

PARTICIPATORY CULTURE PERSPECTIVE IN LOVE AND DEEPSPACE TIKTOK COMMUNITY: A NETNOGRAPHY STUDY

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Abstract: Existing studies have examined participatory culture in fanfiction communities and social media fandoms, yet limited attention has been given to how players of 3D otome games collectively reinterpret and reconstruct narratives on TikTok. This netnography study investigates how fans of the *Love and Deepspace* TikTok community interpret, expand, and reconstruct narrative elements through participatory culture. Using Kozinets' (2015) netnography method, the research analyzed approximately 150 TikTok and over 2,000 comments collected over 12 month-period. Findings reveal four practices: POV Performances, Lore theories producing timeline diagrams, Visual Storytelling, and Cross-Game Recreation migrating leads into *Sword of Justice* and *Baldur's Gate 3* through labor described as fighting the sliders. The study contributes to broader discussions on how platform affordances reshape participatory culture in the mobile gaming era, while suggesting future research directions including cross-platform and cross-cultural comparative analyses, as well as ethnographic investigations into fan motivations and experiences.

Keywords: digital fandom, *Love and Deepspace*, netnography, participatory culture, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

The Otome gaming genre has undergone a significant social and technological transformation since its inception, evolving from niche console-based visual novels to global high-fidelity mobile phenomena. Originating in Japan with Koei's *Angelique* (1994), developed by the pioneering all-female team Ruby Party, the genre established a story-based dating simulation format primarily targeted toward women, emphasizing

romantic character development (Ganzon, 2019). While early international growth relied heavily on dedicated fan communities for localisation, the successful Western release of *Hakuoki* (2012) and the Chinese sensation *Love and Producer* (2017) solidified the genre's commercial viability on mobile platforms. Huan (2022) further contributed to this understanding by examining how female representation is constructed within Chinese otome games, revealing that character design and narrative framing often reinforce traditional gender roles despite the games' interactive nature.

Following *Love and Producer*, Papergames released its latest otome evolution *Love and Deepspace* in 2024, with overseas publishing by Infold Games. The game moves beyond the traditional 2D visual novel format to high-fidelity 3D graphics and an immersive first-person perspective. The story is set in futuristic Linkon City, where players assume the role of a customizable Deepspace Hunter tasked with neutralising otherworldly monsters. Beneath the surface-level sci-fi tropes lies a heavy reliance on fated love and reincarnation, with five male leads: Xavier, Zayne, Rafayel, Sylus, and Caleb, who share a history with the protagonist spanning hundreds of years across different timelines.

Mechanically, *Love and Deepspace* introduces real-time 3D combat, integrating action as a form of bonding between player and male leads. The game's integration of Gacha mechanics further extends the game's shelf life and deepens player engagement through a "pity system" that guarantees rare cards after a certain number of attempts (Ma et al., 2025). The immersive quality of *Love and Deepspace*'s 3D experience serves as a catalyst for digital activity, as the rise of TikTok has provided the primary platform for these new trends.

Since its inception in 2016 and subsequent acquisition of Musical.ly, TikTok has evolved to become the most popular social media application in the world (Montag et al., 2021). But unlike other platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, which rely on established social networks and follower counts for visibility, TikTok introduces the FYP (For You Page), a recommendation system that prioritises content relevance and engagement over a creator's existing popularity (Kanthawala et al., 2022). TikTok's accessible editing features lower the barrier to entry, allowing even novice creators to participate in community trends. For the *Love and Deepspace* fandom, these

tools are transformative, ensuring the community remains a highly visible and evolving affinity space where users do not just watch content but recreate it.

On TikTok, this technical shift enables fans to engage in digital sampling, re-editing 3D combat sequences or intimate “Kindled” moments into POV (Point of View) narratives. By syncing these clips with trending audio or original voiceovers, creators effectively perform a personalized relationship with the characters, inviting others into the experience. This constant cycle of creation and discovery reinforces a sense of belonging, where the player’s personal attachment to the game’s characters is validated by a global audience, effectively merging individual gameplay with collective digital storytelling. This phenomenon serves as a modern case study for what Jenkins (2007) argues that participatory culture emerges when consumers no longer remain passive but act as active contributors and co-creators enabled by digital media (Xu et al., 2023).

