Visual Novel

DATING SIM SURVEY

Report

Researched and collated by: Jennifer Reuter,
15th February 2026



A DATE WITH DEATH



SIGH OF THE ABYSS



SUCKER FOR LOVE

About the Survey

This survey was originally conceived as research to better inform the production schedule and focus for me visual novel dating sim project *Hateship*; set in a quasi-sci-fi criminal world involving biomech monsters as the love interests.

The survey was released for a week and a half, from 13th November to 22nd November 2025, asking respondents a variety of questions about the genre, their play habits, and their preferences. Upon completion, they would receive a desktop background artwork from the game as thanks.

Near the end of the survey, they were asked what they wished was done better in visual novel dating sims they've played. These will be spread throughout the report.

42 Respondents

The survey was shared on platforms with follower count:

- Tumblr — **230**
- Bluesky — **250**
- Newsletter subscribers — **60**
- Itch.io — **140**
- = 6% conversion rate

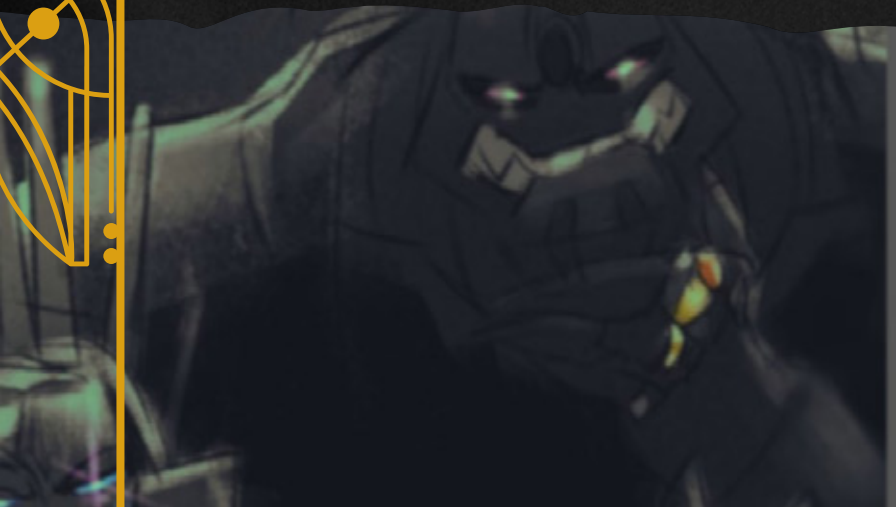
For comparison: 1.36% is industry-standard conversion rate on social media, and 2% to 5% in newsletters.[1]

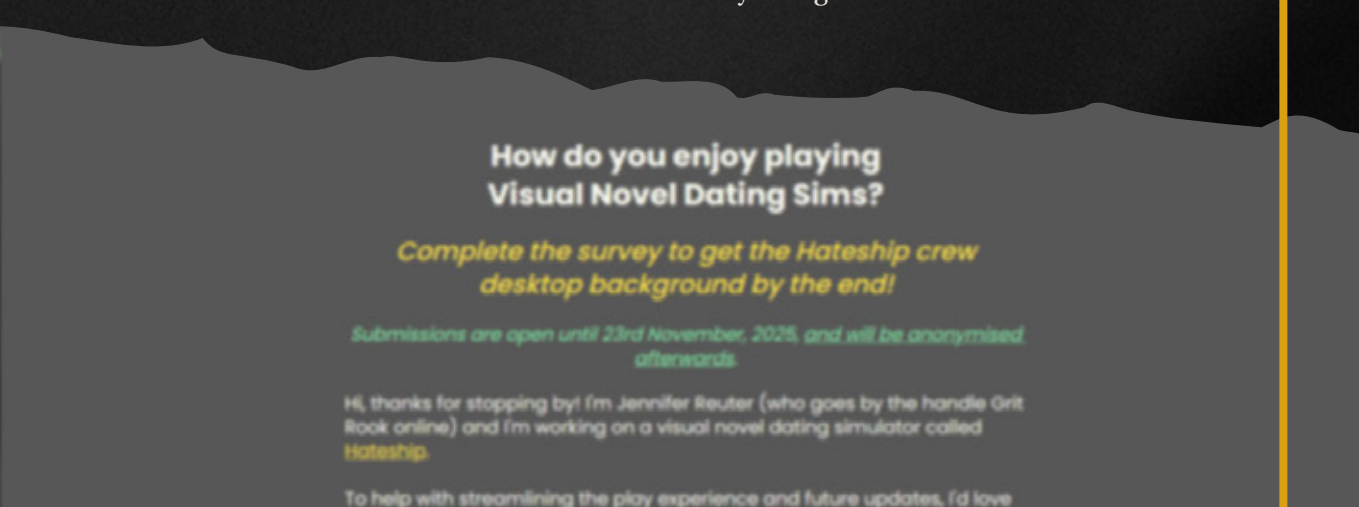
Given such a small following at the time, the turnout was impressive. Which goes to show the proactiveness of the audience.

See the *Genres and Market* section for which platforms made up the majority of the respondents.

Glossary:

- Game/games — will be used to refer to visual novel dating sims, and no other style of game.



