

Analysis of the Capitalization on Companionship among Indonesian Young Women through Otome Mobile Game

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Abstract

With the growing popularity of otome mobile games among women like Love and Deepspace (2024) lies in their ability to provide players with a sense of emotional fulfillment, companionship, and the opportunity to live out their idealized romantic fantasies in a safe and controlled virtual environment. But with this cultivated environment and interaction, players are slowly being pushed to build a parasocial relationship with the male love interest. The emotional fulfillment offered by the game creates a lucrative environment that developers can exploit through gacha systems, in-game purchases, and limited-time content. Using a qualitative approach with critical content analysis of the game's features, observing and conducting in-depth interviews with players, and analyzing findings using thematic analysis, this research examines how Love and Deepspace fulfills the desires for companionship and emotional support among Indonesian young women and how it capitalized by the developers through the pushing of a parasocial relationship and in-game purchases.

Introduction

The uses of mobile devices and the proliferation of video games have transformed the way individuals, particularly the younger generation, engage with entertainment and social interactions. Through video games, players can explore virtual worlds, immerse themselves in various roles, and satisfy their social needs (Fraser et al., 2023). Amid this landscape, a genre of games that has uniquely captivated the attention of a specific demographic of women in Indonesia is the otome genre, which is designed specifically to cater to the preferences and emotional needs of female players. Otome games, which translates to "maiden's game" in Japanese, typically feature a female protagonist who interacts with a cast of male characters, forming romantic relationships and exploring various narrative paths. The appeal of these games lies in their ability to provide players with a sense of emotional fulfillment, companionship, and the opportunity to live out their idealized romantic fantasies (Diniz et al., 2023; Zhang, 2024; Chen & Chen, 2025). These games offer a virtual space for women to explore and experience relationships in a safe and controlled environment. *Love and Deepspace* (2024), an otome free-to-play mobile game from Shanghai, has become the most popular otome mobile game since its launch in January 2024, with over 15 million pre-registered users before its launch (Frater, 2024). With 3D models being uncommon in otome games, *Love and Deepspace* uses this as an advantage. An immersive experience through their 3D cutscenes, range of interaction with the male love interests, combined with combat mechanics, making it stand out from other otome games.

In January 2025, @Windah Basudara, a major Indonesian gaming YouTuber, was planning to play *Love and Deepspace* live on his YouTube channel. With the majority of his audience

being underage boys, many Indonesian female players of *Love and Deepspace* reached out to him through social media and email, urging him not to play the game because the content was unsuitable for his younger audience. *Love and Deepspace* were suddenly brought to the attention of the public through him, his audience, and the player's interaction in social media. The Indonesian otaku or “wibu”, have known this game’s existence with the majority of the players being young adult women, and both male and female have a normal reaction to the game. Now with a wider audience, *Love and Deepspace* were given a mixed reaction. Some women who aren’t into Japanese pop culture are interested in playing the game. While several men, most of them were followers of Winda, voiced their disdain derogatorily by referring to the game as a “jomok” or a “gooner” game for women, a colloquial term connoting to pornographic content. The negative reactions from Winda’s male audience to the game sparked a discourse through social media, especially on X where players of *Love and Deepspace* expressing their anger and frustration of the slut shamming for playing the game and fear of the game being ban by KOMINFO. The mixed reactions to the game sparked a discussion among feminists and the general public regarding the acceptance of otome games.

From the reaction of the players to the emerging discussion of otome games in the Indonesian socio-cultural context, *Love and Deepspace* has shown to have an impact among the Indonesian female audience. But how does this game manage to captivate a large amount of female audiences by selling a virtual companionship, and what exactly is the side effect of the growing popularity of the game among Indonesian young women? To understand the appeal and impact of this game, this research will examine how *Love and Deepspace* fulfills the desires for companionship and emotional support among Indonesian young women and how it is capitalized on by the developers through the pushing of a parasocial relationship and in-game purchases. This research will focus on Indonesian players' view and experience of playing the game, including their motivations, emotional investment, and spending habits within the game. It will examine how the game's design and mechanics foster players' personal connection with the male love interest to be more parasocial, and how this is leveraged by the developers to incentivize in-game purchases and ongoing engagement.

