

Chinese Female Player's Love and Hate to Love and Producer

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Abstract

This study examines the reasons for the popularity of Love and Producer in China. We conducted 10 in-depth interviews and analyzed online feedbacks from users and journals. We mainly want to investigate why Chinese female players are obsessed with this game at the moment it was published. This study explains this phenomenon from multiple ways: social influence, user's preferences (personal hobby, gender character), game design, etc. This essay also explains why this game is losing users recently. The results suggest that the curiosity effect that this game produces is one of main reasons that this game hits hot trend on mobile game market, and the less gratification this game could provide to users causes more customers to quit.

Keywords: Popularity, Love and Producer, in-depth interview

1. Introduction

Otome game or love romance game is a kind of video game in which the main character is a girl who can choose among several men to become her true love. The average otome game is set up in a peculiar way in which the avatar is almost nonexistent and it usually try to make the player feel as if they are the heroine (Kim, 2009).

While this all may be general knowledge, more cites would be helpful
Originated in Japan, otome game still has huge influence on China. Love and Producer, a mobile otome game, becomes the hot topic recently. Chinese female players are reported to spend over 39 million dollars on their virtual boyfriends in this game and this application has ranked among top ten game apps in China's App Store (Huang, Good 2018). The success of Love and Producer attracts considerable attention and its producer has therefore made large profits.

With the different position of Love and Producer and its popularity in China, player's motivation to play this game becomes our research question. Adopting the in-depth interview method, this paper tries to analyze why Chinese female players choose to play Love and Producer based on uses and gratifications theory, and the concept of interesting way to merge UG with these critical perspectives.
masculinity and hegemonic masculinity.

After the introduction, the conceptual framework is given to explain the terms used

in this paper. The research method is discussed in the third section followed by analysis part, in which we attempt to explore female player's motivation to play Love and Producer through analyzing interview results before the conclusion. The reasons why some female gamers stop playing this game are also mentioned in the fourth part.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Uses and gratifications theory

Uses and gratifications theory (Blumler, Katz, 1974) is based on the audience's position, it examines the psychological and behavioral effects of mass communication

on human beings by analyzing the audience's motives of using the media and obtaining satisfaction. Different from how the traditional message affects the audience, it

Be sure when discussing methods to rely also on how the method has evolved, so citations should also focus on what's been going on in the past five years.

This sentence is unclear and might actually be inaccurate, but I am not sure what you are trying to say. emphasizes the initiative of the audience and highlights the status of the audience. This

theory believes that the audience actively restricts the process of media communication through the active use of media, and points out that the use of media is entirely based

If so, what is the outcome of such behavior or actions? on individual needs and desires.

2.2 Connell's masculinity and hegemonic masculinity

The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity is the most influential theory in the field of men and masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2000; Glaser, 2004). When it comes to masculinity, it is a concept that is related to gender relation. Specifically, masculinity concerns the position of men in a gender order. It is defined by Connell (1995) as "a place in gender relations, and the practices which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture" (p. 71). From this definition, individuals can not only adjust themselves to masculinity but also produce masculinity through participating in masculine practices. Therefore, masculinity is composed of a wide range of practices which happen across space and over time and are implemented collectively by groups and communities. Later, Connell (2000) defines masculinities, since there can exist more than one form of masculinity like complicity masculinity, subordinate masculinity, and more than one way of being a man, relying on time, place and society, as "configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face-to-face

relationships and sexuality”. These two definitions stress social interactions, practices and relationships between men and women in the formation and development of masculinities.

As for hegemonic masculinity, it not only refers to those personalities which can be identified to distinguish “real men” from other men and women, but also justifies men’s dominance over women. Connell (1987) suggests that hegemonic masculinity is realized through the marginalization of other masculinities. In this way, hegemonic masculinity acknowledges men’s domination over women and further strengthens the gender practice of the patriarchal society. However, hegemonic masculinity is not fixed, and it is the product of social practice, changing with the development of society. Therefore, we should take social context into account and analyze hegemonic masculinity with a developing view.