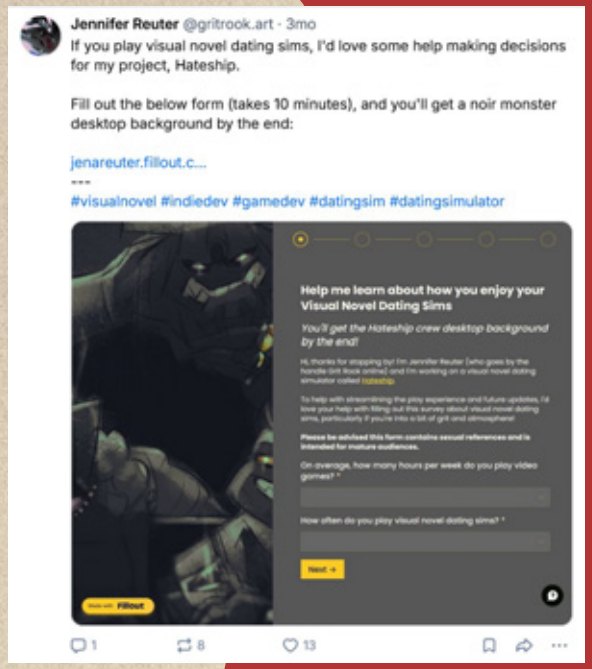


Existing Bias

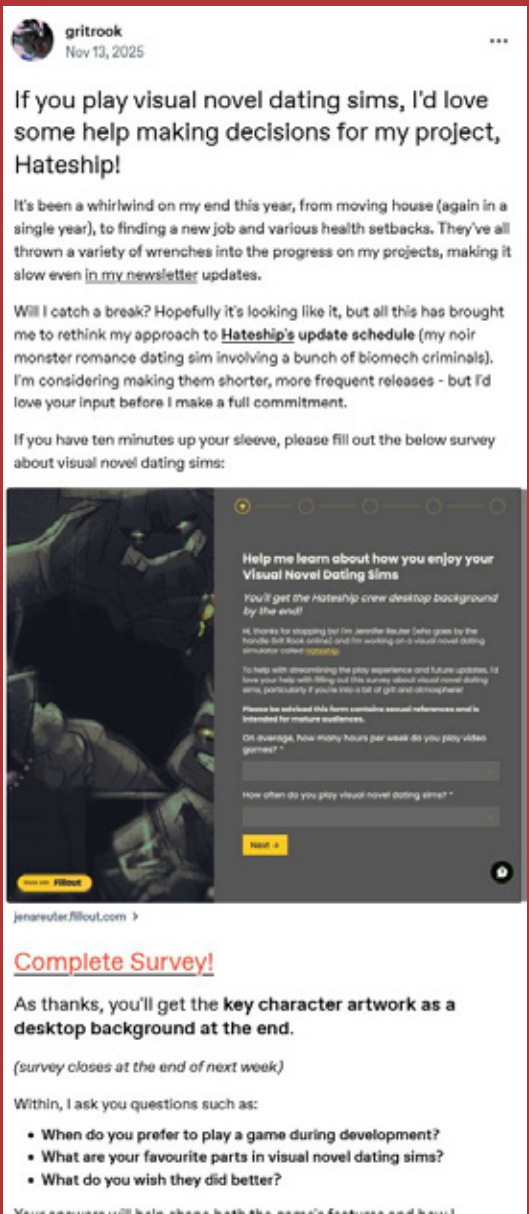
The respondents for this survey weren't sampled across the broadest possible audience. They were limited by my following and reach, which was skewed towards urban fantasy, dark fantasy, dark sci-fi, gothic aesthetics, monsters and the like.

The thumbnail in the social media posts, and the design of the survey also strongly suggested a genre by including art from *Hateship,* as well as flavour text like "particularly if you're into a bit of grit and atmosphere!" This meant that respondents would self-select by common interest upon entry.

This was by design: the most likely audience for my work and first contact point was going to be people who enjoy the intended genre. The focus was to meet their expectations, rather extend reach. If I were to repeat this survey on a bigger scale, it would be worth expanding the scope by keeping the survey visually and linguistically neutral.







Gaming Habits

While respondents where frequent players, with a bulk **(61.9%)** playing more than three hours a week, almost half **(45.2%)** play visual novel dating sims specifically only when it interested them, and **31%** played them upon a full release.

With that said, the second-highest response played once every week **(16.7%)**, and **47%** preferred to play them **chapter by chapter**. Even those who played only when it interested opted for a chapter-by-chapter approach, which seems to suggest a proactiveness when they do become invested.

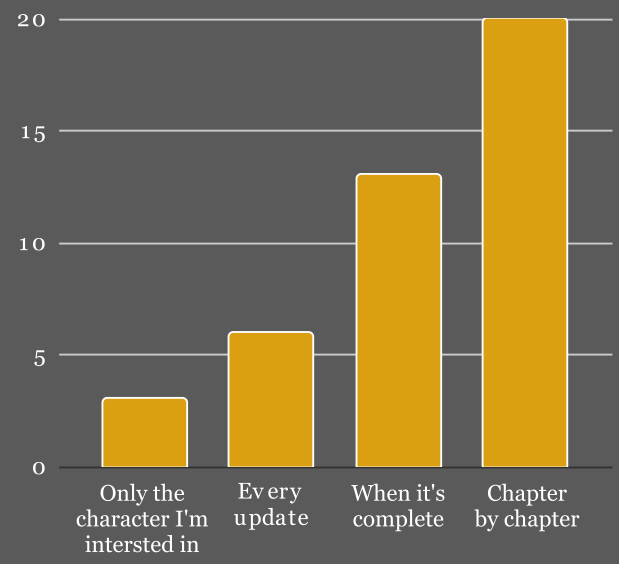
> ***"This is how I'm currently playing Scarlet Hollow, which I like. I'm a slow player, so I take breaks anyway – complete chunks accomodate that"***

> ***"Since I don't have much time to play visual novels, playing each update or chapter by chapter is a bit complicated."***

> ***"Be consistent with their release."***

> ***"i most game I play as soon as content is available. In an ideal world Its when its complete"***

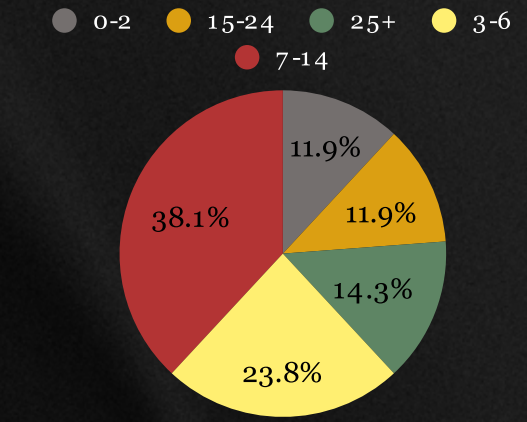
At what point do you like to play visual novel dating sims?