Literature Review

The mobile game industry in Indonesia has experienced exponential growth in recent years, with the country emerging as a significant market for game developers (Hamid & Suzianti, 2020). Since COVID-19 restricted society to interact directly, the use of digital platforms and virtual space to maintain social relationships has significantly increased. Players would turn to video games as a way to fulfill their needs, either for connection or even escapism (Carmona, 2021; Liao et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2023). This phenomenon is evident by the rise of games, especially mobile games, as it allows gamers to access games freely and conveniently. A study found that 46% of Indonesian mobile gamers reported switching to mobile platforms and the number of Indonesian mobile gamers doubled from 2020 to 2021, with 49% of the mobile game players being women (Nouvanty et al., 2023).

Otome games, a genre of visual novels and dating simulators that cater primarily to a female audience, have become increasingly popular among young women worldwide, providing them with a digital outlet to explore romantic relationships and companionship in ways that are often not as readily accessible or socially acceptable in their offline lives (Zhang, 2024). The gameplay of otome games typically casts the player in the role of a female protagonist, allowing them to navigate a diverse cast of male characters, each with distinct personalities, backstories, and potential romantic paths for the player to pursue. Otome games have gained increasing popularity among young women in East Asia in recent years (Gong & Huang, 2023). Title such as *Mystic Messenger* (2016), *Tears of Themis* (2020), and *Love and Deepspace* (2024) are

among the most popular otome games played by Indonesian teenagers and young adult women. Mobile game developers such as Infold have recognized the potential of otome games in captivating this demographic and have sought to capitalize on this niche market by combining otome and gacha. Although *Love and Deepspace* are not the first to exploit the uses of gacha-system in an otome game, the game itself has managed to be the most known otome game globally. By launching the game as a free-to-play mobile game combined with gacha system, Infold manages to rival other gacha-based mobile games in just a year since launch. *Love and Deepspace* manage to generate around six billion in 2024 global revenue, which according to the Chinese Research Institute Gamma Data, China's female-targeted game market grew by 124.1% since the release (TechNode, 2025).

As mobile games continue to gain traction among the young demographic, game developers have sought to capitalize on this lucrative market. Nowadays, gacha mobile games have emerged as a vibrant favorite among Gen-Z, captivating players with its engaging mechanics and visually appealing art styles. Gacha is a major monetization mechanic commonly used in free-to-play mobile games, where players obtain in-game characters or items through a randomized chance system by spending in-game currency (Hakusai, 2025). This gambling-like mechanism has been criticized for its exploitation of human psychology to encourage excessive in-game spending (Nouvanty et al., 2023). A player can still participate and have a chance to get any limited-time items by obtaining the in-game currency through playing the game, but the chances of obtaining said items will be harder, considering the limited-time items are combined with all the obtainable items from the normal gacha banner (Chen & Fang, 2023). Without paying for any additional in-game currency using real money, their chances of getting the content they want, or even all of the limited-time content, are pretty slim. To give the player a chance to obtain any high-price items, developers would have a guaranteed outcome of one of the high-value items in the gacha-banner to be obtainable by the player after a few draws. The downside is that players cannot choose which items they want as a guaranteed outcome.

Sellier (2021) has managed to explain the economic strategies of a free-to-play otome games experience by exploiting players' desire for a character and their completion of their stories. While in her findings, most of the otome games offer an in-game purchase either to skip the waiting time between stories or simply just to unlock the stories. In case of *Love and Deepspace*, the need to unlock the continuity of the male love interest's story drives players to repeatedly engage with the gacha-system called *Wish* to obtain more character cards and advance their understanding of each love interest's narrative. There are two types of *Wish* mode players can draw, the *Xspace Echo* mode, which contains 5-Star, 4-Star, and 3-Star Cards, where players can play it anytime, and the limited-time event gacha mode, where it contains limited edition 5-Star cards combined with the *Xspace Echo* mode cards. *Love and Deepspace* utilises their character's love stories not from the main story, rather through the character cards players collect from the gacha mechanic. From 4-Star cards players can enjoy audio-based stories, while 5-Star cards narrate the story with fully animated cut scenes and give players the ability to choose dialogue with minor difference in the story progression. These additional contents are the major reason why players are motivated to keep playing the gacha mode and collect all the cards.