What you need throughout this is a rationalization of how and why these approaches intersect. Why did you choose these from the long list of options and how and why do these ideas work together for this particular project?

3. Research methodology

Why?

When it comes to our research method, the main one is the in-depth interview. But before we conducted the in-depth interview, we carried out a small-scale pilot testing. As one traditional and specialized form of qualitative research, pilot testing is used in

the development of quantitative survey items which are piloted on study participants to test the validity and reliability of the items. Hulley (2007) suggests that pilot study is often chosen to test the design of the full-scale experiment which later can be adjusted, thus in an attempt to avoid time and money being wasted on an inadequately designed project. Since pilot study can help to evaluate time, cost and the feasibility of the project design, we regard it as the preliminary research method. If something is ignored in the pilot study, it can be supplemented to the full-scale project to improve its performance.

Good

Therefore, we chose three Chinese female players to implement this testing. These three interviewees are all young international students in Lancaster because the target consumer group is actually the female under 30 years old. The pilot study includes 18 questions, which involves basic information, social aspect, psychological and gender aspects.

After the pilot study, we perfected our questions like adding the question of “the standard of spouse selection in reality and the ideal male image”, and then interviewed 10 Chinese female players. Conducted on one to one basis, the in-depth interview is designed to reveal the underlying motives of the interviewee’s attitudes, behavior, and

perceptions. Because the in-depth interview adopts an open-ended, discovery-oriented method of data collection, we are allowed to deeply explore the respondent's feelings and perspectives on specific object, which leads to rich background information that can provide contextual insights and shape further questions relevant to the topic. In the current research, the in-depth interview was used to gain intensive perspectives of the Chinese female players under 30 (regardless of their professions), about their motivation to play Love and Producer. In terms of the category of motivation, we conducted the in-depth interview from the aspects of social interaction, player's psychology and love outlook. A 14-question interview was designed. Meanwhile, Good detail. Need citations or reference to justification. Who did it before? Did it work? Why do it here? different questions were asked, and these questions mainly depended on what kind of answers were given. Among the 14 main questions, questions 1 to 5 were general questions about the player's background, the frequency of playing Love and Producer, and so on. Though not aimed at directly finding out the specific reasons to play this game, those general questions helped to obtain the perspectives of the context in which Chinese female choose to play it. Questions 6 to 14 were main questions directly addressing the research question: Why is Otome game like Love and Producer attractive

to Chinese female players? In summary, in-depth interview helps us to get a wealth of detail on the insights into how people think and feel, and it works even better with discourse analysis in some way.

However, since we lack of resources to find more representative sample (such as professional game designer, the designer from Love and Producer team, etc), the result could be not deep enough to some essential reasons.

4. Interview Analysis

4.1 The motivation to play Love and Producer

In this section, we try to analyze the reason why Chinese female players play Love and Producer from the aspects of curiousness stimulation, social interaction, fan effect, game design trick and spiritual pleasure.

4.1.1 Curiousness Stimulation

How many of how many?

For almost all players of Love and Producer, the psychology motivation to start playing this game is curiousness. Before Love and Producer was published, the main producer of otome game is in Japan. A lot of Chinese players would buy games from

Japan, and sometimes meet the problems of language. As the first Chinese native otome game, Love and Producer had won a lot of public attention before it published. Its designing company Paper Studio is one of the most famous Chinese game producer which had published other popular games such as Miracle Nikki, and the target market is mostly young females. Throughout the 10 interviewees, most of them had known that Paper Studio is the design group of Miracle Nikki, which gave them the first impression of Love and Producer. Some players of Love and Producer are exactly the group of people who have ever played Miracle Nikki. “I used to play Miracle Nikki for a while. I think the designs of characters and background are great. When I know Paper Studio would publish their own otome game, I began to be curious about it, and hope it could bring me more fun than Miracle Nikki” says Shentu, a 24 year old female player.

