



Research on the Marketing Strategy of Otome Games Based on China

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Abstract. In recent years, China's female-oriented game market has experienced explosive growth, particularly in the otome game. However, traditional games often fail female players due to gender stereotypes and a lack of emotional depth, while even popular otome games face challenges like repetitive gameplay and predictable characters. This study examines the marketing strategies crucial for attracting this growing demographic within the Chinese otome game market. Combining case study analysis of the successful game *Love and Deepspace* with core theories, the study analyzes effective marketing practices. The findings show that an authentic emotional connection through deep character development is crucial, the user-generated contents act as powerful organic promotion, and the immersive technology must serve the narrative and companionship experience. The study concludes that sustainable success in the Chinese otome game market requires a player-centered approach. Marketers should prioritize genuine emotional value, utilize community cocreation, develop narrative-aligned crossovers, ensure high-quality merchandise, and foster participatory communities, moving beyond stereotypes and superficial tactics to build meaningful virtual bonds.

Keywords: Marketing strategy, Otome game, Emotional value

1 Introduction

In recent years, the digital entertainment industry has experienced rapid growth. Within this sector, otome games, the dating simulation games specifically targeted at female audiences, have become a prominent niche market. Due to their remarkable expansion and distinctive market potential, these games have increasingly drawn attention from various industries and academic fields. According to the *China Game Industry Trends and Potential Analysis Report 2025*, the female-oriented games' market size amounted to 8 billion RMB in 2024, representing a year-on-year growth of 124.1% [1]. This data demonstrates that, whether from the perspective of the current market size or future potential, the female player group is an important and indispensable force in the game industry. The success of otome games has not only prompted the gaming industry to reconsider the diversified needs of female players and the corresponding marketing strategies but also offered highly valuable cases for exploring the consumption logic of

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women in the digital era. Therefore, conducting an in-depth analysis of the marketing strategies of otome games is crucial for understanding this booming market phenomenon and grasping the consumption psychology of female players.

Given the rapid development of otome games, the academic circle has conducted a preliminary study on them. For instance, in 2025, Haili Li researched the participation degree of female players in Chinese otome games [2]. It is found that the players' romantic desires and hesitant attitudes when quitting and returning to the games were complex and contradictory. Dongna Chen analyzed the female protagonist characters in Chinese otome games and found that they are predominantly depicted with small faces, fair skin, and slender figures [3]. They work primarily in the fields of art and business, and their personalities are usually shown as either kind and caring or independent and brave, but they still need protection from men. This suggests that traditional gender stereotypes, such as the notion of "strong men and weak women," continue to exert influence in these portrayals. Moreover, Chuanhui Tang researched the marketing strategies of the phenomenon-level IP Love and Deepspace and found that the game achieved a market breakthrough by meeting the needs of female players for visual experience, emotional interaction, and control rights, emphasizing the importance of understanding the preferences of target consumers for future market planning [4].

In conclusion, to further explore the marketing strategies of otome games in the Chinese market, this essay adopts a combination of case analysis, industry data, and trend interpretation to systematically analyze the marketing practices of successful otome game products, aiming to explore marketing strategies that can meet the needs of female players and effectively respond to the challenges of the game market.

2 Problem and Theory

2.1 Traditional Game Market Imbalance

The imbalance in the traditional game market regarding gender structure and content design is shown as a significant mismatch between the composition of players and the content of the games. This is a key issue that affects the experience of female players. According to the research, although there are about half of game players are female, the traditional mainstream game market has long been constrained by gender stereotypes [5, 6]. Game design frequently reflects a male-dominated perspective, featuring male protagonists more often than female ones [7]. Moreover, many games continue to assign women to stereotypical roles, which reinforces the outdated gender norms [7]. These traditional online games struggle to fully satisfy female players' strong demand for emotional interaction, in-depth narrative experiences, the provision of emotional value, and a sense of companionship.