The players' strong urge to continually invest their time in otome games such as *Love and Deepspace* can be understood through the lens of parasocial relationships towards fictional characters. Parasocial relationships refer to the one-sided emotional attachment that individuals develop towards a media persona who they perceive as real despite the lack of reciprocal interaction (Godulla, 2022). Alan Rubin, a communication scholar, classified the different reasons as to why people consume media into eight motivations: passing time, companionship,

escape, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation, and excitement. This classification led to his discovery of parasocial relationships from the consumption of media to feel a sense of relationship or any kind of emotional connection (Griffin et al., 2015). The need to have a sort of companionship, whether it's a friendship or romantic ones, or even to combat the feeling of loneliness, parasocial relationships tend to often stem from an emotional attachment. In the context of otome games, players would develop strong feelings of affection, intimacy, and even romantic attraction towards the male characters.

Methods

Case Study

This research uses a qualitative rhetorical analysis combined with critical content analysis to examine the use of otome mobile games, a visual novel genre that caters to the interests of female gamers, in enticing the social and emotional aspects of a romantic relationship to young Indonesian women through a video game. The decision to use *Love and Deepspace* as a sample to examine the effects of otome mobile games stems from the rising popularity of the game among female players both worldwide and in Indonesia. Using critical content analysis to examine the advertisements, game content, and features of *Love and Deepspace*, along with relevant academic studies, to explore the appeal, player engagement, emotional investment, and sociocultural implications of otome games from a capitalist perspective.

Etnography

By engaging with the game, conducting an in-depth interview with other players, and observing both online and offline of the Indonesian *Love and Deepspace* community has enhanced the long-term observational experience of both the game and their players, proving data on players' interaction and experience from playing the game. On observing player behaviour, the writer chose @love.space.fest, one of the Indonesian *Love and Deepspace* communities that operates in Jakarta since August 2024, as the subject on observing players' online and offline habit and interaction. Through one of their offline events, the writer then conducted an in-depth interview with some players with the criteria of being a long-time player who has previously played other otome games, keeping up with the latest mobile game titles, and interacting or exchanging opinions with other otome game users.

Results and Discussion

Love and Deepspace Game Analysis

The Ideal Boyfriend Narrative

Since its launch, *Love and Deepspace* has offered players three male love interests: Rafayel the passionate artist, Xavier the Deepspace hunter, and Zayne the cardiac surgeon. On 15th July 2024 with the 2.0 update, *Love and Deepspace* launched a new male love interest, Sylus the self-professed "bad boy". Lastly, Caleb the fighter pilot and childhood friend, launched on 22nd January 2025 along with the 3.0 update. Each character has a unique personality and combat abilities called "evol" to assist the player during combat. Each male love interest has a personality which can be analyzed textually by observing each character's visual and narrative. Xavier as the soft-spoken laid-back type, Rafael as the sassy creative type, Zayne as the quiet gentle doctor, Sylus the edgy mafia boss type, and Caleb as the possessive older brother type. From this analysis, all the male character's personality and design are all based on the common love interest tropes of otome games. Though their personalities are different, the one thing they share in common is their attraction to the MC. This attraction has already been present from the start of the introduction of the male love interest in the main storyline. With most otome games, the player's task is to woo the love interest to the MC by either giving gifts, spending

time with them, or by gaining their affection through dialogues. *Love and Deepspace* with all the male love interest since the beginning of the main story has had interest with the MC, players are being tasked to increase their relationship level by spending time, collecting cards, or leveling up their cards. Through these actions, the player's relationship to a male love interest would increase their level dubbed *Affinity Level* and progress as if a romantic relationship would develop; from crush, darling, lover, then devotion.

Players are granted the ability to interact with the male love interests through their phone, where they can have scripted messages, phone calls, or interact through their social media timeline. Player also able to interact with them directly when one of the male love interests on the main menu. Through here, players can have various interactions such as asking for a recommendation of what to eat, holding hands, hear his heartbeat or even just poking them. The male love interest will then have various voicelines and be animated to react or answer to the player's interaction as if having a conversation directly. Or should the player choose not to interact, the male love interest would be animated to do other activities themselves, such as reading, working, playing with their phone, or napping as their idle animation. They would give short comments such as asking if the players are bored or stating they're busy. Upon initiating a conversation, they would only end their idle animations as the character will promptly engage in dialogue with the player. By not letting the characters just stand and wait for players' next input, Infold manages to give a natural feeling of interacting with a person instead of scripted moments.