Some interviewees playing other otome games were also interested in Love and Producer because they were not sure that Chinese companies can do well in designing a native otome game, and how it would be modified to meet the demand of Chinese market.

4.1.2 The Desire for Engagement and Social Media Trigger

Social networking is the core of element for all Chinese female game players, the games which can cause more social discussions can be more successful in propaganda.

There are clear differences in the way men and women discover games. For female gamers, social circles are key, with 39% of them discovering a game through friends or family, and 20% through social networks. For men, a comparatively low 27% discover games through friends or family. Instead, 26% of men discover new titles through review or game sites and 24% through online video channels. (Osborn,2017)

The majority players of Love and Producer can be divided into two types:

1. Those who have never played otome games,
2. Those who have already played other otome games

For those who have never played such otome games, the heat discussion about Love and Producer makes them curious about this new kind of game. Especially when one has friends who play Love and Producer and talk about it in Wechat groups or other social networks, this person may have the desire to play and join the talk about it.

For those who have already played other otome games (most of them are Japanese

games), because the topic of Love and Producer is widely spread in social media, they have more willing to try a native otome game which they do not need to spend time translating and adapting to the regulations of this kind of game. For instance, Qinyi, one of our interviewers and a long-term player of otome games, has spent over 3000RMB on Love and Producer. She used to play Japanese otome games. When she heard the news that one Chinese game company had published the first Chinese otome game, she soon downloaded Love and Producer and added points to it. She said:” Sometimes when I posted screenshots of Love and Producer in Weibo, the old friends of mine with whom I had rarely connected would ask me something about the game. It is a good topic to keep in touch with old friends.”

Social media exerts great influence in attracting people to play Love and Producer. According to our interviews, almost all of them start to know this game through social media such as Sina Weibo and Wechat. It is obvious that Paper Studio spent more to advertise Love and Producer in social media than other kinds of platforms. Although this game is not an interactive game where players can communicate with each other and develop teams together, the heated topic of Love and Producer on social platforms

makes it a trend to play and talk about this game. The recommendation chain between friends is clear and effective, the Paper Studio's propaganda tactic to great extent meet female's desire of engaging in social discussion. Once Paper Studio had developed their first group of "seed customers", they bought advertising space of some huge social networks, Therefore, the topic of the game can be more and more heated through relationships.

Where is the hegemonic element you wrote about? Also where is the basics of UG Theory?

4.1.3 Fan Effect and Attention

Many users of Love and Producer are fans of its voice actors. Love and Producer employed the most famous Chinese voice actors to dub for 4 main male characters, which is one of the most attractive elements of this game. Those 4 voice actors had already owned large fan groups in their own fields by talent performance in broadcasting series or cartoons, and their fan groups are exactly the target market of Love and Producer: young females.

Qinyi said that she was totally addicted to charming voices, and she loved Ajie, who was the voice actor of Baiqi in Love and Producer. The best thing about this game was that you could have the virtual phone call to hear your favorite voice, although it was

not possible to response whatever you want to him.”

Through our interview, half of the players mentioned the attraction of voice actors in this game. When this game was in the period of initial advertising, great voice actors had won the attention of many potential players. They may imagine the content of Love and Producer with their former experience of voice actors and then generate the expectation of this game, and it becomes one of the motivation to download and play the game. Even though the game cannot reach some of their expectation, it still exists a hint that the game is interesting and well-designed.

4.1.4 Strategy and trick of game design

Not only do the above factors maintain the DAU (Daily active users) and MAU (Monthly active users) after the Paper Studio releases its new game, but also the tricks of game design have the same effects in Love and Producer.