By viewing the *Love and Deepspace* community through the lens of Jenkins’ (2007) participatory culture framework, digital sampling reflects a broader global shift where audiences become active cultural producers, a pattern observed across platforms and fandoms, from BTS fandom in Indonesia, K-Pop fanboys on Instagram to Harry Styles fans on Wattpad, *Squid Game* enthusiasts on Twitter, and Indonesian netizens using memes to enact participatory culture (Bangun, 2019; Fitria et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2022; Syahriyani et al., 2022; Hidayanto & Eriyanto, 2019). This level of agency is also evident in Chinese transmedia science fiction, where audiences intervene in plot development (Xu et al., 2023). The *Love and Deepspace* TikTok community is therefore not merely an isolated gaming phenomenon but a high-tech evolution of these established participatory behaviors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several prior studies on participatory culture in digital fandom highlight three dominant themes. First, research on general fandom shows that Twitter facilitates circulation and collaborative problem-solving among *Squid Game* fans (Syahriyani et al., 2022), while K-Pop fanboys on Instagram use visual edits to simulate intimacy with idols (Fitria et al., 2025). Harry Styles fans on Wattpad transform solitary writing into collaborative narrative gap-filling (Dewi et al., 2022). Hidayanto and Eriyanto (2019) concluded that all four markers of Jenkins’ participatory culture: affiliations, expressions,

collaborative problem-solving, and circulations, can be fulfilled through the creation of anecdotes and memes on Twitter. Supporting this, Bangun (2019) found that BTS fans in Indonesia actively produce new cultural artefacts, such as fanfiction, and engage in all four types of Jenkins' participatory culture. Xu et al. (2023) further demonstrated that transmedia platforms enable readers to move from passive consumption to active creative intervention, exemplifying collective intelligence where crowd wisdom influences plot development.

The second theme is otome game fandom and fan labor. Ganzon (2019) argued that female fans in the “Otome Armada” act as informal marketers and cultural translators, bridging the gap between Japanese developers and global audiences through blogging. Ganzon (2022) concluded that Otome games function as affective technologies within a globalized media mix, allowing female players to negotiate post-feminist identities and explore digital intimacy across cultural boundaries. However, both studies focus on 2D-heavy titles and text-based blogging, leaving a gap in understanding high-fidelity 3D assets of modern mobile games.

The third theme is netnography approaches and TikTok methodology. Dwarsianti (2022) demonstrated that netnography allows researchers to categorize and interpret social patterns through digital footprints, employing a four-phase analysis: investigation, interacting, immersing, and analyzing. Kanthawala et al. (2022) discovered that while content analysis is the most frequent method for studying TikTok, there is a significant lack of ethnographic and multimodal approaches that account for the platform's algorithmic and visual affordances. Li et al. (2021) further highlighted the importance of systematic content analysis for understanding health communication on TikTok, demonstrating how the platform's unique features, such as trending audio and visual effects, can be leveraged to disseminate information effectively. However, according to these studies, a significant gap remains where participatory practices surrounding high-fidelity 3D otome games on TikTok have not been adequately examined. Addressing this gap is necessary to understand how hyper-realistic mobile game visuals reshape fan labor, particularly the “Expression” marker of Jenkins' (2007) framework.

This research employs Jenkins' participatory culture framework. Jenkins (2006) defines participatory culture as an environment with “relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's work, and

informal mentorship where experience members pass knowledge to novices” (p.3). Jenkins (2007) identifies four pillars of participatory culture: 1) affiliation (membership in online communities); 2) expressions (production of new creative forms, including digital sampling and remixing); 3) collaborative problem solving (fans working together to develop new knowledge); and 4) circulations (shaping the flow of media through sharing and virality).

