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I-RoLE 2023

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION 2023

**EMBRACING CHANGE:
EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE
OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC,
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

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A VISUAL NOVEL GAME ON SOCIAL ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT:

Taking spots from normal novels and illustration books, visual novel games are an interesting method for writers to express their imagination. Compared to illustration books, visual novel games employ various visual elements including sounds to enhance players' experience when playing. The games are also interactive which avoid players from getting bored by only reading texts. It is practically a perfect balance for those who enjoy both reading and playing. Therefore, in this project, the challenge of developing a visual novel game which employs both creative writing and coding skills was taken in order to produce a visual novel game that is focused on social anxiety which consecutively could give the public an insight to the experience of those affected by the condition. Ren'Py, an easy-to-operate software game engine, was a huge help in making the project a reality as the storyline, characters, musics, and sound effects were eventually combined into one long script of codes. Followed by the release of the visual novel game project on itch.io, a platform where many visual novel games were also released on, many interests in the project could be seen through the analytics provided by the site. Additionally, there were also some positive comments given through the feedback survey answered by the players of the visual novel game project. All in all, it was an enriching experience of tackling the challenge of making a visual novel game for the first time with only the internet and search engine as guides.

Keywords: Visual novel game, creative writing, coding skills, social anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

Visual novel game. As the name suggests, it is a story presented in the form of a gameplay where players can make different choices that may lead them to possible different paths and endings, depending on the creator. In other words, a visual novel game might resemble novels made up of mixed media due to the feature of mostly static graphics, most often using anime-style art or occasionally live-action stills as the key parts of the visual in a visual novel game (Kusumawati, 2019). Additionally, other visual elements are utilised to add emotional intensity to the story being told (Daniel, 2018).

However, it is important to note that while it is called a visual novel game with an emphasis on the visual aspect, it does not mean that is all there is to it. In fact, visual novels in general also have sounds such as music and sound effects which help immerse the players into the story (Nguyen, 2019). Without good sounds, the overall experience of the visual novel would be bland and unenjoyable for the players.

"Everything Will Be Alright" is a visual novel game featuring a main character who suffers from social anxiety. In the case of the story, social anxiety occurs when people become concerned about how they are being perceived and evaluated by others (Leary, 1997). In brief,

the story focuses on the inner struggles she has to confront as she returns to university all alone for her final semester as she is the only one from her friend group who is staying inside the campus. Therefore, players will be experiencing the journey of the main character from the third point of view as she attempts to get through the semester by overcoming her social fear to make friends.

1.1. Project Objectives

The objectives of the project are:

- 1) To develop a visual novel game emphasizing social anxiety faced among young adults.
- 2) To employ creative writing and coding skills in developing a visual novel game.
- 3) To produce a visual novel game that gives the public an insight into the experience of social anxiety faced among young adults.

With the completion of the playable visual novel-game called “Everything Will Be Alright” and feedback from the players, the objectives were thus fulfilled.

1.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

To begin, the screenshot below represents the interest check that has been conducted through the author’s personal Instagram account. A number of 20 people have expressed their interest in playing “Everything Will Be Alright”.



Figure 1. Results of interest check conducted on the author’s Instagram account.

Followed by the interest check, the screencap below is included to present the data and statistics that have been obtained from itch.io, the platform “Everything Will Be Alright” was published on.

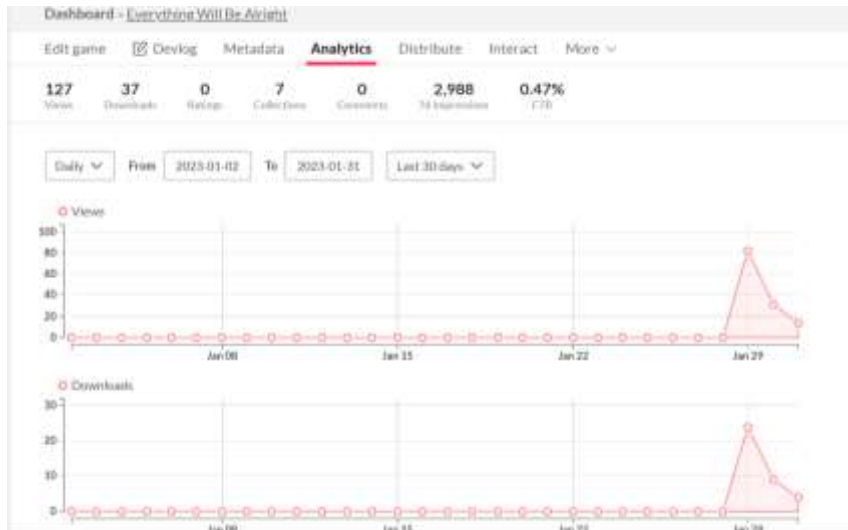


Figure 2. Analytics of “Everything Will Be Alright” on itch.io

As shown in the two figures, the number of downloads far exceeds the original number that was retrieved from the interest check. Considering the fact that the visual novel game is available to the public by being released on the itch.io platform, the statistics prove that there are people aside from the author’s acquaintances who are interested in the game. Even the number of views and impressions gained show that people are interested to check out the game, to see the premise of it. The public’s interest is proof that there are entrepreneurial opportunities to the visual novel game project.

