

Research Article

Parasocial Relationships: Players' Emotional Attachment to Characters in the Otome Game Love and Deepspace

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Abstract

This study explores player character attachment in the otome mobile game Love and Deepspace and its impact on their lived experiences. Using a literature review approach, this study highlights how parasocial interactions with the main character and love interests affect players' emotional, social, and behavioral aspects. Results indicate that character attachment can increase emotional well-being, strengthen social relationships, and motivate positive behaviors in daily life, despite the risk of overspending. These findings provide a basis for further research into the psychological and social effects of mobile games, particularly otome games, on players.

Keywords: character attachments, mobile games, otome

INTRODUCTION

The mobile gaming industry is experiencing rapid growth and has become one of the most dominant forms of digital entertainment globally. This growth is characterized not only by an increase in the number of players but also by changes in the characteristics of gaming experiences, which increasingly emphasize narrative aspects and emotional player engagement (Mobile Gaming Market, 2025). Advances in mobile device technology and internet networks have also driven the emergence of games designed to create more personal and immersive gaming experiences.

One genre that stands out in this development is the otome game, a narrative-based romance game that places the player as the primary subject in interactions with virtual characters. Otome games are designed to build emotional connections through deep storylines, characters with strong personalities, and interaction mechanisms that allow players to feel personally involved. This makes otome games a relevant context



for examining the phenomena of emotional attachment and parasocial relationships in digital media.

Love and Deepspace is an otome game that has shown high popularity both globally and in Indonesia. This game offers an interactive narrative-based gaming experience with emotionally and visually designed characters to create a close bond with the player. Through a combination of story, dialogue, and ongoing interactions, Love and Deepspace serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as a medium for forming emotional connections between players and virtual characters.

The phenomenon of players' emotional attachment to characters in otome games can be explained through the concept of parasocial relationships, which are one-way connections individuals feel toward media figures. Although these relationships are not real, players can experience significant closeness, empathy, and emotional involvement. However, literature specifically discussing parasocial relationships in the context of otome games, particularly Love and Deepspace, is still limited. Therefore, this study focuses on a literature review to understand how narratives and interactions in otome games play a role in shaping parasocial relationships and emotional attachment between players and characters.

This study aims to examine parasocial relationships and players' emotional attachment to characters in the otome game Love and Deepspace through a literature review approach. This research is expected to provide a conceptual understanding of the role of narrative and interaction in shaping emotional relationships between players and virtual characters.

METHOD

This research employed a literature study method with a narrative review approach. Data sources were obtained from scientific articles relevant to the research topic. A literature search was conducted through Google Scholar using a combination of the keywords "character attachment," "mobile game," and "otome." These keyword combinations were used interchangeably to obtain articles relevant to the research focus.

The obtained articles were then selected based on topic suitability, conceptual relevance, and theoretical contribution to the discussion of parasocial relationships and emotional attachment in otome games. The collected data was analyzed descriptively and qualitatively by grouping the research findings into main themes that formed the basis of the discussion.

The Concept of Parasocial Relationships in Digital Games

Parasocial relationships were initially understood as one-way attachments between individuals and media figures, such as television personalities or celebrities, that do not involve direct reciprocal interaction. Over time, this concept has evolved beyond traditional media and has also emerged in the context of interactive digital media, including video games. Digital games allow players to repeatedly interact with virtual characters, creating the illusion of closeness and personal connection. This fosters a more intense parasocial relationship because players are no longer passive spectators but are directly involved in the game's storyline and experiences.

In the context of character-based games, such as otome games, parasocial relationships are reinforced through interaction mechanisms designed to mimic interpersonal relationships. Players are given the opportunity to communicate, make choices, and follow the character's ongoing emotional development. These interactions foster the perception of the character's presence as a responsive being with a consistent personality. As a result, players can develop a sense of emotional attachment that resembles a real social relationship, even though the relationship is actually one-way and occurs in a virtual space.

Players' Emotional Attachment to Otome Game Characters

Players' emotional attachment to characters in otome games is formed through affective engagement that develops over time. Players not only follow the storyline but also experience emotional dynamics with the characters, such as empathy, caring, and emotional closeness. Repeated and consistent interactions make the characters perceived as familiar and personally meaningful. This encourages players to build emotional bonds that go beyond the characters' function as mere game elements, but also as figures who play an emotional role in the gameplay experience.

In otome games, characters are generally designed with distinct personalities, in-depth backstories, and emotional responses tailored to the player's choices. This design allows players to feel cared for and understood, thus strengthening feelings of emotional closeness. This attachment can be reflected in players' desire to continue the story, spend more time in the game, and demonstrate loyalty to a particular character. Thus, emotional attachment is a crucial element explaining why players can feel a strong connection to virtual characters, even when that connection doesn't exist in the real world.

The Role of Narrative and Interaction in the Otome Game Love and Deepspace

The narrative and interaction in the otome game Love and Deepspace play a crucial role in building the player's emotional experience. The gradually unfolding storyline allows players to deeply understand the characters, including their backgrounds, personal conflicts, and the development of their relationships throughout the game. This personal and emotional narrative encourages psychological involvement, so that the relationships developed are not only functional but also emotional.