All male love interests scripted to respond and cater to the player's next input. Combine with no negativity or even a decreasing interest towards the player's action, all of them are being portrayed as the ideal boyfriend figures. Compare to a real relationship where there are ups and downs, the male love interests in *Love and Deepspace* are consistently caring, affectionate, and attentive towards the player, creating an idealized and fantasy-driven depiction of romance. Even though in some parts of the stories where the player would have a differing opinion with the male characters or even a slight argument, there are no long-lasting repercussions and their interest towards each other does not decrease. The interaction between players and the scripted responses of the male love interest illustrate how developers aim to craft an idealized relationship devoid of disagreements or conflicts typically found in real-life partnerships. In this context, male partners are portrayed as more attentive and nurturing, challenging the conventional patriarchal ideology surrounding male roles in relationships.

The preferences of one's ideal partner are varied and mostly based on their experiences, cultural influence, and their personal values. Some commonly sought qualities tend to be physical attractiveness, good earning potential, kindness, and passion (Eastwick et al., 2011). What constitutes an "ideal" partner is subjective and depends on the individual's priorities and expectations within a relationship. On researching what are the ideal partners among feminist and heterosexual women, (Backus & Mahalik, 2011) find that women with stronger feminist beliefs tend to favor those who do not conform to traditional masculinity, such as aggression, dominance, or the "playboy" stereotype. While those who are not tend to be more accepting towards the traditional masculinity traits upon choosing their partner. When comparing the usual traits of masculinity, the male love interests in *Love and Deepspace* still exhibit some of these characteristics, though they are often portrayed in a more nuanced manner. Aggression, for instance, is channeled towards protecting the player, rather than being directed at them. Similarly, the male love interests are depicted as seeking consent or even allowing the player to take the lead, rather than simply asserting dominance. While the "playboy" archetype is not prevalent across all the male characters, there are instances where background female characters comment on the attractiveness of the male love interests instead.

Self-care and the Uses of Companionship

The use of otome games combined with a self-care feature has started to emerge in 2013 by a Japanese company Creative Freaks Inc. called *Burn Your Fat with Me!!*. *Burn Your Fat with Me!!* is an otome fitness app that motivates players to work out along with their virtual boyfriend to lose weight and boost self-care (Davidson, 2020). The game uses the male love interest as a standalone partner or coach by giving pointers on the player's workout routine and tracking their progress. The game presents advancing the user's routine is through twenty chapters combined with the progression of story, in which the male love interest slowly falls for the player as the story goes. *Burn Your Fat with Me!!* although the game categorized itself as an otome game, it functions more as a fitness app than being an otome game, which is why it is not widely known by others. Since *Burn Your Fat with Me!!* there has not been another otome game that has a self-care feature in-game. With *Love and Deepspace*, the game is more focused on being an otome game first rather than being a self-care app. Compare it to a real self-care app, such as fitness, health, or period tracker app, it's functions are very simplified and are not as detailed as a real self-care app.

Self-care features in *Love and Deepspace* give a much more varied set of features for players to use. Through the main menu, players can choose to converse and were given options: 1) *Remind Me*, a personal reminder that players can use either for usual activities such as study, work, eat or sleep. There is also a period tracking function, where the game would track players' period cycles. On reminding the players, the male love interests would give a pop-up notification of the reminder, while on the period reminder they would have additional dialogue where they would either remind the player of upcoming cycles or be more tentative and give a suggestion such as food for comfort, remind to stock up on pads or tampons, commenting on the duration of the cycles either if its normal or not, or just give caring messages. 2) *Relax Time*, a feature for the player to interact with male love interests, such as holding hands or head pats. 3) *What to Eat*, suggest on what meal players would eat, either by asking their recommendation or what the characters eat. 4) *Tete-a-Tete*, to converse with the male love interests on the players' feelings. They would either give commentary if players express happiness, congratulate players on achievement, or give comfort if players express sadness. Player could also use this feature to introduce the male love interest to either friends or family as their boyfriend, which has a different voice line for each character. 5) *His Heartbeat*, a feature functioning as hearing the male love interest's heartbeat in which their device would vibrate in rhythm with their heart rate. 6) *Quality Time*, a feature that functions to accompany players to workout, study, or work, where the male love interests would accompany the activities based on the duration player chooses.