In addition to the analytics, to further prove that “Everything Will Be Alright” has entrepreneurial opportunities to be consumed by the public, the statistical results below are included to support the statement.

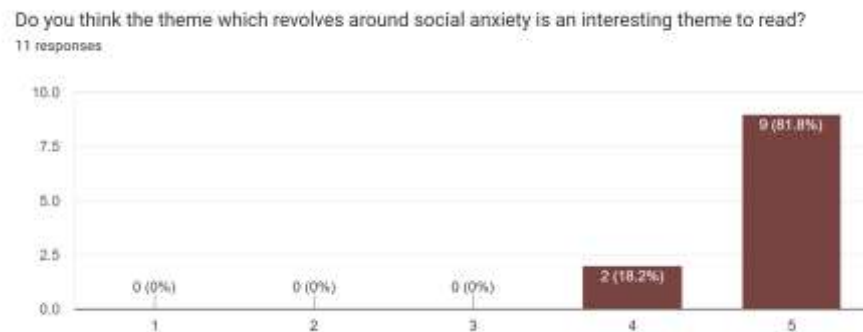


Figure 3. Statistics of feedback survey response: Do you think the theme which revolves around social anxiety is an interesting theme to read?

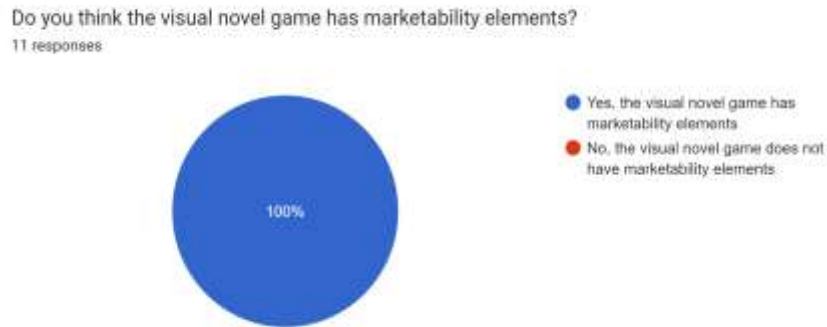


Figure 4. Statistics of feedback survey response: Do you think the visual novel game has marketability elements?

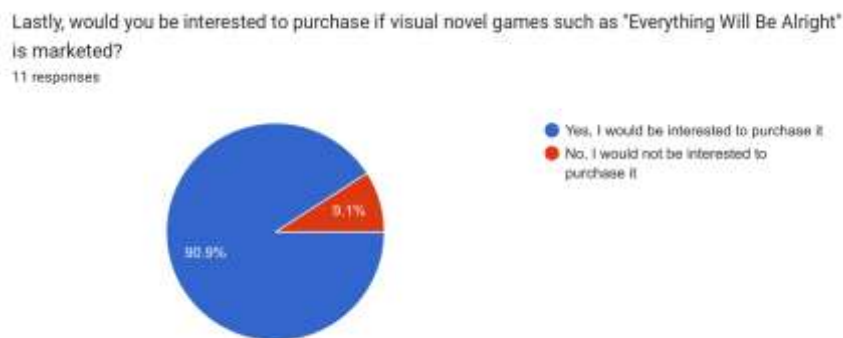


Figure 5. Statistics of feedback survey response: Would you be interested to purchase if visual novel games such as "Everything Will Be Alright" is marketed?

As seen in figure 3, the players were questioned on their interest in a visual novel game that represents the theme of social anxiety. Majority of them agreed that the theme is very interesting using the scale of 5. Only two opted for the scale of 4, which is also the lowest scale given. This proves that "Everything Will Be Alright" has the chance to appeal to the public despite having a non-fantasy or adventurous theme.

Moreover, figure 4 and 5 have questioned the respondents regarding the visual novel game's marketability elements and their interest to purchase it if it was ever marketed. All of them agreed that the game has marketability elements, while on the matter of purchasing the game, everyone but one respondent stated that yes, they would be interested to purchase it. However, the player who answered no did mention that while they do not see themselves outright purchasing the game, they would definitely download it if it was ever featured on their page on Steam, another software specially designed for games. Based on all the figures shown, it can be said that "Everything Will Be Alright" definitely stands a chance to go even further in terms of entrepreneurial opportunities.