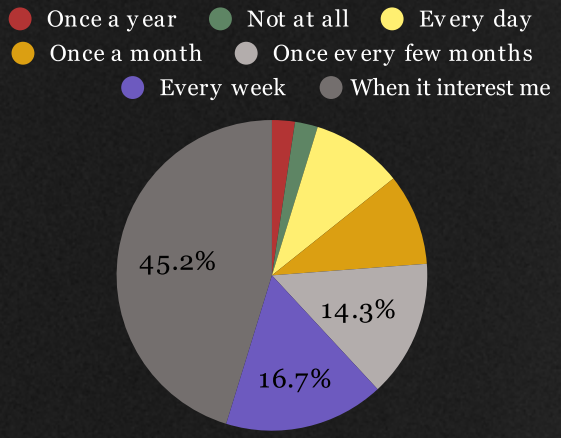
> ***"I want to experience it as the creators intended, without needing to keep track of redactions. Tho indie projects are interesting to see in progress"***

> ***"If the game comes out in chunks, I can find it easier to digest! It gives me something to look forward to. I personally don't mind long waits :)"***

How many hours do you play per week?



How often do you play visual novel dating sims?



Genres and Market

Monster lover, along with standard genres of **fantasy** and **science fiction,** took the lead easily in favourite choices. However, **horror** and more **abstract/weird** genres were right after. Players seemed interested, even preferred, a variety.

The genre 'romance' or 'romantic' was left out because, obviously, dating sims are focused on such by default.

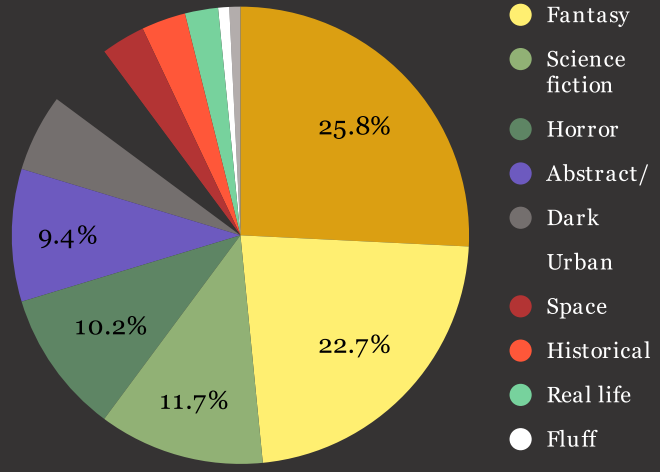
Out of existing games in the market, the top games played were:

1. Monster Prom — **24**
2. Doki Doki Literature Club — **19**
3. Hatoful Boyfriend — **16**
4. Slay the Princess — **15**
5. Dream Daddy — **14**

Respondents were given the 'other' option to suggest games they've played outside of the provided selection, and they submitted **31 more titles**, including *Hustle Cat* and *Our Life* (see *Appendix* for the full list).

Therefore, players enjoying visual novel dating sims are 'well-read' and more likely to enjoy new experiences, and outside of mainstream titles.

Favourite genres for visual novel dating sims



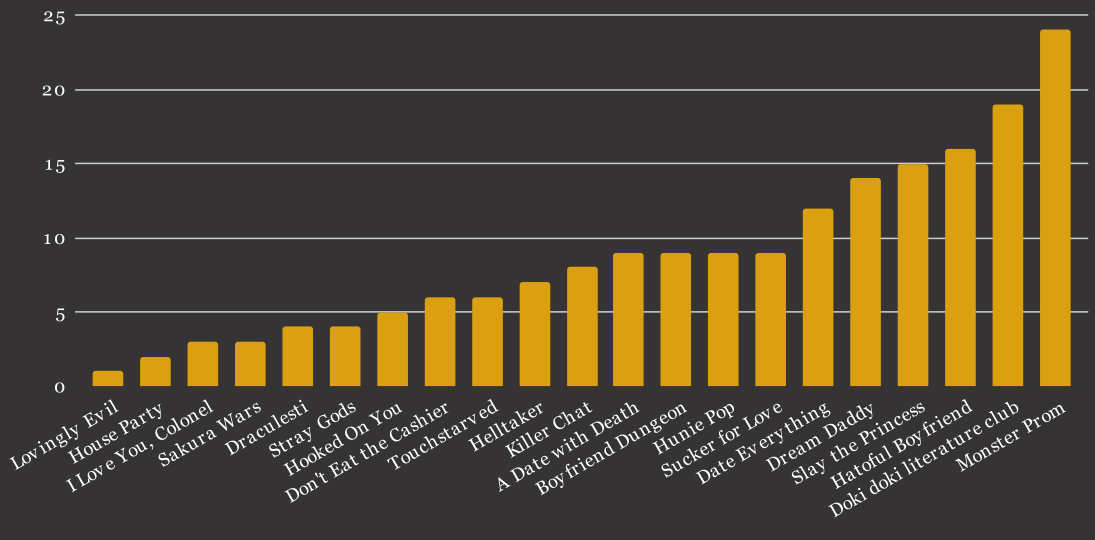
- Monster lover
- Fantasy
- Science fiction
- Horror
- Abstract/ Dark Urban
- Space
- Historical
- Real life
- Fluff
- Anything



DRACULESTI

i like a variety of art styles, anime art styles are lovely and what i grew up on but i do like to see more variety

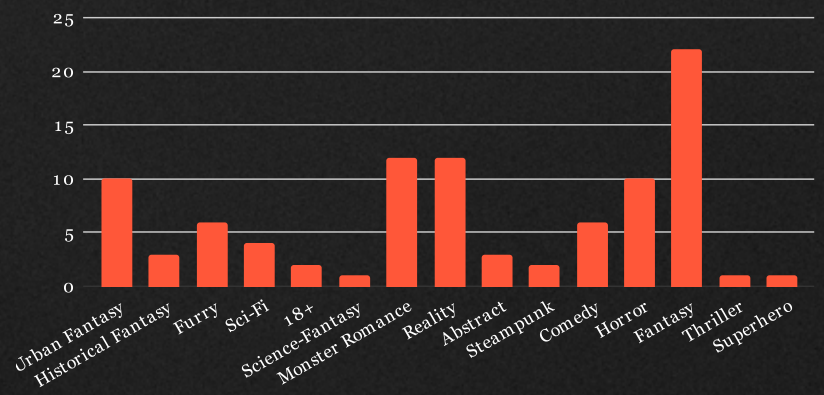
Which dating sims have you played?



Genres and Market cont.