The constantly positive feedback to the players at beginning stage also contributes DAU/MAU and profits to the company, hooked the users to let them stay. This trick of game design could be explained by the logic of Feedback Loop and Skinner Box (Despain, 2012): along with the process of tasks going further, players will receive more

rewards, and these rewards will help them to complete other tasks. Game designers persuade players to continue playing this game, by feeding them with variable rewards (raffle cards for example). Thus, at this stage, players will step into a positive feedback loop: they easily receive more and more rewards as a beginner treat, and passing tasks faster with this reward. This feeling of smooth going and gratification leads them to continue play. With the faster process, they enter into a Goal-Gradient Effect: players would have more motivation as they are getting closer and closer with the goal, so they are willing to pay more efforts (money or time) on this game. Combining the effect that tricks have done above, this game produces an addiction effect, keeping the DAU solid grow. Most of our interviewees also mentioned this strange phenomenon, such as the system would give them some rare rewards just before they feel want to give up this game.

4.1.5 Female player's Spiritual pleasure

The spiritual pleasure that female players can gain in Love and Producer makes them continue playing Love and Producer to certain extent. Since Love and Producer is a kind of otome game, the female players' choice for male characters is worthy of

research, which causes us to explore the relation between their selections and the motivation to play Love and Producer. According to Han (2009), the hegemonic masculinity in the society of contemporary China refers to the determination, aggressiveness, the ability to conquer the female and so on. Besides, the norm of the gender role of men and women exists since ancient times in China. Women should achieve the mission of mothers, while men are free to do what they want to do. Therefore, it can be seen that the traditional thinking of “women are inferior to men” is still influencing Chinese people, although it is now changing. This can be confirmed by some respondents mentioned that their favorite male character in game was Li Zeyan, because they were attracted by Li Zeyan’s personalities of superciliousness and aloofness, and they felt that they were protected by Li Zeyan when playing Love and Producer. But when we asked them whether such personality is their standard of spouse selection, they gave us a negative answer and said that the person like Li Zeyan did not exist in reality. From this description, it is the disparity between the ideal and the reality that allows them to enjoy being protected by male character and get the spiritual pleasure, thus keeping playing this game. Due to the fact that some female players

desire to be protected in game, they may play this game because of the spiritual pleasure they get.

Similarly, there are several interviewees who express that they are attracted by the male characters' qualities such as steadiness and considerateness. Compared with hegemonic masculinity, steadiness and considerateness are personalities that can be treated as subordinate masculinity. When the male character like Xu Mo is considerate to the female players in Love and Producer, they cannot help loving him and continue playing this game.

In brief, on the one hand, the spiritual pleasure Chinese female players obtain from Love and Producer affects their willing to play it. On the other hand, different selection for male character reflects the tendency that hegemonic masculinity may contain more and more feminine temperament with the development of society.

4.2 Reasons for the discontinuation of playing Love and Producer

However, the UE (user experience) of Love and Producer has not reached the expectation of players. In figure 1, the black line represents the UE from other games (as a baseline in this case) and the point A, B, C, D represents the range of variation,

the pink line, and the blue line represents the UE from Love and Producer. If a game has produced well UE, at the pro-phase stage, user's experience would lie between 'happy' and 'just so-so', because they could feel a little frustrated as they need to learn the operation of this game (such as League of Legends could be quite difficult for green hands). Once players can handle the operation system, they could enjoy some gratification from this game, and the game designer could use the method Feedback Loop, Skinner Box and Goal-Gradient effect to keep users. At the later period, users have learned how to play this game well and gained enough recourses, therefore, their experience should reach the highest level. This feeling of success and proficiency operation could let users become habitual players, or let them leave as less of challenge or competition from others. The timeline of mid-term and later period could be months or years if one game is designed very well.

However, the UE of Love and Producer shows a different scene. The crazy advertisement and expectation gave players enough curiosity and interest to download and try at first stage, yet lots of users complained about this game and quit to play at mid-term and later period. The market penetration rate overall is decreasing since Paper

Studio released this game (see figure 2). So, what is wrong with the performance of the Love and Producer?