By explicitly connecting Jenkins’ (2006) participatory culture framework with netnography analysis of *Love and Deepspace* TikTok community, this research demonstrated how high-fidelity 3D mobile game assets enable new forms of fan production that extend beyond traditional 2D fandoms or text-based blogging. Consequently, the research fills the gap identified in previous studies and contributes to broader discussions on how platform affordances (TikTok’s short-form video, audio trends, and editing tools) reshape participatory culture in the mobile gaming era.

METHOD

This study employs netnography (Kozinets, 2015) to investigate digital cultural experiences on TikTok, focusing on the *Love and Deepspace* community. Unlike traditional ethnography, netnography enables systematic analysis of multimodal data (e.g., textual, graphic, and fannish expressions) capturing unique social patterns within online spaces (Eriyanto, 2021). Treating digital artifacts as primary evidence, this approach examines participation, interaction, and immersion.

The researcher identified netnography as the most relevant method for this study, given the continuous growth and evolution of TikTok’s user base. While digital technologies change, netnography’s core focus (e.g., investigating the lives and cultures of digital citizens) remains constant, enabling adaptation to rapid technological advancement. This approach is further supported by recent academic applications. Dwarsianti (2022) used netnography to analyze sharenting culture on Instagram via the #anakku hashtag, revealing complex social patterns through digital traces. Similarly, Waruwu and Vera (2020) employed netnography to investigate hate speech phenomena on Instagram, demonstrating how the method systematically captures both interaction content and broader cultural context.

Data was gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary data consists of high-engagement TikTok videos tagged with #loveanddeepspace and #lnd, including associated metadata such as captions, sounds, and visuals. Secondary data, including academic articles and theoretical texts, provides the foundational background for analyzing these primary artifacts. Following the initiation phase, the researcher conducted systematic data collection over a 12-month period (January 2025–December 2025). An initial search using the specified hashtags yielded a population of 1,247 videos. From this population, videos were first screened for relevance (e.g., content directly related to game narratives and fan play) and engagement. A total of 312 videos met the initial selection criteria, which were operationally defined as those exceeding 50,000 likes, 1,000 comments, or 500 shares. From this eligible pool, purposive sampling was used to select 150 videos and over 2,000 comments that exhibited clear evidence of participatory narrative play, ensuring information-rich cases directly relevant to the research questions. This purposive approach ensured that the data set was focused on instances where community participation and cultural production were most manifest.

The analytical process transitions from raw observation into a multi-faceted phase of integration. During this stage, the researcher performed “thick observation,” capturing representative screenshots and recordings of player interactions and associated comment sections. The coding process was primarily deductive, guided by Henry Jenkins’ (2007) Participatory Culture markers, categorizing artifacts into themes such as Affiliations, Expressions, Collaborative Problem Solving, and Circulations. By examining social interactions between creators and fans, the study identifies the underlying structures that drive cultural production. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher periodically re-checks these interpretations against the raw TikTok data, ensuring the analysis accurately reflects the community’s lived digital experience. The researcher acknowledges their position as both an observer and a participant within fandom spaces. Having been an active consumer of game-related content on TikTok for several years, the researcher brings an emic perspective that facilitates a deeper, more intuitive understanding of community norms and language. This practice of reflexivity ensured that personal biases were systematically examined and made transparent.

This study collected data from publicly accessible TikTok videos and comment threads. While the platform is considered a public space, the researcher acknowledges the

ethical complexities of netnography research regarding participant privacy (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). To mitigate potential harm, all screenshots are used solely for academic illustration and are not shared beyond the research context. The researcher has considered whether any individual user could be negatively impacted by identification and has determined that the public, performative nature of the content, combined with the focus on collective cultural patterns rather than individual scrutiny, minimizes this risk. Nevertheless, the researcher remains committed to honoring any direct request from a community member to remove their content from the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of the *Love and Deepspace* TikTok community identified four participatory culture practices through which fans interpret, expand, and reconstruct narrative elements. These practices align with Jenkins’ (2007) pillars of participatory culture: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem-solving, and circulations. To provide empirical grounding for the qualitative analysis, all 150 videos and 2,000+ comments in the corpus were coded against the four thematic categories. The table below summarizes the frequency and engagement patterns across the full dataset.