Shen et al., (2019) in their research about the implementation of self-care in addictive apps, they categorize it to two benefit, ones that boost self-care activities by alerting or reminding user through information based on app usage statistical data, and apps that pushes for more long-term healthy life which usually used by those who need lifestyle changes. Functions such as *What to Eat*, *Tete-a-Tete*, and *Quality Time* only function to motivate or comfort players, and only would function to either motivate or comfort players instead. Most self-care features provided in *Love and Deepspace* are more into reminding or to motivate them, all except the additional period tracker, which is more into a long-term reminder compared to other features. The period tracking feature was not previously implemented in the game but was added during the Ver 3.0 update. In an interview by 4Gamer (2025) with producer Kuriko and main writer Nomi, explaining the reason behind the upgrade of the *Remind Me* feature to include a period tracker. The idea stemmed from the request of players through in-game questionnaires to include a feature which commented on how happy they would be to have a partner to care and

help them during their period. In addition to being a reminder, the developers would also tackle the approach on discussing perioop prectaion based on scientific facts by working together with a Specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecologist from a Chinese hospital (Kanerva, 2016). On writing the male love interests' dialogue on about menstruation, they would also give a recommendation on what to ease the pain based on scientific facts, which is delivered by the characters differently based on their personality and occupation of the characters. Through this feature, the developers want to have an open discussion of the fact that menstruation is a natural phenomenon and to deal with it in a more scientific way rather than a precautionary assumption which tends to contradict scientific knowledge (Kuna, 2025).

Player and Community Interview

Based on the offline events and the interaction of the Indonesian *Love and Deepspace* communities, *Love and Deepspace* is most popular among young adult women around the age of 20-30 years old. @love.space.fest on Instagram and X, is one of Indonesia's love and space communities, operating in Jakarta since August 2024. @love.space.fest mostly focuses on creating offline gathering events where attendees can participate in lunches, games, and raffles. Since August 2024, @love.space.fest has held 3 event gatherings; twice for the love interest's birthdays on the 7th of August and 13th of October 2024, and first launch anniversary on 19th January 2025. The anniversary event was held in a ballroom at a hotel with a capacity of 80 people. The majority of attendees were young women in their 20s, along with three attendees over 30 and one man who identifies as LGBTQ+. In attending the events, attendees can either cosplay as their MC or one of the male love interests, or simply just dress up casually, which in all three events is the most common choice.

Player Interaction with Male Love Interest

The emerging trend of the reliance of young Indonesian women on otome games as a means to experience companionship and emotional fulfillment reflects a broader societal issue. During the event, the writer conducted interviews revealing that those who are single have two differing opinions on relationships influenced by playing *Love and Deepspace*. Some players claimed to have shown interest in starting a relationship with real people and looking for those with the type of personality of their favorite character. While others claimed to be more pessimistic about starting a relationship, either because they view other men negatively or cannot find a perfect man like their favorite character's personality. Interestingly, the study found that the digital realm of otome games offers a more comfortable and controlled environment to explore romantic relationships and emotional connections, potentially serving as a coping mechanism or a form of self-care in navigating the complexities and challenges often associated with real-world relationships (Giuliana, 2019). The narrative focus of otome games, where players can invest significant time and emotions in cultivating relationships with their chosen love interest, provides a sense of emotional fulfillment that may be lacking in their real lives. (Situmorang, 2007), on her research on the trend of singlehood among Indonesian women in Yogyakarta and Medan such as how they live, views towards marriage, and their coping mechanism for staying single which resulted of most respondent claiming that staying single does not result in a satisfied life but still accept social norm of being marriage are more ideal. Although the proportion of being single has changed throughout the year, being single is quite favourable by Indonesian Gen-Z with claims either not ready or intimidated by the notion of starting a family (Lestari et al., 2024), the social norm of being married remains the ideal for many in Indonesian society.

With *Love and Deepspace*, although the majority of the gameplay is a romance visual novel game combined with action combat gameplay, their main selling point is selling the experience

of dating a 3D boyfriend. The slogans that they have in use for the description of their game in their advertising are “Immerse in 3D love & adventure”, “Date through 3D cutscenes”, “First-person POV”, “3D interactions” and “New dating feature”. An option to personalize players' avatars, compelling storylines, and the sense of personal connection fostered through the extensive interactions with the love interests all contribute to cultivating these parasocial bonds between players and the love interests. What distinguishes this behavior feels more aligned with a parasocial dynamic are the specific features and voice lines that create a more "realistic" and immersive experience compared to other otome games. With the use of semi-realistic style 3D models combined with voice acting in either cutscenes or interacting with players, which then resulted in a more intimate result when they converse with the player.