According to interviewees feedback and online comments, it is the gap between high input and low payback enrage players. Most players have already known the ambition of Paper Studio through the Miracle Nikki, but they did not know that this game is asking more, compared with the lower quality of the game design. Some people complain about the stereotyped storyline, but what they mostly angry about is that the money they paid into this game would not give them what they want, then they have to pay more and more. This game designs lots of limitations that allow users buy to resources (such as limitations of energy every day, players need a certain amount of energy to complete tasks). For those people who do not want to invest money into the game, they can earn resources by doing previous tasks over and over again, consuming time. For those who urge to finish the storyline sooner, or earn the rare cards faster, they mostly would choose to invest some money. It seems that this game has covered both groups: customers who have time but no money, and customers who have money but no time (see the principle of Time and Money, by Despaigne, 2012). Yet it actually

enraged both sides: boring mini-games (which in some way not related to the romantic storyline), slow progress, and this game would ask even more to those who have paid.

Apparently, Love and Producer did not balance three elements in game design: fast, cheap, good (see the principle Pick Two: Fast, Cheap, Good, by Despain, 2012).

Basically, it is really hard to achieve all three in one game (such as high quality means high cost, and that leads to expensive products), so game designer must choose one or two orientations to focus. However, Love and Producer performs pretty bad on all of them: the game update is slow, always need to block server, and customer service always ignoring the feedback from users in media platform; game resources are expensive, and users feel harder to win SSR (highest level card in this game) at later period, which means they need to pay even more money on the raffle or resources; furthermore, the poor interestingness of Love and Producer is another reason why more and more players have stopped playing it.

Unlike the traditional otome games (console game since 90s) in which users can choose single storyline with one characters and multiple endings, Love and Producer does not give users enough options on storyline development. Although the main

storyline is the leading feature of this game, they are not doing so well on this part but develops a card collection game feature. All reasons above lead to one kind of disappointed feeling when users play this game, and they sooner quit as they cannot fulfill their gratification anymore (Blumler and Katz, 1974). Until now, most users have given up playing it, and others continue because of obsession of collection habits or voice actors.

Some more about the critique of the method would help.

5. Conclusion

According to our theory basis and in-depth interview research, curiousness and social engagement desire are the main motivation for Chinese female users to play Love and Producer. The fan effect of famous voice actors also exerts much influence in the propaganda period of this game. The positive feedback in the first stage of game arouses more curiousness and satisfaction of players and leads them to a higher level of engagement. But when the game goes further, players find that Love and Producer is more like a card gathering game rather than a love game, and they need to pay more time and money on this game. Thus, after the middle level, the satisfaction

reduces and most players choose to give up this game. In addition, the gap between reality and the ideal in personality of male character provides female players more fantasies which can meet their demands. Therefore, the game company should focus on improving the user experience based on the discussion above.

Areas for future research?