2.2 The Stereotypes of Female Roles and Marketing Challenges

As mentioned earlier, traditional online games, especially those targeting male players, have often created female characters in stereotypical ways. To appeal to male users, the images of female characters are often highly "sexualized" and "objectified". Games like *Azur Lane* show this with characters having exaggerated bodies and revealing outfits. The main point of this character image design is to present female characters as visual objects for the male players, to satisfy their demand of "Gazing", rather than create a well-developed character with their depth and personality. Although this kind of model has achieved commercial success in specific markets, this approach reinforces the objectification of women, focusing on their physical appearance and sexual appeal excessively. It fails to acknowledge that women are not just characters in games, but also players of games with diverse identities and needs. These deep-rooted stereotypes pose significant cultural challenges for the gaming industry as it faces the rapid growth of its female player base.

However, while otome games are developing rapidly, they are also facing a significant bottleneck - the problem of homogenization. One of the homogenizations is the repetitive core gameplay. Top Chinese 2D otome games, such as *Love and Producer* and *Tears of Themis*, their core interactive mechanics rely heavily on story-driven text reading, card collection, and card progression. While this structure effectively delivers the emotional experience, it struggles to meet players' growing demand for diverse and immersive experiences. Another notable form of homogenization is the predictable characters. The attractive male characters often follow highly similar personality patterns. While details differ slightly between games, their core traits and actions often stick to common tropes. According to the study of Chenmeng Li, some players can already predict the character composition of the male lead in the next new otome game [8]. This homogeneity of character designs has significantly reduced the novelty for players. Since the same voice actors often voice male protagonists across different Chinese otome games, many players feel familiar when switching between different games. In conclusion, it is crucial for the otome games and even the game industry to move beyond stereotypes, create more diverse characters and stories, and develop unique marketing strategies

2.3 Theory Basis

This study mainly relies on the following three core theories to analyze the otome game players and marketing strategy:

First, the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory. This theory considered that people actively select media content based on social demands and psychological motivations to form a dynamic closed loop of "demand - use - satisfaction" [9]. In the study of the marketing strategy of otome games, the U&G Theory is helpful to analyze the internal needs that drive female players to actively be addicted to these games, and what satisfaction they expect to obtain from interacting with virtual characters. It is the key basis for understanding the players' loyalty and the games' attractiveness.

Second, the Social Identity Theory (SIT). According to Brown, an individual's social identity mainly comes from group membership [10]. People try to feel good about their group identity by seeing their group as better than other relevant groups. This comparison makes them feel better about themselves. However, if being part of that group makes them feel unsatisfied, they'll either try to leave the group or work to make the group itself seem better or more special. Within the context of otome games, SIT can help explain the following questions: How players build their identity as fans by playing, discussing games online, and expressing affection for specific characters. Additionally, how this sense of group identity influences their purchasing decisions for game-related peripheral products and their social behaviors both within and outside the game.

Finally, the Experiential Marketing. In this theory, experience marketers believe that consumers are more concerned about obtaining enjoyable experiences rather than functional features and benefits [11]. It emphasizes five dimensions of consumers: sensory perception, emotional response, thinking, action, and association. In the study of otome game marketing, this helps the research analyze how game companies build an immersive 'romantic experience' using many parts: the story, character designs, art and music, voice acting, in-game events, and real-world promotions. It can also be seen how this carefully crafted experience evokes emotions and encourages players to use their imagination, thereby encouraging them to participate more and ultimately become loyal fans.

In conclusion, these three theories form the analytical basis of this study. They complement each other and provide a solid theoretical basis for a deeper understanding of the market phenomena of otome games and the formulation of effective marketing strategies.

3 Case Analysis

To further explore how to effectively meet the deep needs of female players and break through the gender imbalance in the traditional market, this section will conduct an in-depth analysis using the recent phenomenon-driven work "Love and Deepspace" as the core case study.