“....For example, we hope everyone can feel true companionship with our male leads. We think about how to make more realistic, interesting interactions during R&D. We've designed the current interface interactions with this in mind and added many Easter Eggs, such as poking, shaking the phone, blowing air, etc. to get different responses.”
[Exclusive interview with *Love and Deepspace's* development team (Frater, 2014)]

The game's design elements go beyond a typical narrative-driven experience, developers actively cultivating a sense of intimacy and emotional investment, which leads players to develop real feelings for these virtual characters. In addition to conversing and interacting with the male love interests, players can also go on activities with the main male love interest through the *Playtime* and *Photo Studio* features. The *Photo Studio* allows players to take photos with the male love interest, either using MC as a standalone in both *Wink Snapshot* and *Upgrade Glint Photobooth*, or using the *AR Snapshot* to take a photo as themselves. Players can choose to pose and dress both the MC and the male love interest, choose the studio's background and lighting, and even customize the photo using frames and stickers just like in a real-life photobooth. While the *Playtime* allows players to play cards and play claw machines with them as if going on a date.

On the uses of in-game features, players express their positive reaction to all of the features available in-game, with the *Remind Me* feature to be the most commonly used by players, either just using it like a normal reminder or using the period tracker. The additional interaction and voice lines from characters reminding or encouraging players adds a personal touch to a simple feature. Other features such as the *Photo Studio* are also widely used, as they provide players with the ability to create photos to share with the community. Some players also noted would act inappropriately when interacting with the male characters, such as dressing said character in a revealing outfit, ‘touching’ on inappropriate areas, and taking inappropriate photos using some creative photo angles.

Though these interactions are available in-game, the developers have never said or openly encourage said interaction with the player. Dressing and touching the characters has always produced a reaction by the character based on the player's interaction. Inappropriately touching another character will elicit various reactions, such as bashfulness, headshaking in disbelief, surprise, or laughter. Notably, none of these responses lead to negative consequences; instead, the characters interpret the player's action as playful teasing. These interactions, which are typically deemed inappropriate or frowned upon in real life, can be easily explored in the game by players without any real-world consequences. Although these kinds of interactions are typically confined to private or secluded settings, it is not escaping the accusation of the game promoting vulgarity. With the game rating globally still not being updated till the time of this research, which is currently rated 12+, it could raise a problem in the future of the continuity of the game in Indonesia.

While on the aspect of character design, the majority of respondent claimed to fall for a certain character based more on their personalities rather than their appearance. With most otome games created by East Asian game developers, a good-looking physique and facial feature for a love interest NPC design is already the standard of the game industry. A handsome character in an otome game is not enough for players to invest their time in. Their backstories, personality, and how the character would interact with the players are the main reasons why players choose to invest time playing with their favorite characters (Zhang, 2024). As the game has increased its player base worldwide since mid-2024, many players who have a lot of experience playing other Otome games have shown conflicted feelings with some tropes that are prevalent in the Otome genre. In this case, with Caleb being introduced earlier in the main story as the MC's adoptive brother, some player express their conflicting feelings due to thinking their relationship is condoning an incestuous relationship, or the jarring moments when some characters would express a level of possessiveness towards the player. With the game being known more globally, and the background of their female audience has become more varied, it is not surprising that some would prefer other characters more rather than the others due to the way of viewing some masculinity traits that some character has (Backus & Mahalik, 2011).

The Capitalization of Companionship

Since the game's launch on 18th January 2024, *Love and Deepspace* have had around 32 limited-time events, each featuring limited-time cards and additional clothing items for both the player's avatar and male characters. The developers have emphasized that the limited-time items will no longer be obtainable once the events have concluded. This exclusivity of the limited-time items pushes players to participate in those events, especially on obtaining limited-time 5-Star cards. The probability of obtaining a 5-Star card is 2.1%, a 4-Star card is 12%, and the highest outcome is the 3-Star card. Players also have a choice to draw either once or ten draws in one go, with the ten-draw having a guaranteed one 4-Star card as one of the outcomes. Players will have a guaranteed 5-Star card obtainable on their 70th draw as a pity system. From their 61st draw, the player's probability of 5-Star cards increases by 10%, but once the player obtains a 5-Star card it resets back to normal. The need to obtain the limited-edition content from these limited-time banners, especially the higher rarity cards, thus capitalizing on the core demographic's desire for romantic narratives and character interactions, which in turn compels players to spend in-game currency more frequently.