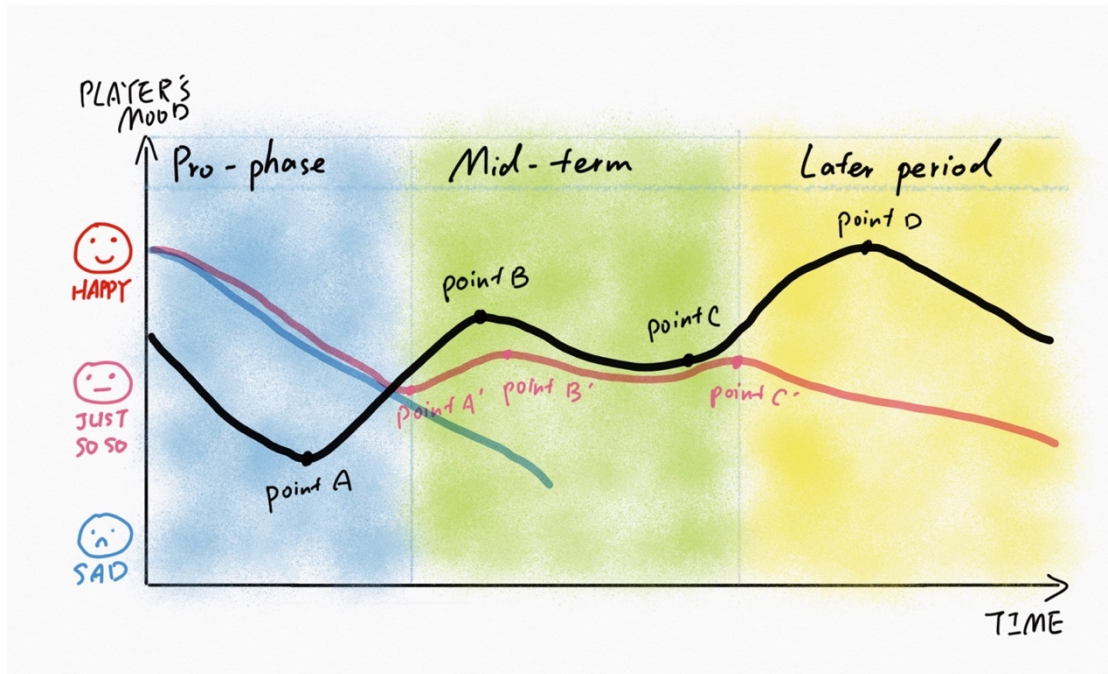
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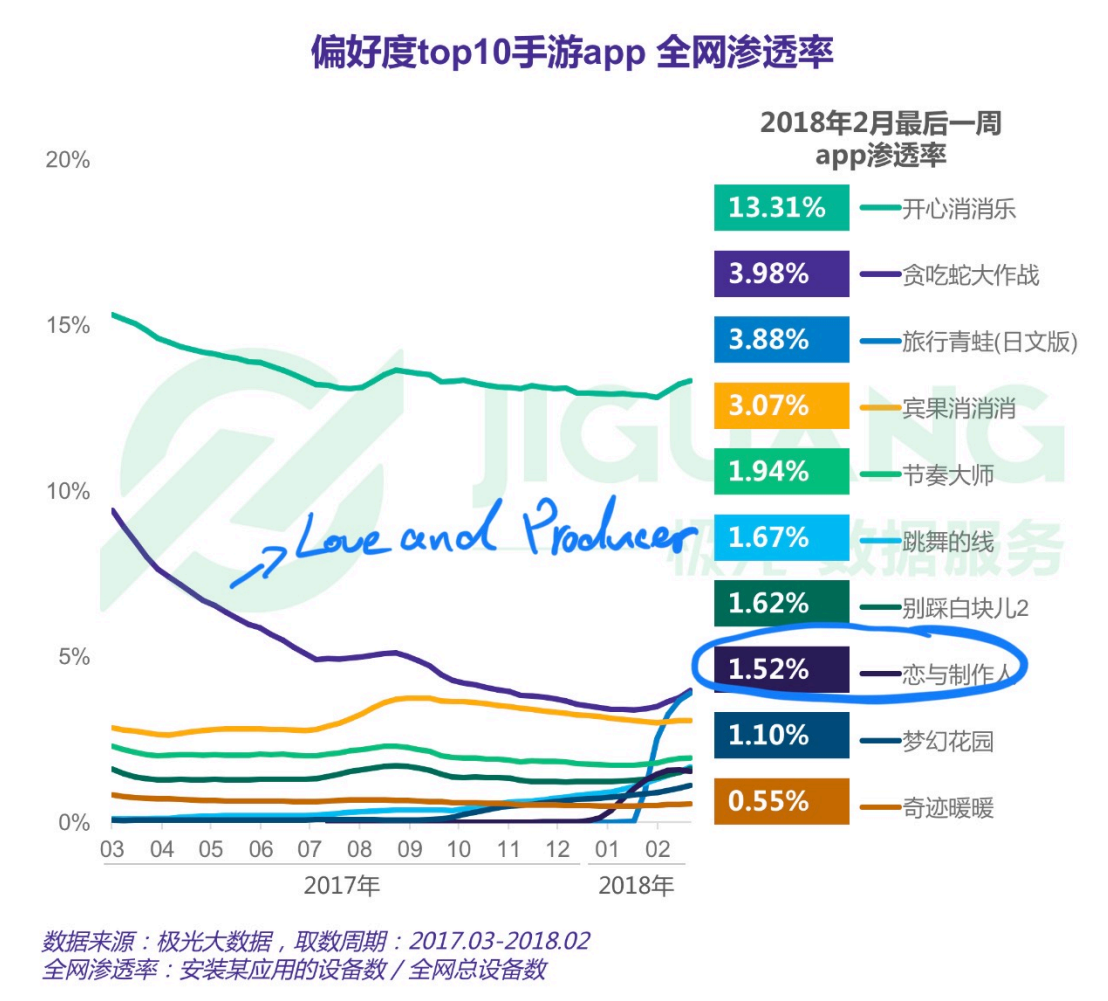
Appendix