Love and Deepspace, the first 3D immersive romance mobile game developed by Paper Games, was officially launched in January 2024. According to Qimai Data's statistics and predictions, it topped the iOS best-selling chart on its launch day, with an estimated global monthly revenue of over 600 million RMB [12, 13]. Based on its unique design of immersive emotional experiences and targeted marketing strategies, Love and Deepspace is regarded as a successful example of addressing the emotional needs of modern female players while challenging traditional gender stereotypes in gaming. It effectively fills the gap in the market for the immersive companionship experience that was previously lacking in conventional video games. Love and Deepspace's core marketing strategy uses advanced technology not just for novelty, but to significantly deepen emotional connection and immersion with the characters. The

game employs real-time 3D rendering and voice interaction to create unique first-person dating experiences. These technologies effectively convey the distinct personalities and complex backgrounds of the male leads, which were crucial to the game's success. For example, a character like Xavier, who combines tenderness with strength, relies heavily on the real-time expression system. Detailed facial animations allow players to see subtle shifts in his emotions. During everyday interactions, Xavier appears gentle and playful, while in battle scenes, his powerful presence and leadership become dominant, fully showing the different sides of his personality.

The 4.0 version, released in July 2025, *Love and Deepspace* has further broken the boundary between virtual and real world by adding two new features: real-scene AR companionship and AI-driven voice nickname systems. According to Huang, this design adopts the concept of mimetic companionship [14]. Through the creation of characters and their interactions with players, it constructs a virtual yet realistic companionship relationship. In AR scenes, when favorite characters interact with players using exclusive nicknames, this experience transcends mere technology. It makes players feel that these virtual beings become unique because of themselves. Moreover, the addition of environmental white noise enhances the sense of immersion, creating a scenario where players seem to genuinely coexist with these charming characters [15]. This combination of advanced technology and character-building appeal has significantly enhanced the quality of companion interaction. It is no longer a superficial virtual interaction but can accurately reach and meet players' emotional needs. As some players have said, his algorithm changes because of you, which shows that these complex and relatable virtual characters are not static settings. Instead, they keep evolving as players participate in building their core identities and developing their stories, eventually forming a growing relationship shaped by both sides.

Meanwhile, *Love and Deepspace* enhances emotional resonance and achieves natural communication effects through user-generated content (UGC). These secondary creations made spontaneously by players enhanced user engagement and emotional connection, facilitating the transformation of users from passive consumers to active disseminators, forming a symbiotic relationship between the brand and the users [16]. On *Lofter*, exquisite fan art of the five male leads dominates the platform, extending these characters' charm and visual narratives beyond the game itself. *TikTok* and *RedNote*, on the other hand, attract a large amount of traffic with short, immersive game clips and guides for the combat system. Such authentic, player-driven content has become a powerful marketing tool for *Love and Deepspace*. It transforms the game's emotional core into an understandable and shareable form, which not only touches the target audience but also attracts new players who are looking for similar, sincere emotional connections.

In addition, in terms of cross-border collaboration and related derivative products, *Love and Deepspace* has undertaken several exploratory initiatives. As Si and Zhang point out, integrating games with diverse cultural resources through cross-border efforts can spark positive emotions among players, drive resource development, benefit game promotion, and deepen players' emotional resonance [17]. For example, the official flagship store of Paper Game continuously launches character-themed products from *Love and Deepspace*, and the game has also carried out cross-border collaborations

with well-known brands such as KFC, China National Tourism, and the Asian Winter Games. These cultural resonances and community-driven dissemination contribute to the positive promotion of the game, effectively enhancing players' sense of belonging and identification with the game's specific community, thereby boosting user engagement and loyalty [18]. However, according to the 2024 China Game Industry IP Development Report by Gamma Data, not only Love and Deepspace, but many domestic games' collaborations have problems of overly high prices of associated products, difficulty in purchase due to limited availability, poor quality, and insufficient correlation between the associated content and the game itself [19]. Therefore, in terms of cross-border collaboration, there is still room for improvement.

In conclusion, Love and Deepspace, as a typical case of otome game marketing in China, has successfully met the demands of female players for deep emotional interaction and genuine companionship through a combination of technological immersion, emotional experience, and community co-creation communication. This demonstrates the significance of the business model driven by emotional value.