Table 1. Distribution of Participatory Practices across the Video			
Participatory Practice	n	(%)	Primary Jenkins’ Pillars
POV Performances	47	31.3	Expressions, Circulations
Lore Theories	31	20.7	Collaborative Problem-Solving, Affiliations, Circulations
Visual Storytelling and Lore-based Edits	56	37.3	Expressions, Circulations
Cross-game Recreation of Characters	16	10.7	Collaborative Problem-Solving, Circulations

As shown in Table 1, Visual Storytelling and Lore-based Edits comprised the largest share of the corpus at 37.3% (n = 56), followed closely by POV Performances at 31.3% (n = 47). Lore Theories accounted for 20.7% (n = 31) of the videos, while Cross-Game Recreation of Characters was the least frequent at 10.7% (n = 16). This distribution

suggests that emotional and affective content dominates the community’s participatory output on TikTok. The relatively lower frequency of Cross-Game Recreation (10.7%) is consistent with its higher technical demands and more specialized audience. Notably, Lore Theories, despite being fewer in number, were coded as engaging all three pillars of participatory culture (Collaborative Problem-Solving, Affiliations, and Circulations), reflecting their role as sites of sustained collective debate and community bonding.

The findings are presented below with representative examples, community language, and engagement metrics.

POV (Point of View) performances

POV edits are digitally manipulated videos that use the game’s 3D assets to simulate intimate, direct interactions. By placing the viewer at the narrative center, these edits bridge the gap between digital avatar and lived emotional reality. This practice exemplifies Jenkins’ expression and circulation pillars.

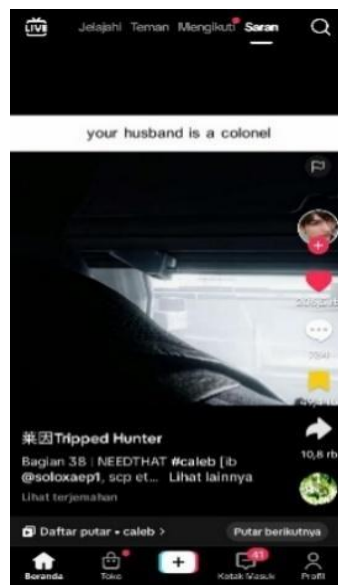


Figure 1. Screenshot of 3D POV Edit

Source: TikTok @lyeineze104 (<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS9LX6Eey/>)

In one viral 16-second clip featuring Caleb with 1.4 million views and 200,000 likes, the creator uses high-contrast filters and rhythmic transitions to recontextualize his military uniform, on-screen text declaring “your husband is a colonel”. This exemplifies Jenkins’ (2012) textual poaching, as fans domesticate character designs to fit personal romantic fantasies. This exemplifies what Jenkins (2012) calls textual poaching, the

process by which fans appropriate popular texts and reread them in ways that serve different interests. Fans domesticate character designs to fit personal romantic fantasies. The video's title, "*Bagian 38*" (part 38) reveals serialized production, with the creator producing at least 38 installments transforming POV edits into fan-authored seasons, this finding that parallel official content.

This shift signifies a definitive move from passive consumption to active prosumption, the blurring of production and consumption in digital labor (Fuchs, 2014). Fans are no longer mere recipients of Caleb's canonical characterization, but they are active producers who modify his identity into a romanticized trope according to their preferences. As Jenkins (2007) notes, participatory culture thrives when fans feel empowered to circulate their own narratives. In this context, the POV edit functions as a transformative work, where technical skill in syncing game assets to specific "vibes" creates layers of meaning and intimacy not present in the original game files. Through expressions by creating the edit and circulations sharing it widely, fans reconstruct the game's narrative pacing and character identity to better satisfy their emotional desire.

Lore theories

Fans produce, debate, and visually map the game's fragmented timeline. Since *Love and Deepspace* deliberately withholds a unified chronology, the TikTok community engages in forensic narrative reconstruction. This practice exemplifies Jenkins' collaborative problem-solving, affiliations, and circulations pillars.