Where visual novel dating sims are found and played

Genres of games in market



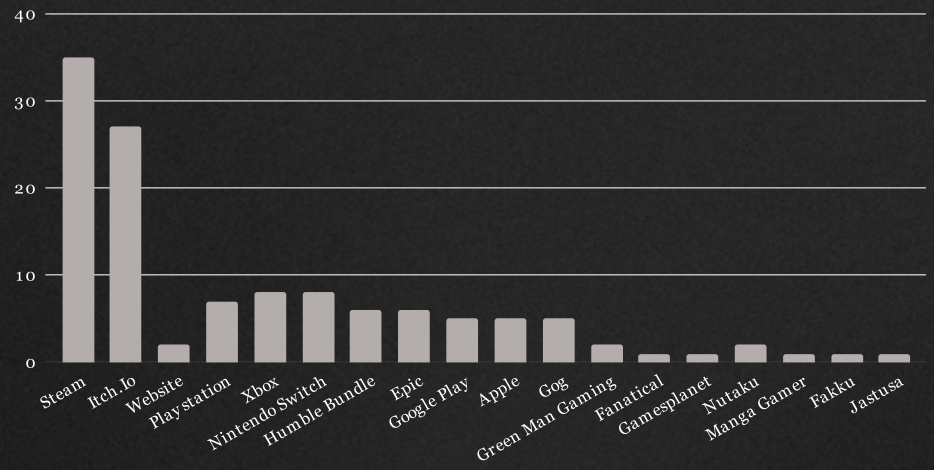
In allocating genres to games provided in the survey, and suggested by respondents, the number of **fantasy** games matched the higher genre preference on the previous page. **Monster romance**, which was the most favourite, and the **reality** genre, despite being one of the least favourite, matched in frequency of occurence. Sci-fi, the third-favourite, was very under-represented.

There are plenty of gaps to fill, to say the least.

Here are the top games with their respective genres:

1. Monster Prom — urban fantasy, monster romance
2. Doki Doki Literature Club — reality, horror
3. Hatoful Boyfriend — abstract, comedy
4. Slay the Princess — horror, fantasy, monster romance
5. Dream Daddy — reality, comedy

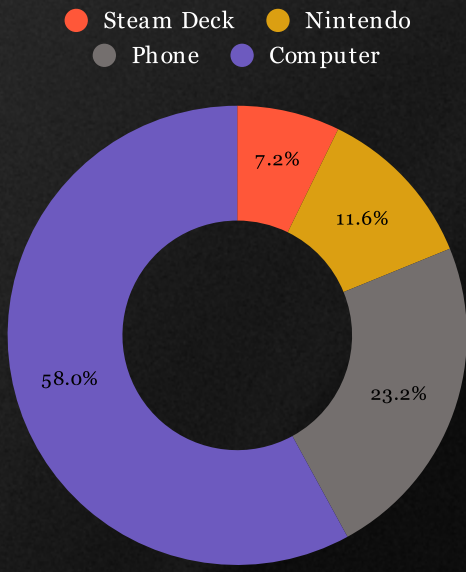
Purchase platforms of games in market



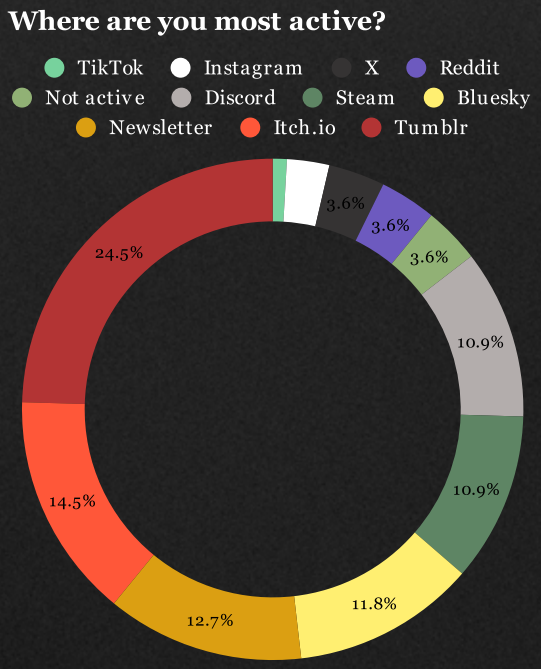
A majority of games released are on PC-focused platforms such as **Steam** and **Itch.io**, with bigger productions available on consoles (see bar graph above).

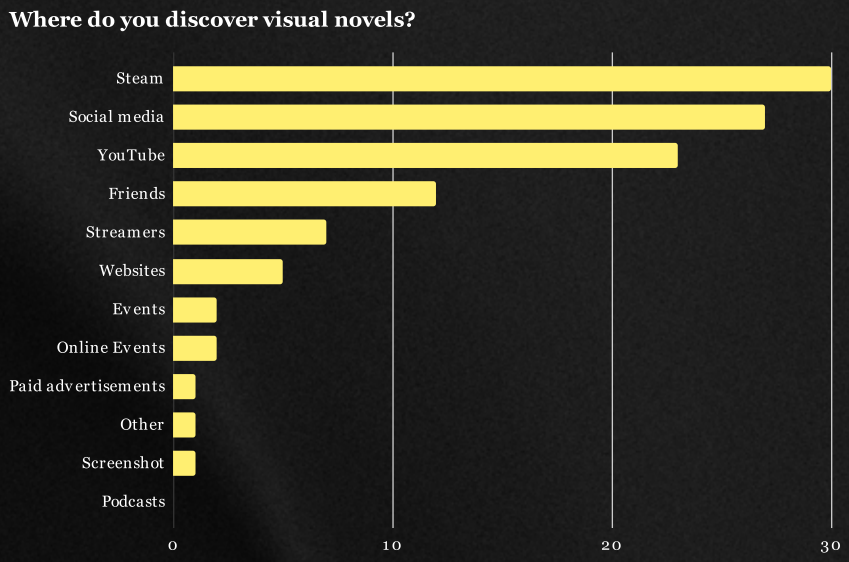
But when it comes to play preference (graph at right), the second-highest choice was mobile. There appears to be a gap of suggestions and research in the games available on those platforms, which would need further investigation.

On what platforms do you play dating sims?



Genres and Market cont.