The high price of obtaining a full collection of limited-time contents can be seen as a business strategy that capitalizes on the demographic's commitment to the game and specific characters. By leveraging the narrative elements and character relationships, otome game developers can design their gacha mechanics and limited-time events to keep players engaged and compel them to spend more on in-game purchases. Sellier (2021) would dub this type of content as a *freemium economical model*, a business strategy where a product or service, such as a mobile game, is offered for free, but users have the option to pay for premium features, virtual goods, or other enhancements to enhance their experience. In the case of otome, they would give access to a small portion of the story, but either players would need to wait for a timer to access it or need to pay to continue the story. In *Love and Deepspace*'s events, they tend to give the player a part of the male love interest's story to be accessible for free, but the conclusion where the romantic moments are fully animated are locked behind the limited-time cards which players would need to pay in-game currency to unlock.

One of the offline event attendees has claimed to have spent nearly a hundred million rupiahs to collect every single card and outfit from the limited-time events and in-game contents. Since launch, *Love and Deepspace* have already launched around 30 limited-time events with 18

being a one-character focus and 12 events for all characters. Said person (female) has collected all the cards and additional contents of each character by purchasing in-game currency with her estimation of spending each event for at least one million rupiahs. The frivolous habit of spending real money by players has become more frequent due to the majority of the additional narrative and accessory contents being locked behind limited-time gacha or a seasonal pass. Other players have claimed they would just buy the seasonal pass to get some free in-game currency for a month and still play the game to add more in-game currency themselves. While those who are free-to-play players who only play the game fully free, they would either pass an event due to not having enough in-game currency, or said event does not contain their favorite characters.

Another aspect of the need to collect the limited-time contents could be attributed to the fear of missing out on newer story contents. This sentiment is supported by research showing that the fear of missing out can drive individuals, especially younger users, to engage more frequently with social media and related digital platforms (Sofia et al., 2023). Even though *Love and Deepspace* only lock a few stories behind limited-time cards, it is still not enough to satisfy the player's need of content. With those who had managed to obtain their cards would share it on their social media, some respondents claimed to be motivated to obtain it in order to experience the content themselves. Interestingly, some players who are committed to staying free-to-play players would find another way to experience the content by searching for the limited-time contents on the internet, such as YouTube uploaded by other players, to watch the story unfold to get the closure of the stories.

The urging to spend more real money on in-game currency is acknowledged by the player themselves. From the interviews, all of the respondents would complain that the limited-time events are too frequent and getting more costly each month. With how the developer would not give a clear timeline of any upcoming events, players only rely on leaks and predictions to save up their in-game currency to lessen their spending. In late December 2024, a boycott movement emerged among Chinese players of Sylus's fans, who identified themselves as "*Sylus's Kitten*". At first, they would file a collective complaint of this predicament to 黑猫投诉 or Black Cat Complaint, a Chinese website for customers to file complaints or act as a mediation service between customers and businesses (Xiong, 2019).

Due to the "Love and Deep Space" game official consumer fraud, China Kitten is organizing a collective complaint, the same resident pool, other male owners are 41 cards, sylus only 17 corner cards (other male owners 29% probability, Sylus 12% probability) #sylus #LoveandDeepspace

概率	深渊室的 夜后头	概率	汇总	概率	对比其他男主 出招概率
0.000%	301	6.13%	3214	1.25%	深渊的概率是其他男主的三分之一
0.000%	16	3.32%	16	2.61%	16.40%
0.000%	11	4.32%	36	4.89%	142
0.000%	16	3.32%	36	4.57%	156

5:37 PM · Jan 7, 2025 · 219.8K Views

Figure 1. @fluffyMonster35 on X regarding the collective complaint filed by

The CN's Sylus's Kitten filed a group complaint on Infold's way of pushing compulsorily consuming to players for obtaining Sylus's cards of being a consumer fraud. Since the filing of the complaint still has not been given a response from Infold until January 2025, the CN's Sylus's Kitten opted the global players to not spend money, participate in limited-time events, and expressed their concerns on *Love and Deepspace's* social media platforms (X, 2025). Since both Sylus and Caleb are not launched from the beginning of the game, both of them have a lesser amount of content than the other three male love interests. To obtain either Sylus or Caleb's cards from either normal or limited-time gacha, players have a smaller chance to obtain them due to the lesser amount of cards for both characters when combined with the other cards. For players who are fans of either Sylus or Caleb, it is harder to collect their cards without spending real money due to the smaller rate of obtaining their content for free.