Figure 1 Player Journey



Black line represents players' UE from other games, pink line and blue line represent players' UE from Love and Producer. Normally, games would give players constantly happy feeling, gratification, and randomly frustration. However, Love and Producer gives players high expectation at pro-phase and pushes them out of comfortable zone later, causes customer churn. Pink line represents players who still playing this game and blue line represents players who have quitted already. Points are not fixed on certain position, they represent limitations of maximum and minimum.

Figure 2 Top 10 most popular mobile game app market penetration rate



Resources: Jiguang big data. <https://www.jiguang.cn/reports/238>

Figure 3 Interview summery table

	Chang	Tiantian	Xiaoxu	Di	Pershan
Basic info	Master student in Beijing; 23; single	International student in London; 23; single	Has worked one year in Beijing; 24; single	International student in Glasgow; 24; single	Just graduated from college in Chongqing; 25; single
Time consume on this game	Started since the end of 2017 until April 2018; 1 hour per day at first and 20 mins at later period	Started since it released until now; 1 hour per day	Started since it released until now; 1 hour per day and few mins now	Started since it released until January; 1 hour per day	Started since November and lasted 1 month; 3 hours per day at first then several times a week in later period
Why started to play	Roomates recommendation	Known this company through Miracle Nikki; friend recommendation	Saw it on Weibo; I'm a fan of voice actor, Ajie	Like Miracle Nikki so download this; known from Weibo	Saw friends shared it online; thought it could be interesting but disappointed after
How much you've paid and why	50 RMB	1000 RMB; for Li Zeyan card collection	300 RMB; for raffle, for getting SSR	200 RMB; want to collect full set cards	Non; don't like spend money on game
Aspects you like and hate about this game	Interesting storyline (kind like science fiction)	Don't like this game at all, only like Li Zeyan	Voice actor; hate the female character	Some features like phone call, message from 'boyfriends'; hate it so expensive	Voice actor; no multiple ending
What kind of personality you are	Extrovert	Extrovert	Extrovert	Introvert	Extrovert
Prefer staying along or be with friends	Both ok	Both ok	Along	Only with close friends	Along
Would you discuss this game with friends	Yes; also sharing discount code	Maybe a little bit; kind of ice break tool with new friends	Yes, I think that is the value of playing this game	Yes	No

How do you spend leisure time	Talk with friends; don't like play game	Play mini-game; this game brings lots of pressure as it consumes money	Playing game	Checking social media apps	Reading; this game to me brings no gratification at all
Which male character you like the most	Li Zeyan	Li Zeyan; cool outside but warm inside; but not in real life	Bai Qi, as Ajie is the voice actor	Lize Yan; he likes you but never admit it	Xu Mo; he is always steady
Which character you hate the most	Non	Xu Mo; he treats every girl so ambiguous	Bai Qi's personality is not logical	Non	Some dialogues of Lize Yan
How do you feel about the relationship between characters	I don't care, game is just game	The girl is fickle, she likes every boys in this story which I hate her the most	I understand they have to do so (letting one girl crushes on four boys) but they could do better on game design	Don't care	Don't care, but somehow not logical
Spouse choice in real life and in game world	Maybe related with the type I like in the game but maybe not	Not related; Li Zeyan in real world would be over aloof	No related	Maybe in some way; but won't like Li Zeyan in real world	Maybe in some way
What do you think about defining peoples personality by sex	Too extreme; personality should not related with sex	I can understand why people think like that; but my ideal world would be like girls can like cars and boys are allowed to play dolls	Should no be related	I don't care in game design but do care in real life, it should not be related in real life	Don't know
What do you think about otome game	I would think that this game has one break through, that is letting people play this game by the	So fake; I will quit sooner		Like simple games more; this consumes times	Not a fan