4 Discussion and Recommendation

According to the successful marketing of Love and Deepspace, there are three core insights:

First, the authenticity of emotions can enhance players' engagement. In otome games, only by prioritizing the characters' personalities and emotionally responsive interactions over the novelty of technology can a genuine emotional connection with players be effectively established. Second, the collaborative creation by players has facilitated the promotion and dissemination of the game. Through UGC such as Lofter fan art and TikTok battle guides, players spontaneously became the disseminators of the game, thus naturally extending the emotional story of the game beyond its boundaries. Finally, immersive technology serves the narrative. Only when combined with character-centered world-building can the accompanying nature of augmented reality and the personalization of artificial intelligence succeed, giving the virtual connection a unique meaning. Collectively, these insights demonstrate that sustainable success in the female-centric gaming market hinges on a human-centered approach—where technology, narrative, and community are orchestrated to cultivate authentic emotional bonds—providing an actionable blueprint for future innovation.

Therefore, this article holds that in the future, marketing strategies for otome games are suggested to focus on the following aspects:

Firstly, learn from the narrativity approaches to branding [20], cross-border narrative interactions can enhance players' emotional resonance. For instance, the collaboration between China Space Day and Xavier is in line with the fictional interstellar background of Love and Deep Space. While popularizing aerospace knowledge, it also evokes a strong emotional resonance among players, enhancing their sense of identification and belonging to the game.

Secondly, attention should be paid to the design and quality control of game-related derivative products. Donald Norman's three-layer design framework can help clarify

the core significance of these derivatives as emotional carriers for players [21]. Focus should be placed on their visual fidelity, practical value, and emotional connotation. For example, when replicating an in-game character's necklace at a 1:1 scale, strict attention must be paid to ensuring the product's accuracy and quality, which helps strengthen the emotional connection between the derivatives and players.

Finally, the core point lies in the fact that the fundamental goal must always be to provide emotional value to the players. Game companies need to continuously maintain the vitality and cohesion of the player community ecosystem, fully incorporate player suggestions to optimize game content, and thereby enhance the players' sense of active participation in the game's iterative process. Just as Jenkins pointed out in the participatory culture theory, the vitality of the player community stems from interactive co-creation [22]. When players feel that their opinions can significantly influence the development of the game, their sense of belonging to the community and the emotional connection with the game will also be significantly strengthened.

5 Conclusion

This study focuses on the Chinese otome game market and examines the marketing strategies required to effectively attract the growing demographic of female gamers. Based on the U&G Theory, SIT, and Experiential Marketing, the analysis shows that the key to the success of modern role-playing games lies in breaking through the traditional gender stereotypes and market imbalances, and thereby providing genuine emotional value and immersive companionship experiences.

Take Love and Deepspace as an example. This case successfully demonstrates this transformation. It integrates advanced technologies such as 3D rendering, AR-based immersive companionship, and AI-driven voice interaction to enhance the core narrative and character immersion, effectively blurring the boundaries between the virtual and the real while addressing the emotional value needs of most players for high-quality companionship. Furthermore, by leveraging the dissemination advantages of UGC, the game transforms players into active content promoters, freeing the game's emotional story from core gameplay constraints, enabling its extension outside the game environment. Although the cross-game collaborations have enhanced players' sense of identification and belonging, there is still room for improvement in creating more creatively integrated, narrative-oriented, and quality-controlled intellectual property extension content.

For future marketing strategies of otome games, the priority should be establishing authentic emotional bonds. This requires technological implementation to serve the depth of narrative and character development. Secondly, efforts should be directed towards developing narrative-driven cross-over collaborations. This can effectively deepen players' emotional resonance and strengthen their identification with the game. It is also crucial to refine the design and quality of game-related merchandise, as these products serve as carriers of emotional value for players. Furthermore, a participatory community ecosystem should be established, integrating players' feedback into game

development and community activities to enhance their sense of participation in the game's development.

In conclusion, the sustainable development of the Chinese otome game market relies on a player-centered strategy, which is centered around the value of genuine emotions, immersive character-driven experiences, and active community collaboration. Marketers and developers should abandon the homogenized and superficial stereotypes. By strategically applying technology and cooperation, they can build deep, meaningful, and sustainable connections within the virtual world where players form bonds with their beloved characters.

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