2. METHODOLOGY

Prior to the development of "Everything Will Be Alright", much research was done to ensure the process runs smoothly. When the project was decided to be a visual novel game, types of softwares that are helpful in making visual novels were looked into. After some comparison, the method of development used to code and create the visual novel game was eventually decided to be Ren'Py. Not only is it a free software game engine, but it is widely used by many

creators as Ren'Py facilitates the creation of visual novels which mostly helps in the coding process.

Aside from deciding on the software used to code the visual novel game, there was also planning in terms of the theme and plot of the story, the character sprites and designs, the background images and music, and of course, the management of schedule to execute everything that has been stated. Much research was done, especially once the theme of the visual novel has been set to center around social anxiety. Other than that, for certain aspects such as creative writing involved in drafting the storyline, they required an endless brainstorming process and efforts which consumed plenty of time.

As for some other aspects which involve the visual and audio aspects, permission was asked before using them as part of the visual novel game materials. Hours were also spent in finding the most suitable sounds and music to be used in the game. After all, music and sounds not only play a significant role in creating a sense of immersion in a game, but they also help reflect the inner feelings of a character alongside influencing the vibe to the setting of the game (Zehnder & Lipscomb, 2012). Every method used in the project development and management only consumed time and energy with no actual monetary cost.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Analysis of results

The first two project objectives are achieved with the completion of the project. Everything Will Be Alright has successfully been developed, in which the visual novel game told the story of the main character, a university student with social anxiety. In fact, the game began with an explanation of what social anxiety is, to put emphasis on the theme itself alongside helping the players understand the premise better. Aside from that, there were various creative writing and coding skills that were applied in developing the visual novel game. For instance, the visual novel was written from a third person point of view. By specifically focusing on using third person limited omniscience, players are able to witness the characters' actions including their thoughts, with it mainly being the main character's consciousness as the story is heavily centred only around the said character.

Aside from that, the visual novel game also portrayed the conflict of man vs self, which was one of the types of conflict mentioned when it comes to creative writing. These two mentioned are basically the major creative writing skills that were employed throughout the process of writing the plot of the visual novel game. On the other hand, the coding skills that came into play were the process of learning how to conduct the Ren'Py software engine and the methods of typing the codes into the script. There were a lot to consider when coding, such as labelling the characters that appear in the game, labelling the names of the images and sounds to be used for easy access, and even positioning the character sprites. Miniscule may they seem, but they are the ones that really took time to be adjusted before the coding process could progress further. Not to mention, there were also the bits of coding choices, which are also known as menus, which took some time to be figured out. Nevertheless, it was an enriching experience as problems were encountered and were able to be solved.

Furthermore, as the final objective mentioned on giving the public an insight into the experience of social anxiety faced among young adults, the results can be seen through the feedback survey answered by those who have played "Everything Will Be Alright". In one of the questions asked regarding players' experience on the visual novel game, they were asked whether the storyline was able to provide them with insight on the impact of social anxiety towards some people. As seen in the chart below, the majority of them responded with the scale of 5, indicating their agreement towards the question. Additionally, the lowest scale given is the

scale of 3, indicating that the player did not particularly agree or disagree with the question. It can be seen that none of the players who responded directly disagreed; therefore, the final objective has successfully been achieved based on the players' feedback.

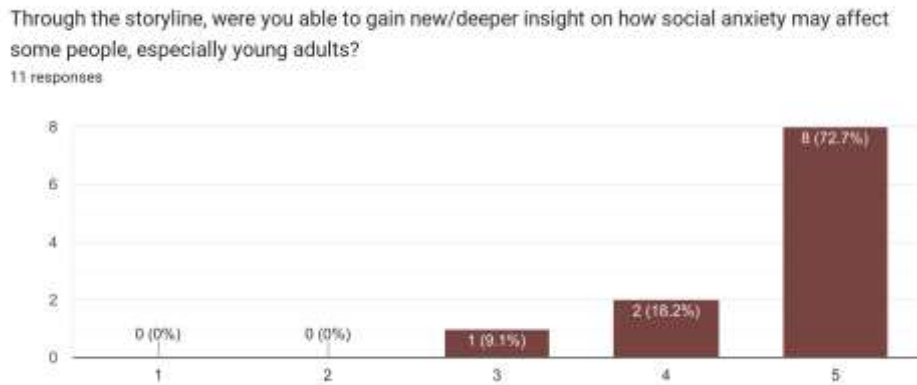


Figure 6. Statistics of feedback survey response: Through the storyline, were you able to gain new/deeper insight on how social anxiety may affect some people, especially young adults?