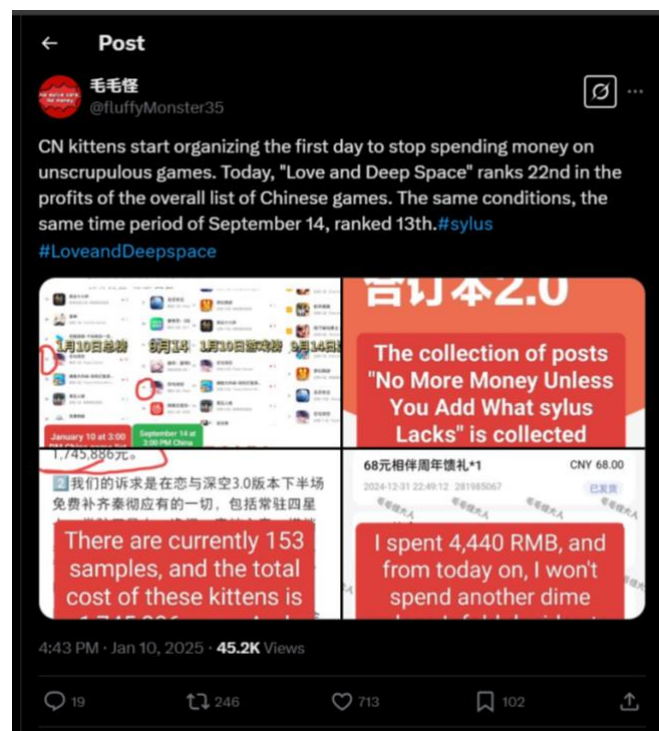


Figure 2. @fluffyMonster35 on X regarding the start of the boycott globally from the CN Kittens Or

@fluffyMonster35: CN kittens start organizing the first day to stop spending money on unscrupulous games. Today, "Love and Deep Space" ranks 22nd in the profits of the overall list of Chinese games. The same conditions, the same time period of September 14, ranked 13th. #sylus #LoveandDeepspace [4:43 PM · Jan 10, 2025 · 45.2K Views (X, 2025)]

While the movement is initiated and being participated in more on the Chinese servers, some players from the global servers would also participate by either not participating in the event, not purchasing any in-game currency, or simply would not open the game for three days in hopes of lowering Infold's February global revenue to express their disappointment towards the company's unfair exploitation of the low probability of obtaining certain characters.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that a gacha-based otome mobile game, a free-to-play game that revolves around romantic narratives and character interactions, has become a prominent platform for young Indonesian women to experience a virtual romantic relationship

with an idealized partner. How some women expressed their outlook on starting a romantic relationship after playing Love and Deepspace is quite interesting, with some expressing their interest while others are feeling content with just playing the game and not motivated to start a real relationship. Although throughout the interviews, players who are single do not admit to feeling loneliness, the conscious need of playing and rejection of the notion of starting a real relationship reflect the use of the game to fulfill their need of companionship to combat the lack of the sense of connection in their lives. The sentiment of using *Love and Deepspace* as a coping mechanism to fill the experience or fulfillment of being in a relationship supported by the game being a safe space for players to experience an ideal romantic relationship with none of the negative aspects. This sentiment is the result of how *Love and Deepspace* manage to utilize their use of the male love interest interaction with the player by various interactions and 3D animation that gave an intimate and surreal feeling as if players are interacting with a real person. Although they manage to overly idealize the sensation of interacting with a partner in a romantic relationship, the game did not provide a realistic depiction of a relationship. Rather, they have created an exaggerated and unrealistic version of a male romantic partner who is flawless, compliant, and caters to the player's every desire.

The use of the limited-time events through gacha-system added with the need for fulfillment, either from the need of companionship or investment of the story, motivates players to spend real money on in-game purchasing. By adapting a freemium economical model to entice players to participate in their limited-time gacha, they manage to still profit from the game even though it is technically a free-to-play game. Although players are conscious enough of the capitalistic system the developer created through the gacha-system, players would still play the game due to their interest in the story or how they are captivated by the male love interest. This monetization model is highly profitable for developers, as it effectively capitalizes on the players' emotional investment in the romantic narratives and companionship provided by the game. From the fulfillment of having a real romantic relationship to be satisfied by the game, some players find themselves stuck in a capitalistic system designed by the developers to maximize their profits. Despite being aware of the developers' capitalistic intentions which actively profit from their loneliness, these players remain invested in the idealized romantic narratives and companionship offered by the game, unable to break free from the cycle of emotional and financial investment. They choose to confine themselves in the safe environment provided by the game rather than seek fulfillment elsewhere.

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