Where players are based

Given I promoted the survey only on Tumblr, Bluesky, Itch.io and my newsletter, the results for where people are most active will be skewed towards them. Nevertheless, respondents provided multiple locations they mingle. There's a lot of overlap.

Where they discover games is through **Steam**, **social media**, **YouTube**, **friends** and **streamers**, meaning recommendation is a central part of discovery.

To demonstrate whether respondents were actually active on the platforms they chose, I tracked the source of where people came from when filling out the survey (bar graph at bottom right), using URL parameters manually added at the end of a link, different on each platform posted.

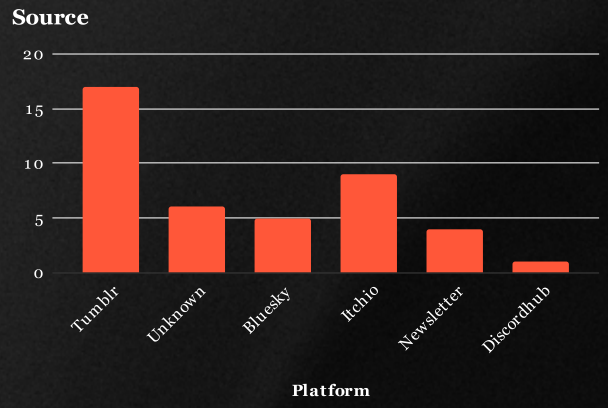
Tumblr and Itch.io were the most active, matching the pie chart top-left.

Unknown may be due to people using blocker plugins in their browser, or the link being followed without the URL parameteres present.



Number of respondents based in a country, each:

- 22 — USA
- 3 — Germany & Russia
- 2 — Argentina
- 1 — Spain, Philippines, Thailand, Scotland, Asia, Argentina, Turkey, Czech Republic, Canada, UK, Poland



Game features

Arguably the most revealing part of the survey is the features which respondents considered the most, or least, important for a visual novel dating sim.

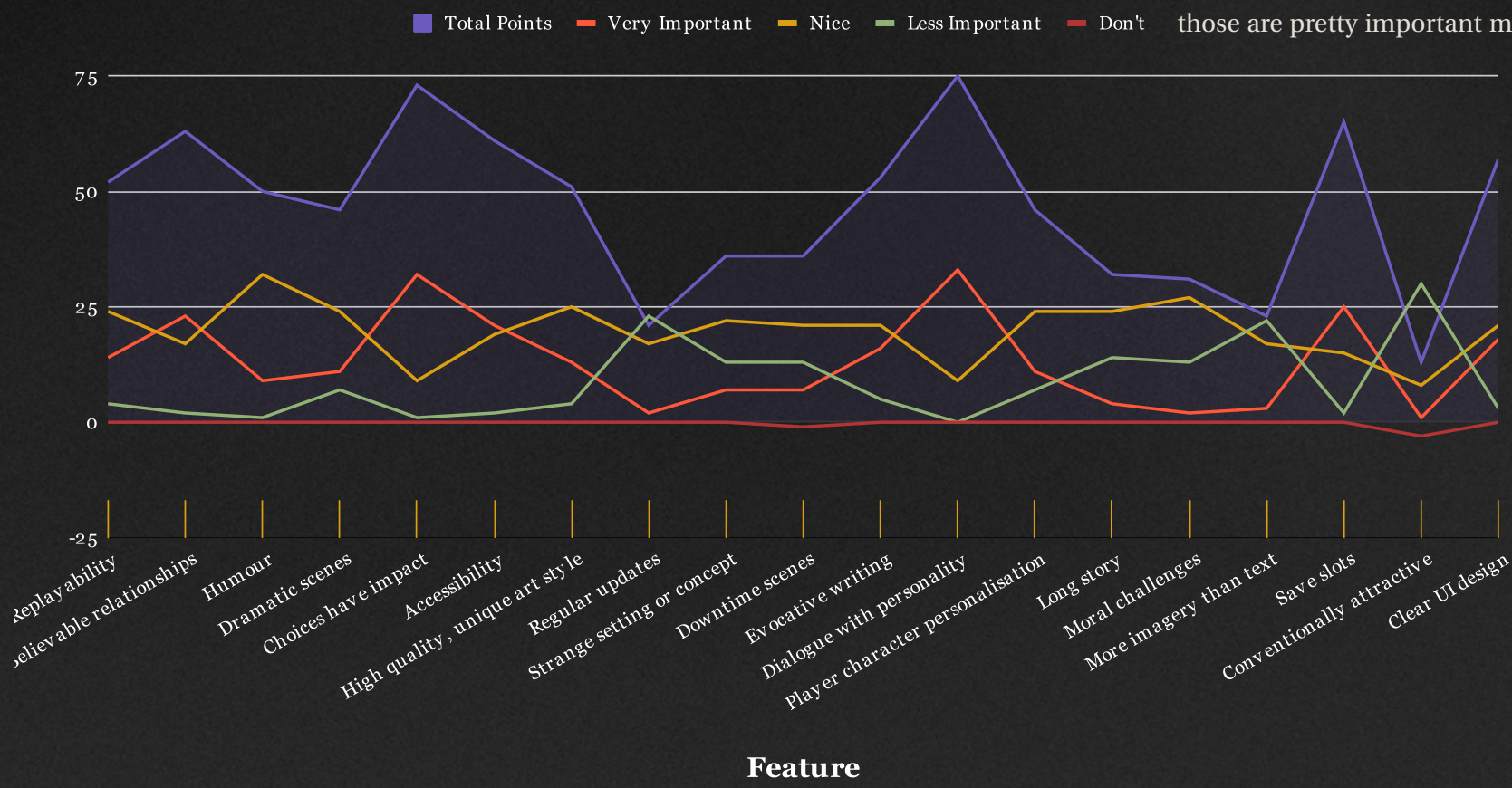
Each degree of importance was given a score to multiply per vote:

- Very important — 2
- Nice to have — 1
- Less important — 0
- Don't include — -1

Overall, **dialogue with personality** and **choices with impact** were deemed the most important, followed by **option for save slots** and **believable relationships**.

Very few options were voted in the negative, save for two: **conventionally attractive characters** and **downtime scenes.** For a game like *Hateship*, which involves lizard-like monsters and action scenes, those are pretty important metrics!

Importance of Features



Feature

Game features cont.