3.2. Discussion

It is however important to take note of the limitations that exist in developing the project. For instance, most creators and players of visual novel games often go for the unique, fantasy themes rather than themes that showcase the realities that exist in life. Therefore, it was a question whether people would be interested in a visual novel game that represents the slice of life theme. Furthermore, writing itself is a subjective art form and the enjoyment differs from an individual to another individual. Everyone will have different opinions whether the “Everything Will Be Alright” was a good visual novel or not, and the only thing that could be done was to express the storyline as best as possible while keeping to the theme. Regardless, the figures below are the data that reflect the concerns related to the limitations stated.

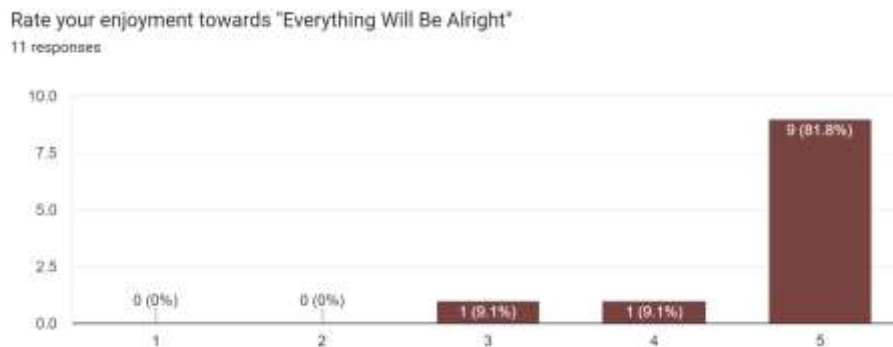


Figure 7. Statistics of feedback survey response: Rate your enjoyment towards “Everything Will Be Alright”

Based on the figure 7 shown above, it can be seen that while one respondent rated their enjoyment to be on the scale of 3 and another on the scale of 4, the rest of the players rated their enjoyment on the highest scale, indicating the visual novel game was very enjoyable. It can be concluded that the limitations did not hinder the experience of players when playing “Everything Will Be Alright”.

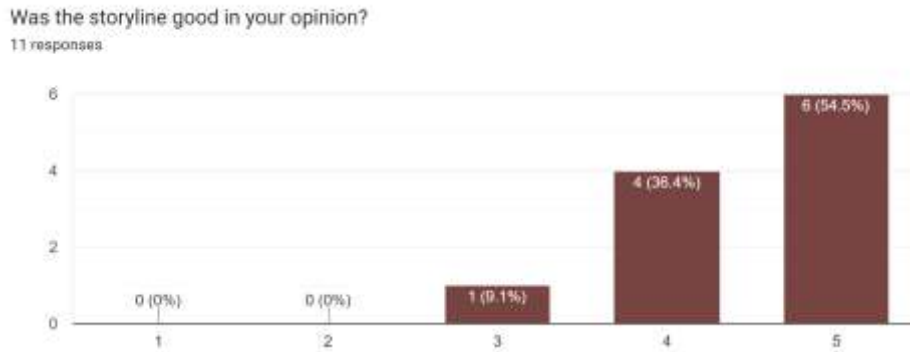


Figure 8. Statistics of feedback survey response: Was the storyline good in your opinion?

Nevertheless, there will always be room for improvements to be done to further bring up the quality of the plot of the visual novel. As seen in figure 8, while the majority of the respondents gave a scale of 5 stating that they found the storyline very good, the number of respondents who opted for the scale of 4 only differs by one respondent. Furthermore, one respondent gave a scale of 3 for the quality of the storyline which proved that everyone has different opinions when it comes to a subjective art form such as writing.

However, it is far from enough to decide the overall success of the visual novel game based on the feedback survey statistics alone. Creative writing and writing in general are by no means a simple task, and time enhances the quality of writing as long as it is not abandoned and is always revised. Therefore, despite “Everything Will Be Alright” already showing promising results based on the players’ feedback, there is always the opportunity to improve it in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the majority of people who gave the project a chance is decently aware of how social anxiety affects people in general. The norm of spreading factual information of social anxiety on various media definitely helps in getting rid of negative stigma such as it being a condition where an individual is extremely shy. It was a rewarding experience to see that today’s generation and society are well-aware of what social anxiety is through the results obtained from the public release of the project. Besides, there were no problems that can be picked out of the positive generalisations concluded. In addition, the project was also able to theoretically and practically spark interests in reading and playing a reality-of-life-focused visual novel game rather than the typical fictional visual novel game. This especially applies to those who are affected by social anxiety as they shared personal comments on how the story was something they can deeply relate to, and it was pleasant to see such a theme being portrayed in a visual novel game. Overall, the visual novel game project “Everything Will Be Alright” is far from perfection, but the theme definitely has high potential to stand out and appeal in the world of visual novel games. With better time management to make up for the time constraint, the project definitely could have been more polished and made longer. Nevertheless, there is always a future where the visual novel game can be made even better.

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