new otome games that they might not have known about. It also acts as a reference to those new to the market, giving them ideas on possible first stocks. LinLinLavender encompasses coverage of otome games released in Western markets as well as those exclusively available in Japan, including titles that have not been officially translated into English. That and the fact that the video focuses on games that have been translated into English probably explains why it is so popular amongst an international audience.

The second most popular video is *2023 Is the Best Otome Year!* (LinLinLavender 2023), which is a big leap for the genre as it has already seen the release of 25 new titles, Japanese and localised. This fact seems to back the theory that otome games are gradually becoming more and more popular in Western territories, especially with the recent and very popular release of *Jack Jeanne*, which did very well in Japan. The comments show a general excitement among the viewers about the addition to their otome collections, but at the same time they joke about how much money their little hobby is starting to cost them.

The video *The Anti-Heroine in the Anti-Game* (LinLinLavender 2022c) presents an interesting case as it focuses on a single title, *Suuran Digit*. Despite the game not being available in English – and the rarity of non-Japanese-speaking players engaging with untranslated titles – it has attracted significant attention due to its unique gameplay and protagonist. The main character of *Suuran Digit* breaks away from the typical otome heroine mould; she lacks courage, morality and idealism, embodying the traits of an anti-heroine. While she occasionally makes morally sound choices, these

decisions are often driven by self-interest – in this case, simply her desire for sleep. She shows little interest in interacting with others and remains detached from the game's main events. This unconventional portrayal has resonated with players who find morally ambiguous characters more relatable and complex than traditional “gold-hearted” heroes. However, despite the protagonist's appeal, many viewers find the gameplay itself repetitive and underdeveloped, indicating an opportunity for developers to further explore such innovative character approaches.

In *Should You Play BL Games? Boys Love/Yaoi Games on the Switch* (LinLinLavender 2021b), LinLinLavender delves into a different niche within the genre of games for women, specifically those that focus on male–male romances. Known as “Boys Love” (BL) or shounen-ai, these games feature romantic narratives centred on male characters in non-explicit relationships, setting them apart from the more sexually explicit yaoi games. In Japan, fans of this genre are referred to as fujoshi – a term that has gradually evolved from a derogatory label to a more neutral descriptor. This genre often appeals to otome audiences, as evidenced by the popularity of this video. LinLinLavender offers a curated list of recommended BL titles, which, as comments indicate, have found a welcoming audience within the otome community.

The video *The Otome Community in a Nutshell* (LinLinLavender 2022e) provides a humorous take on the otome fanbase, highlighting behaviours and preferences that resonate. The video has garnered over 24,000 views, indicating a positive reception in the commentosphere. Several commentators have pointed out the “greed” among the female gaming community, often not satisfied with the selected main love interests, seeking additional stories with secondary male characters. As such, numerous developers have listened to the feedback and expanded the main cast with those supporting characters (e.g. *Obey Me!* with characters like Simeon, Diavolo and Barbatos, and *Mystic Messenger* with V and Saeran). Most comments, though, simply agree with points made in the video, despite their humorous nature, building a sense of community between female gamers, and sharing inside jokes about the titles they have played.

The last video on LinLinLavender's top nine most viewed uploads is *Best Otome Games for Beginners How to Start Your Otome Game Obsession* (LinLinLavender 2021a) which is perfect for those new to the genre. In this video, LinLinLavender provides a curated selection of otome titles across various platforms and price points, detailing gameplay features to help newcomers make informed choices. From the responses of the viewers, it seems that this advice has helped a lot of new players, making their transition into the community an easier one and also more likely to participate.

4. Conclusions

Otome games have emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon combining entertainment, feminist critique and social participation. This paper establishes that the genre, which originally functioned as a niche market for girl gamers, has evolved to incorporate diverse narratives and now offers traditional and new storylines.

This study reveals some important findings, the first being narrative complexity and diversity. Audiences have shown a strong demand for complex themes,

multidimensional characters and unique storylines. Games that have challenged traditional tropes, such as those featuring morally ambiguous protagonists or anti-heroines, have received wide critical acclaim, thus signifying a shift in player expectations and preferences. Also cultural and community impact is important here. The otome gaming community, as demonstrated by LinLinLavender's platform, takes part in dialogues that impact the cultural development of the genre. Participants take on the role of contributors rather than consumers, fostering an ongoing discussion of gender roles, societal expectations and personal empowerment within the gaming landscape. The next crucial factor is accessibility (and economic considerations). There are economic impediments and platform-related constraints that impede wider engagement. While console games make up the bulk of the market, mobile platforms and indie games provide more accessible points of entry – a further democratisation of the genre – to bring in a wider audience. The last important conclusion concerns feminist debates. Otome games provide a platform for women inquiry, allowing players to re-evaluate definitions of femininity and agency. While some of them continue to promote traditional gender stereotypes, others let women retell their part in society.

5. Summary

This research shows that otome games are a powerful, complex, transformative cultural artifact, with the genre moving from a niche to gaining international attention driven by community activity and a growing desire to have more diverse and inclusive stories. To that end, this study relies on the comment section (ca. 100 comments over one video) of content uploaded by LinLinLavender on YouTube as a pivotal location for the forging of discourses, relationships and future transformations of otome games.

To secure the possibility of sustained growth and relevance, the genre has to tackle the issues of accessibility, cost and narrative diversity. Expansion into untapped markets and exploration of unconventional themes will help in attracting broader audiences while fostering deeper connections with existing players. Otome games bear the potential to become not only an entertainment staple but also a platform for cultural critique and personal empowerment. With gamers demanding more complexity and nuance in their experiences, the potential for the genre to impact gaming culture and societal attitudes toward gender can only continue to grow.

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