Comments

> ***"I want more unusual romance options. I don't want to romance conventionally attractive people, i want more monsters and other weird options. Also i think ot would be nice if there was just more novels with unusual plots. Probably the reason why I'm interested in things like Hatoful boyfriend, Angels with scaly wings, Helltaker and Slay the princess (haven't played it yet, but plan to) - they are unusual, and interesting to me as a result"***

> ***"Complex dynamic? Able to try and mend relationship after a fight/arguments. But choices can have consequences"***

> ***"Playing AS a monster would be sweet. Angst, drama, hurt-comfort. Learning dramatic past of the characters is a good bonus. Also Polyamory option, PLOT, Friendship route and Aromantic/Asexual options."***

> ***"More of a pet peeve, but I want more monstrous ladies! I'm tired of seeing conventionally attractive human traits on lady monsters, like boobs or a face full of makeup, especially when the guy monsters are allowed to be more inhuman-looking"***

> ***"I love when dialogue choices later call back to earlier choices, or point out if your character comes off as a hypocrite because of said choices."***

> ***"Utilize the unique combination of visuals, sound and text. Make me care about non-romance characters. Let me choose game-mechanic-relevant traits of the pc instead of just their looks; have npcs'/environmental reactions to the pc change because of prev choices"***

> ***"I really enjoy it when characters, especially the LIs, interact with each other! It's something I think can be left out of some VNs which focus on individual solo routes, but I feel that getting to see these characters interact with each other can bring out new parts to them!"***

> ***"More chances to defend/assert yourself when harassed by antagonists."***

> ***"Polyamory... Sometimes turning people down suuuucks. But also sometimes I'd honestly prefer seeing two other characters get together instead lol. More horror options would be great to see that were actually scary, not just buffs dudes in bloody clothing who have no personality. Good dialogue that isn't cheesy would be amazing haha. Better/more dialogue options for the player that don't make us go 'I would never say that' and shatter immersion. If you go for a pre-made protag then it's no problem, but if it's a player protag then the options needs to include different personality options or be more neutral overall? If that makes any sense?"***

Based on the commentary, frustration was expressed frequently with shallow or lack of choices being reflected in gameplay. This is surprising given how visual novels are narrative-driven, and demonstrates a real lack of literary depth in the market.

In general, respondents were clear on their preferences and happy to share them in detail.

To see all the quotes, see the *Appendix.*

Game features cont.

Degree of 'Spice'

The survey provided these descriptions for each category of intimacy, or 'spice', to choose from:

- None (platonic only)
- Low (kisses & handholds)
- Medium (suggestive dialogue & behind closed door scenes)
- High (vague sexual descriptions)
- Explicit (18+)
- Other

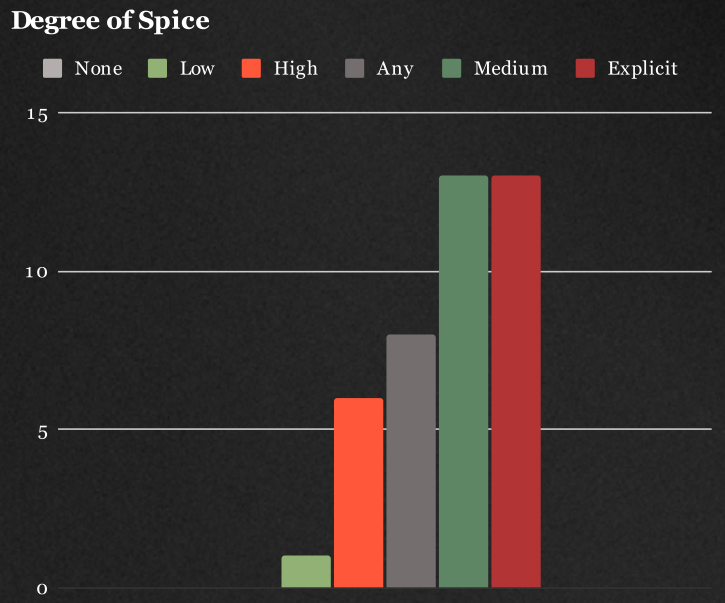
For a romance game, you would expect a high degree of interest in NSFW (18+) content, which was the case. Surprisingly, though, it was not alone in highest preference.

An equal amount chose Medium, and 8 respondents went out of their way to fill out the Other field to suggest they don't mind any level, so long as the story suited.

Despite the enthusiasm for intimacy, it shows the audience is flexible and prefers quality over the maturity rating.



DATE EVERYTHING



"I dont mind spice. Whether its explicit, implied or none at all is ok!"

"I wish the spice level could be adjusted, that way more people could enjoy more games."

"I'm actually pretty fine with any level. Not every single game needs 18+, but it can be unfortunate sometimes for some games/ characters when they don't have it."

"Exploring platonic/close relationships or polyamory!"

Game features cont.

Reasons for playing

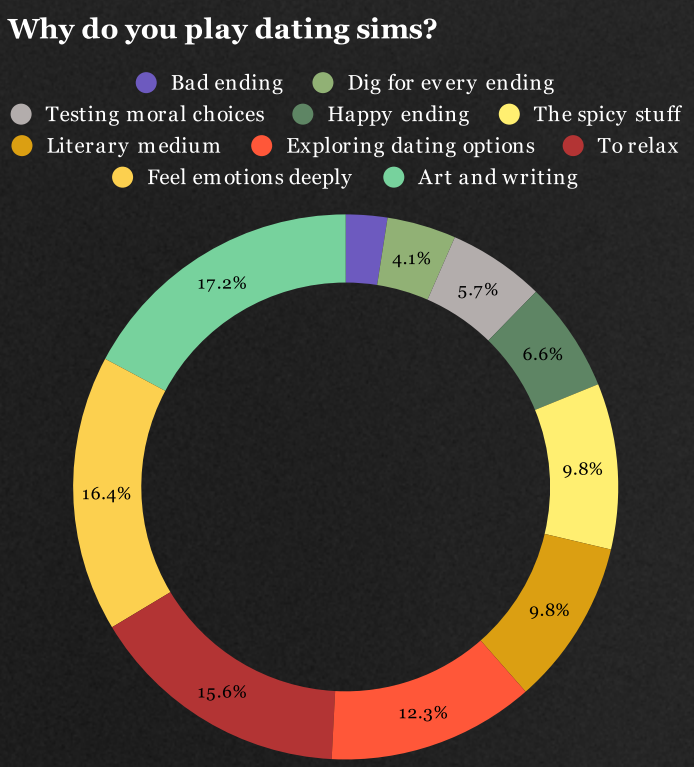
Almost an equal split of respondents played visual novels for the **art and writing**, **feeling emotions deeply** and **to relax**.