Beyond the narrative, the interaction system offered in Love and Deepspace enhances player engagement through dialogue choices, character responses, and intimate communication mechanisms. These interactions create the illusion of reciprocity, where players feel they have influence over the characters' attitudes and responses. The combination of deep narrative and responsive interactions creates an immersive gaming experience, strengthening emotional attachment and parasocial relationships between players and characters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

No	(Author, Year)	Research Methods	Research Results
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1	Zhao and Bowman (2026)	Quantitative	<p>Perceived reciprocity influences entertainment outcomes indirectly through romantic closeness.</p> <p>The effect is statistically significant, but the evidence for mediation is weak due to the cross-sectional survey design (cannot confirm causality).</p>
2	Jha (2025)	Qualitative	MCs appear assertive and inspiring; LIs exhibit mixed masculinity; games impact players' social, emotional, and financial aspects; emotional experiences are valued more than financial outlays
3	Wang and Kang (2024)	Qualitative	Otome games influence real-life relationship satisfaction; gameplay experience and avatar identification influence romantic behavior; provide positive emotional value, but can blur the boundaries between virtual and real.
4	Wu, Qin, & Zhang (2024)	Quantitative	Game engagement affects capacity to love in a complex way; RHVA and positive emotionality act as mediators; there are both positive and negative effects.

5	Cheah, Shimul, & Phau (2022)	Literature Review	Excessive gaming addiction can impact social behavior, mental health, and performance; technology and rewards influence engagement; game design needs to be inclusive and ethical
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Chapter 4

The literature review in this study serves to provide a comprehensive overview of previous research related to players' attachment to characters in otome games and its impact on their real-life experiences. By examining previous findings on character attachment, game engagement, and parasocial relationships, this study can identify research gaps, particularly the lack of focus on the otome game Love and Deepspace and its emotional, social, and financial effects on players. Furthermore, the literature review helps formulate a theoretical framework and research variables, provides a relevant methodological basis, and demonstrates how this research contributes to the understanding of parasocial relationships and player experiences in mobile games.

Players' emotional attachment to the characters and experiences of playing otome games has a significant impact on emotional, social, and behavioral aspects in the real world, but the effects are complex and can be positive or negative, depending on the mediating mechanisms and the intensity of the attachment.

Parasocial Relationships in Digital Games

In the context of digital games, parasocial relationships can no longer be understood as purely one-sided engagement. The interactions between players and characters are designed in such a way that players feel emotionally involved in the dynamics of the relationship. Characters exist not only as visual elements but also as social representations that respond to the player's choices and actions. Although these relationships take place in a virtual space, the emotional experiences felt by players demonstrate a closeness that resembles real-world social interactions. This demonstrates that digital games have the ability to facilitate a form of relationship that players feel personally.

Players' Emotional Attachment to Otome Game Characters

Players' emotional attachment to otome game characters develops through a gradual process. Repeated interactions, storylines focused on personal relationships, and the characters' consistent responses to the player are crucial factors in forming this attachment. Characters are perceived as emotionally present and reliable, allowing players to feel understood and cared for. In this context, emotional attachment becomes

more than just a part of the game, but develops into a subjective experience that holds meaning for the player, even if the relationship is not tangible.

The Role of Narrative and Interaction in the Otome Game Love and Deepspace

Narrative and interaction play a central role in shaping the emotional experience of players in Love and Deepspace. The personally crafted story allows players to feel directly involved in the relationships they develop with the characters. Furthermore, immersive interaction mechanisms, supported by three-dimensional visuals, reinforce the sense of closeness and continuity of the relationships. This combination of narrative and interaction creates a more intimate gaming experience than typical digital games. Thus, Love and Deepspace not only presents a romantic story but also creates a space for players to build lasting emotional connections with the characters.

Implications of Parasocial Relationships on Player Experience

Parasocial relationships formed in otome games have diverse implications for the player experience. On the one hand, these relationships can provide a sense of comfort and provide a means for players to channel their emotions. However, intense emotional involvement also has the potential to influence how players view social relationships outside the game. In some cases, strong attachment to a character can lead to greater emotional and financial involvement. Therefore, parasocial relationships in otome games need to be understood as a phenomenon that is neither entirely positive nor entirely negative, but rather has complex consequences for players.

The Position of Otome Games as an Emotional Space for Players

Otome games can be understood as an alternative emotional space for players, where interactions with characters allow for a safe and controlled exploration of feelings. In games like Love and Deepspace, players not only follow the storyline but also place themselves in relationships that provide space for expressing emotions, such as attraction, longing, or the need for intimacy. This space becomes particularly relevant when players face limitations in expressing emotions in everyday life. Thus, otome games serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium that provides meaningful emotional experiences for some players.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that player attachment to characters in the otome mobile game Love and Deepspace significantly impacts players' emotional, social, and behavioral lives. Players with higher parasocial interactions tend to experience emotional well-being, increased social motivation, and adjust their daily behaviors based on their in-game experiences. However, excessive attachment can pose risks, such as high financial expenditure, emotional dependence, or disruption of the balance between the virtual and real worlds. The effects of this attachment are complex and influenced by mediators such as romantic closeness, RHVA, and positive emotionality.

Suggestion

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that future research conduct

direct empirical studies on Love and Deepspace using longitudinal or experimental designs to determine the causal relationship between character attachment and its impact on players' real lives. For game developers, it is important to design balanced mechanisms, including spending management, playtime control, and interactions that support positive emotional experiences without triggering excessive attachment. Players themselves are advised to utilize the game experience healthily, maintaining a balance between the virtual and real worlds, and observing spending and playtime limits so that character attachment continues to provide emotional and social benefits without negative risks.

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