	perspective of female in China's market				
What do you think about Paper Studio	Don't know too much about this company	The advertisement during Chinese is gender discrimination, not fair for female	I don't like it; this company only like money, they don't care about game quality	Not too bad but they're asking too much	Felt interesting at first time but got bored later; they really put so many effort on advertisement

	Yi	Tu	Shu	Chao	Yao
Basic info	Waiting for study abroad; live in Jiayi now; single		Working in Wuhan; single	Reality TV show editor in Beijing; single	College student
Time consume on this game	Started since it released and quit 4 months later; 1 hour per day at first	Started since it released until now; 1 hour at first but several times a week now	Just one week	Almost 4 months; play it everyday	Just 1 month; 1 hour at first 20 mins now
Why started to play	Just wanna have a try at first; part of personal preference as I also like other otome games	Known the company	Saw it on Weibo; curiosity	Saw it on Weibo; need to know about every hot trend as one kind of requirement from my job	Heard about it from friends
How much you've paid	2500 RMB; we all have to pay for SSR	100 RMB	100 RMB; really regrets, did not work at all	100 RMB; do not care small amount of money; discount; need to pay to continue	200RMB

Aspects you like and hate about this game	Phone call from 'boyfriends'; like voice actor; too much money consumption	Like character design and hate game process design	Too simple for a otome game	Not like this at all but only stay for the card collection, personal preference, and want to know the ending	Cards collection; hate the storyline
What kind of personality you are	Introvert	Extrovert	Extrovert	Introvert	Extrovert
Prefer staying along or be with friends	Both	Both	Both	Along	Both
Would you discuss this game with friends	Yes, complains; making friends closer	Yes	Yes	No	Sometimes
How do you spend leisure time	Playing games, but not this game cuz it's so expensive	Playing game	Playing game but not this one	Watching video and playing game	Listening music; this game gives me pressure
Which male character you like the most	Bai Qi; as the voice actor is Ajie	Bai Qi, as he's good looking	Bai Qi, good looking	Li Zeyan; his rich, giving us a feel of dominant	Li Zeyan; rich, cold outside and warm inside
Which character you hate the most	Non	Non	The girl, she's kind of flirting with every boys	The girl	The girl
How do you feel about the relationship between characters	Don't care; feel interesting in some way	Don't care it in the game	Don't like it	Everyone seems like the girl and the girl is flirting with every boys; wired storyline	Don't like it
Spouse choice in real life and in game world	Every perfect part in four boys; don't expecting such perfect man in real life	Not related	Not related	No; characters in this game are too fancy, too perfect	Will not like Li Zeyan in real life, he's too cold

What do you think about defining peoples personality by sex	Powerful, tolerance for male, sensitive and carefulness for female, that is the way that real life working	Don't think related	I don't know	Don't think it should work in a traditional way	Don't think it should be related
What do you think about otome game	Love it, but hate this game, they asking too much from users	Like it, depends on how the game designed		Don't like this, boring, only wanna know the ending, will quit immediately when the story ends	Boring game, no enough innovation
What do you think about Paper Studio	Nice game but terrible company operation; gender discrimination to female	Making players crazy at first but we would feel just so so later		Games from this company always be like heating at the first and loser at the end	Terrible company, asking too much money