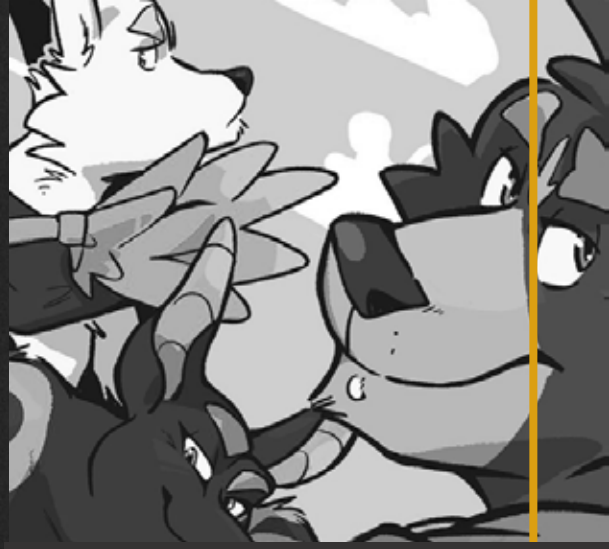
The lowest interest was in experiencing **bad endings** on purpose, **digging for every ending** and **testing moral choices**. But not many more were interested in **happy endings** either (3 more votes than testing moral choices). The impression is that players have their personal preferences in what character or route they play and may not go through the whole experience, but don't necessarily care for the type of end result.

> ***"Find beauty in the grotesque? That's the MAIN reason why I'm here in first place bahaha Even if I can tolareta it, I feel there's still a lack on stories where there's no need for the dateable "monsters" to end yassified/the ugly duck treatment."***

> ***"Unique by-hand art styles - watercolor, ink and brush, etc. They tend to often be pretty similar in color, line weight, layout, etc."***

> ***"Make the narration in-between interactions more engaging."***





ADASTRA



DANDELION



SAKURA WARS



SCARLET HOLLOW

Final thoughts

The visual novel dating sim community, at least those focused on a darker edge, is proactive in seeking out new games in the genre, eagerly keen on variety and are flexible around the maturity level and release schedule. They're ready to make suggestions and provide feedback, even to the point of being skilled writers themselves.

The information that this survey could've gathered for a more complete picture:

- players' age bracket
- their prefered gender and romantic orientation dynamics in games
- their budgets for purchasing visual novel dating sims
- comparing that to the actual cost of available dating sims
- if games contained other mechanics than narrative dialogue, like puzzles, dungeon, etc.
- the percentage of suggested games which are LGBTQ+ friendly.

Special thanks

Thank you to *Jevon Wright* for her advice with marketing research and providing an example survey to work off from. Go check out her base-building survival game *Adaptory.*

References

[1] Indge, Charlie. “Email Newsletters or Social Media? A Data-Driven Comparison for Marketers | Bulldogs Digital.” Bulldogs Digital, 24 Oct. 2024, bulldogsdigital.com/marketing/email-newsletters-or-social-media-a-data-driven-comparison-for-marketers/. Accessed 15 Feb. 2026.

Appendix

Visual novel dating sims - full games list

- A Date with Death
- A Tale Of Crowns
- Adastra
- Andromeda 6
- Angels With Scaly Wings
- Arcade Spirits 1 & 2
- Ascension
- Blooming Panic
- Boyfriend Dungeon
- Code Realize
- Dandelion
- Date Everything
- Doki doki literature club
- Don't Eat the Cashier
- Draculesti
- Dream Daddy
- Echo
- Hatoful Boyfriend
- Helltaker
- Hooked On You
- House Party
- Hunie Pop
- Hustle Cat
- I Love You, Colonel Sanders!
- Katawa Shoujo
- Killer Chat
- Losing Ground
- Lovers Of Aether
- Lovingly Evil
- Made Marion
- Minotaur Hotel
- Monster Prom
- Mystic Messenger
- Nameless The One Thing You Must Recall
- Oathbreaker 1 + 2
- Obey Me
- Obscura
- Our Life
- Ozmafia
- Password
- Penny Larceny
- Re:Alistair
- Sakura Wars
- Scarlet Hollow
- Seekl
- Sigh Of The Abyss
- Slay the Princess
- Stray Gods
- Sucker for Love
- The Arcana
- Touchstarved



ANDROMEDA SIX



DON'T EAT THE CASHIER



HOOKED ON YOU



Appendix

When asked what visual novel dating sims could do better

- Poly routes and have the characters interact uniquely to choices. Or even having consequences for trying to go a certain route (look some ppl aren't comfy with poly or some are but hate or don't have good chemistry with one of the other parties. It happens) it doesn't have to be hyper realistic. Just that if poly route doesn't mesh with a character's established personality it feels shoe horned
- I'd like more big guys to romance, I love strange concepts!
- I love when dialogue choices later call back to earlier choices, or point out if your character comes off as a hypocrite because of said choices.
- I wish the spice level could be adjusted, that way more people could enjoy more games.
- fully voiced
- Utilize the unique combination of visuals, sound and text. Make me care about non-romance characters. Let me choose game-mechanic-relevant traits of the pc instead of just their looks; have npcs'/environmental reactions to the pc change because of prev choices
- Exploring platonic/close relationships or polyamory!
- Unique by-hand art styles - watercolor, ink and brush, etc. They tend to often be pretty similar in color, line weight, layout, etc.
- Allow me to focus on the most morally-corrupt cast members
- More romanceable fat characters of all genders who were not treated as pitiable or a joke. Who are fat in a variety of ways and not just pin-up model "thicc" or "dad bod" strongfat.
- I want more unusual romance options. I don't want to romance conventionally attractive people, i want more monsters and other weird options. Also i think ot would be nice if there was just more novels with unusual plots. Probably the reason why I'm interested in things like Hatoful boyfriend, Angels with scaly wings, Helltaker and Slay the princess (haven't played it yet, but plan to) - they are unusual, and interesting to me as a result
- I really enjoy it when characters, especially the LIs, interact with each other! It's something I think can be left out of some VNs which focus on individual solo routes, but I feel that getting to see these characters interact with each other can bring out new parts to them!
- complex characters and dynamics, non conventionally attractive designs
- I think having a variety of unique characters. Rather than a token "super unique/alien/different character," why not have every character be wildly different
- Complex dynamic? Able to try and mend relationship after a fight/arguments. But choices can have consequences
- let players be nervous! not everyone is going to aproach a situation with confidence
- Be consistent with their release.
- I like it when characters are customizable and decisions depend on personality. Like, if you want to be shy or bold.
- letting us insert ourselves
- Playing AS a monster would be sweet. Angst, drama, hurt-comfort. Learning dramatic past of the characters is a good bonus. Also Polyamory option, PLOT, Friendship route and Aromantic/Asexual options.
- Little jump scares and audio noises.
- More chances to defend/assert yourself when harassed by antagonists.
- Find beauty in the grotesque? That's the MAIN reason why I'm here in first place bahaha Even if I can tolareta it, I feel there's still a lack on stories where there's no need for the dateable "monsters" to end yassified/the ugly duck treatment.