Figure 2. Screenshot of Timeline Diagram of LADS
Source: TikTok by @liluzg (<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS9LXwjA5/>)

Unlike text-based forums, TikTok lore theorizing is inherently visual. One observed video presents a timeline titled “PHILOS AKA EARTH”, organizing dispersed game data into shareable visual artifacts. A prime debate emerged around an inconsistency: in Xavier’s Myth, MC is “Queen of Philos”, while in Rafayel’s Myth, she appears as a “Princess”. Community member @Klaudia initiated the inquiry, generating multiple competing resolutions.



Figure 3. Comment-section of Lore Theories

Source: comment-section on TikTok @liluzg

A prime lore debate emerged around a seemingly minor inconsistency. In Xavier’s Myth storyline, the protagonist (MC) is titled “Queen of Philos”, while in Rafayel’s Myth, she appears as a “Princess”. Community member @Klaudia initiated the inquiry “*Wait how did we go from queen of Philos to Princess?*” This single question generated multiple competing resolutions. Notably, these models are not mutually exclusive in community practice. Fans employ various explanations when discussing interactions, and rely on route-exclusive models when evaluating romantic fidelity. The flexibility over this demonstrates collaborative problem-solving where fans interpretive resources without demanding a single correct answer.



Figure 4. Comment-section of Lore Theories

Source: comment-section on TikTok @liluzg

Another example in the comment section can be seen by @Roci's contribution which exemplifies a distinctive feature of *Love and Deepspace* lore culture. Rather than simply asserting a preferred interpretation, Roci directs attention to an in-game UI element, “*Just remember when you want to pick who you want to meet at the café, there’s a small text on the bottom. You may read that again.*” Notably, fans adopt multiple explanations without demanding a single correct answer, demonstrating flexibility in collaborative problem-solving. @Roci's contribution further exemplifies this by directing attention to in-game UI text as evidence, expanding the evidentiary base beyond dialogue to include interface mechanics.

Unlike linear narrative communities, *Love and Deepspace* fans appear comfortable with productive irresolution. The queen/princess debate did not conclude with a winning answer, instead, the community accumulated multiple compatible explanations. This suggests that for otome game fans on TikTok, the pleasure of lore theorizing lies not in solving the mystery but to hold contradictory possibilities in tension while marshaling evidence for each.

Visual storytelling and lore-based edits

While lore theories engage analytical debate, a parallel practice transforms tragic backstory into emotionally charged visual artifacts. Creators highlight character suffering through “sad edits”, isolating trauma to make fictional bonds feel more authentic and earned. This exemplifies Jenkins' expressions and circulations pillars.

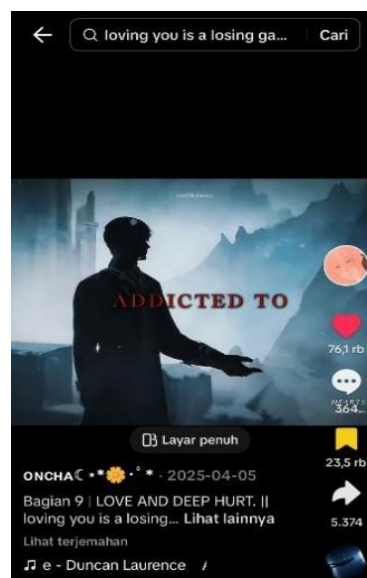


Figure 5. Screenshot of Visual Storytelling Edit

Source: TikTok @_ju.h0n9_ (<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS9L4CTYh/>)

The edit do more than just showcase anguish, they function as a form of social currency. To fully appreciate an angst-driven video, a fan must possess a baseline level of lore knowledge. This creates a tiered system of engagement within the TikTok community: casual viewers may simply enjoy the aesthetic, while hardcore fans engage in deep-dive discussions to validate the accuracy of the tragedy. This communal validation often expressed through comments like “*k, mom pick me up, i’m traumatized*” (@tan), reinforces a shared emotional reality. It proves that in a participatory culture, the narrative is defined not just by what the developers write, but by the emotional weight the community chooses to assign to specific tragic events.