Appendix

- Be free
- Polyamory... Sometimes turning people down suuuucks. But also sometimes I'd honestly prefer seeing two other characters get together instead lol. More horror options would be great to see that were actually scary, not just buffs dudes in bloody clothing who have no personality. Good dialogue that isn't cheesy would be amazing haha. Better/ more dialogue options for the player that don't make us go 'I would never say that' and shatter immersion. If you go for a pre-made protag then it's no problem, but if it's a player protag then the options needs to include different personality options or be more neutral overall? If that makes any sense?
- Letting pc get some characterization, whether they are custom or premade.
- Being able to properly connect with and get a feel for the characters, aka they feel more real
- horror
- Make the narration in-between interactions more engaging.
- More Bionicle and Transformers dating sims
- I would like to see a great emotional immersion of the characters, their facial expressions, gestures, and other small details directed towards the main character through images and text, as well as their interesting development from beginning to end.
- More creative and unique characters and settings instead of conventionally attractive characters in every day settings. More focus on the characters personality and quirks over their outward looks
- i like a variety of art styles, anime art styles are lovely and what i grew up on but i do like to see more variety
- More of a pet peeve, but I want more monstrous ladies! I'm tired of seeing conventionally attractive human traits on lady monsters, like boobs or a face full of makeup, especially when the guy monsters are allowed to be more inhuman-looking
- Music, character designs

When asked why they preferred their frequency of engaging with a game's production

- **Chapter by chapter:** I generally like the experience of cutting the story in logical pieces and rest on them, let myself theorize, if it's not already finished.
- **When complete:** Only because I don't tend to stumble onto WIP visual novels… I play interactive fiction by chapter because I follow the dev
- **Chapter by chapter:** It's a nice Balance between my impatience but also to have pretty nice completed chapter. If its before the bugs get wrinkled out I lose interest
- **When complete:** I like to be able to view all choices and go back and forth between files/ characters.
- **When complete:** I'm inpatient and hate waiting for updates. I'm also old and used to games being complete when you purchase them.
- **Chapter by chapter:** i most game I play as soon as content is available. In an ideal world Its when its complete
- **Chapter by chapter:** This is how I'm currently playing Scarlet Hollow, which I like. I'm a slow player, so I take breaks anyway – complete chunks accomodate that

Appendix

- **When complete:** Dont mind waiting even if it takes a long time. I like being able to go through things in one sitting if Im able or through the week/ month.
- **When complete:** I don't have a lot of time and am not very "online," so I tend to only really know about stuff once it's completed.
- **When complete:** I want to experience it as the creators intended, without needing to keep track of redactions. Tho indie projects are interesting to see in progress
- **Every small update:** I kinda got used to playing them as they come out for other vns. And as a result I like having multiple versions, seeing the differences between them.
- **When complete:** If the game comes out in chunks, I can find it easier to digest! It gives me something to look forward to. I personally don't mind long waits :)
- **Chapter by chapter:** I get super curious about the whole story, what's available
- **Every small update:** Just reliving through the VN from time to time when I have the time
- **Chapter by chapter:** Chapter by chapter to keep constancy in memory, if I go every update I'll get things too split up and if I wait too long I'll forget stuff entirely
- **When complete:** Since I don't have much time to play visual novels, playing each update or chapter by chapter is a bit complicated.
- **When complete:** I hate waiting for the next part
- **Chapter by chapter:** I don't understand the question, sorry? If I check the game every update and bug fix I might get bored of the game quickly, but that's just me.
- **Chapter by chapter:** I don't really play the game update unless new content has been added but ı do always check what the update and bug fixes were
- **Chapter by chapter:** Gives you a taste of the story but leaves you wanting more.
- **Only characters interested in:** Because I'm picky! Kidding, because I admit I have preferences, especially if my favs are very niche in a long cast of characters
- **Chapter by chapter:** I like the build up to the finished product. Each update gets me excited for when it's all pieced together.
- **When complete:** Don't have time/mental energy repeat gameplay just to see updated content. VNs I've been interested in never finished/lived up to what was advertised
- **Chapter by chapter:** Chapter by chapter updates keep everyone on the same page story wise. Depends if the focus is purely dating sim or the visual novel story.
- **Chapter by chapter:** I'm perfectly fine with playing the game once it's fully released but I would prefer to play it sooner than that if possible
- **Only characters interested in:** maybe it will never be complete and i also find it difficult to play games at all generally. time wise and interest wise
- **Only characters interested in:** Either laziness or pickyness.
- **Every small update:** I like to be able to play the game as it develops because it helps with waiting for the final project
- **Chapter by chapter:** Avoids replaying but portions everything into chunks I'm more likely to fully explore till the next one is added
- **Every small update:** the production timeline doesnt matter much to me as long as the story is good! could be a demo, could be entirely finished, doesnt matter to me
- **Chapter by chapter:** Gives the devs room to breathe, and I get to enjoy a big chunk of story when it's ready. Feels like I'm being annoying if I nitpick every tiny change