A paradigmatic example uses the title “LOVE AND DEEP HURT”, concentrating dispersed dialogue, e.g., “My dragon is gone” and “Goodbye, my beloved bride” from different memory cards into a single statement. Editing techniques (match cuts, speed ramping, desaturation) intensify impact, while repurposed audio tracks like “Arcade” by Duncan Laurence function as shorthand for tragic romance. Unlike POV performances or lore theories, visual storytelling prioritizes affective resonance over diegetic fidelity, sacrificing canonical precision for emotional truth.

Cross-games recreation of characters

Fans recreate male leads in external gaming environments (*Sword of Justice*, *Baldur’s Gate 3*) by sharing detailed character customizations. This practice exemplifies Jenkins’ collaborative problem-solving and circulations pillars.

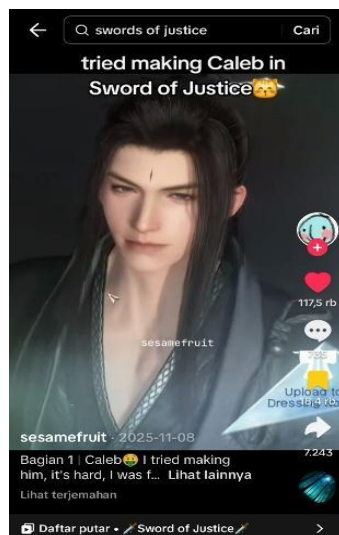


Figure 6. Screenshot of Cross-game Recreation

Source: TikTok @sesamefruit (<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS9L4XsMn/>)

The technical demands for cross-game recreation are exemplified in a TikTok video by creator @sesamefruit, where the creator attempted to replicate Caleb within the

MMORPG *Sword of Justice*. The creator's caption read "*I tried making him, it's hard*" continuing "*I was fighting the sliders, this game got me hooked*". These statements highlight the significant digital labor required to bypass the limitations of one game engine such as different facial morphology systems, limited hair options, and restricted clothes palettes to honor the aesthetic of another. Unlike official *Love and Deepspace* content, which presents Caleb's face as a fixed asset, cross-game recreation demands that fans rebuild that face from a process of translation rather than reproduction. This collaborative problem-solving occurs as fans share slider coordinates, modding techniques, and preset values.

Furthermore, the same creator produced similar content for Rafayel within game MMORPG *Sword of Justice* and utilized third-party mods by @surodmg to bring Xavier into *Baldur's Gate 3*. This multi-character pattern confirms that cross-game recreation is a systematic genre of fan production, not an isolated curiosity. The circulation of these recreations across multiple games demonstrated how fans extend participatory culture beyond the original commercial container.

A subtle but significant subtext of cross-game recreation is implicit platform critique. When @sesamefruit notes that *Sword of Justice* "got me hooked" specifically because of the slider struggle, the comparison to *Love and Deepspace* is unavoidable. By contrast, *Sword of Justice* and *Baldur's Gate 3* offer robust character creators and open-ended interaction systems. Fans who recreate *Love and Deepspace* characters in these games are voting with their labor for more creative gaming environments. This finding complicates the common assumption that fan labor always benefits the original IP owner.

Recreating a character in another game removes the original game entirely, unlike POV performances, which keep the fans within the original game's visual assets. Lore theories and visual storytelling which seek to resolve internal contradictions. This makes cross-game recreation the most technically demanding and theoretically transgressive of the four participatory practices observed.

Discussion

The four participatory practices identified in this study reveal a complex ecosystem of fan engagement that extends beyond Jenkins' (2007) original framework in several significant ways. While Jenkins conceptualized participatory culture primarily through the lens of media franchises and their fan communities, the *Love and Deepspace*

TikTok community demonstrates how Otome game fans deploy these practices in ways that are simultaneously more intimate and more transgressive than traditional media fandom.

The frequency distribution shown in Table 1 supports this interpretation. Visual Storytelling and Lore-based Edits (37.3%) and POV Performances (31.3%) together comprise over two-thirds of the corpus, confirming that emotional intimacy and affective expression are the primary drivers of content production in this community. Notably, Lore Theories (20.7%), despite being fewer in number, engage the broadest range of Jenkins' pillars (collaborative problem-solving, affiliations, and circulations), reflecting their role as catalysts for sustained debate and collective intelligence.

A notable finding across all four practices is the community's consistent prioritization of emotional intimacy over narrative fidelity. In POV performances, fans manipulate game assets to simulate romantic scenarios that feel more personally authentic than the game's canonical interactions. In visual storytelling edits, creators sacrifice diegetic accuracy to amplify emotional impact. Even in lore theories, where one might expect a commitment to narrative consistency, fans demonstrate comfort with productive irresolution, holding multiple contradictory explanations in tension. This suggests that for otome game communities, the primary value of participatory culture lies not in correctly interpreting the source text but in using it as raw material for emotional self-expression and community bonding.

The visual nature of TikTok profoundly shapes how participatory culture manifests in this community. Unlike text-based forums or video-sharing platforms like YouTube, TikTok's short-form, visually oriented format privileges certain kinds of fan labor over others. Lore theories, for example, are presented as shareable diagrams rather than extended written arguments. POV edits rely on rapid visual and audio cues that communicate meaning in seconds. This platform-specific affordance aligns with Burgess and Green's (2018) observation that platform architectures shape the types of creative labor that flourish within digital communities. As they argue, platforms are "not neutral conduits for content but are active in shaping the forms of cultural production that occur within them (p. 57)".

However, this visual orientation also creates tensions. The complexity of the game's lore, which spans multiple timelines and character routes, is difficult to fully

convey in 16-second clips. Fans have responded by developing what we might call “distributed literacy” (i.e., the ability to reference shared knowledge across multiple videos, comments, and external sources). This distributed literacy functions as a gatekeeping mechanism, creating a tiered system of engagement where full participation requires significant investment in community knowledge.

Importantly, this finding complicates Jenkins’ (2007) generally optimistic view of participatory culture as a democratizing force, suggesting instead that fan labor can serve as implicit criticism of commercial constraints. This finding complicates Jenkins’ (2007) generally optimistic view of participatory culture as a democratizing force, suggesting instead that fan labor can serve as implicit criticism of commercial constraints. As Fuchs (2014) argues, digital prosumption labor is embedded within a “capitalist regime of time” where “the boundaries between work and leisure are blurring” (p. 100).

As this platform critique is particularly significant given the economic model of gacha games like *Love and Deepspace*, these games monetize emotional attachment through limited-time “memory card” releases and character-specific banners. By recreating characters in games with more open-ended interaction systems, fans are asserting that their emotional investment is not reducible to the game’s monetization architecture. This represents a form of resistance that is both creative and political, even if not explicitly articulated as such by participants.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The *Love and Deepspace* TikTok community reveals that participatory culture in the context of Otome games is characterized by a distinctive emphasis on emotional intimacy, platform-specific affordances, and implicit critique of commercial constraints. Through POV performances, lore theories, visual storytelling, and cross-game recreation, fans transform a commercial gacha game into a site of creative labor, emotional expression, and community bonding. These practices align with Jenkins’ (2007) pillars of participatory culture while also extending them in ways that reflect the unique characteristics of otome game fandom and the TikTok platform. This finding has implications not only for understanding otome game fandom but for theorizing

participatory culture more broadly in the era of platform-driven, algorithmically mediated media consumption.

Suggestions

This study has several limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, the analysis relied primarily on publicly available TikTok content and engagement metrics, without direct interviews with creators or community members. Future research could employ ethnographic methods to understand fan motivations and experiences more deeply. Second, the study focused exclusively on English-language content, despite the game's significant Chinese and Japanese player bases. Comparative research across linguistic and cultural contexts could reveal how participatory practices vary across different otome game communities. Finally, the study's focus on TikTok necessarily limits its findings to one platform. Other platforms, such as Twitter, Reddit, and Discord, likely host different participatory practices that complement or contrast with those identified here. Future research could adopt a multi-platform approach to develop a more comprehensive understanding of otome game fandom.

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