

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Teenagers in this busy time of technology are easily tempted by game applications that have dangerous features, namely *microtransactions*. Where does the game "sell" the characters in the game itself behind the *gacha* (Risco & Mills, 2025: 3) feature Based on an Article titled *What is a Gacha Games?* Published by Hyte.com, the 2025 Gacha System is derived from the Japanese word "ガチャポン" (Gachapon) which has been taken from the sound of a toy vending machine. More specifically, "gacha" is taken from the sound produced from the rotation of the selling machine, and the "pound" comes from the toy/toy sound that comes out of the machine.

There are various things that make *Gacha* or *Gambling* very attractive for teenagers today. From the adrenaline felt by the *random results* of the gacha system itself, the social element as well as the competitive element, and last but not least, the visual element of the interesting character. For Consumers who have more awareness, the feeling of successfully getting the character targeted to be the *central role* of the interesting factor of the gacha game (Jingyi Mphil , 2024: 48)

Gacha games have various forms and genres, from *Action RPG*, *JRPG*, *Turn-Based Strategy*, to *Visual Novels* with the *Otome subgenre*. Based on research conducted by Global Information Inc (GII), by 2024 the global visual novel market is estimated to be worth around US\$263-270 million in 2023. It is predicted to grow to around US\$620 million by 2030. Because Visual novels are increasingly accessible using PC, and more especially mobile. It is also estimated that the popularity and market price will increase by around 8.5% to ±10.5% per year in the 2023-2030 period.

Besides the problem of games that have a *Gacha system* that is already popular among teenagers, this Visual Novel with the *Otome subgenre* is closely related to the rise of *microtransactions* in a game. Quoting an article titled *Indulging in Romantic-Fantasies: The Allure of Otome Games* by Agate.id, 2023 *Otome Games*, which literally means "*maiden games*" are story-based games that tend to be targeted at teenage girls. This game usually has a female main character premise that interacts with a group of male characters

who have different dispositions and personalities. Build relationships that will affect the plot of the game's story.

The Otome *game* can trigger bad things besides *gambling*. Otome game players usually spend money to get the character they want, this is where the role of the bad things Parasocial appears. The results of the study suggest that parasocial relationship owners are indirectly tied to a condition called *problematic video gaming (PVG)*, although gacha or gambling behavior itself does not predict an association with PVG in the general sample, parasocial relationships significantly alter this dynamic. Especially for individuals who already have problems with parasocial relationships, it has been studied that parasocial relationships with fictional characters can exacerbate the already fatal impact of PVG by increasing emotional investment. Especially in games that are designed to foster emotional attachment through this gambling or *gacha* system. By focusing on the application of interactive storytelling and promoting interactivity with virtual characters through interactions that can be done by players. It is very common for the player to start to have a strong sense of emotional connection, which will develop and turn into a parasocial relationship with one of the many virtual characters in the game that suits their desires. in terms of persona, or even the smell experience. From the research conducted, the data obtained was that of the 582 participants divided by 475 men and 107 women. They play games for 31.53 hours every week. With 57.7% spending money on *gacha*, and 194 people or 33% of the participants were recorded to have parasocial relationships and interact with gacha characters from the game. (Risco & Mills, 2025: 1-5)

Quoted from Britannica.com, 2023 Parasocial is a term used in psychology or media to describe non-reciprocal relationships, which are when a person feels emotionally close, connected, and even personal ties to figures in the media (such as celebrities, fictional figures, influencers, or other media personalities), even though the figure does not really know or reciprocate the relationship. The concept was first introduced by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956 in the classic article *Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction*, which describes how television viewers feel a "pseudo-intimacy" with the characters they see on screen.

It has also been proven that this parasocial relationship is very common among adolescents. Ninety percent of people who transition from adolescence to adulthood experience greater loneliness, from the research with 236 participants it can be taken from the data that 66.95% of participants experience loneliness problems. This loneliness can trigger social relationships from various media. Based on the results of the analysis of 437

participants, the majority of whom were 21 years old and had student status, it was found that 57% of participants experienced loneliness in the moderate category and 73.2% had parasocial relationships in the medium category (Putri Harbowo, 2024: 2) (Putri Harbowo, 2024: 1)

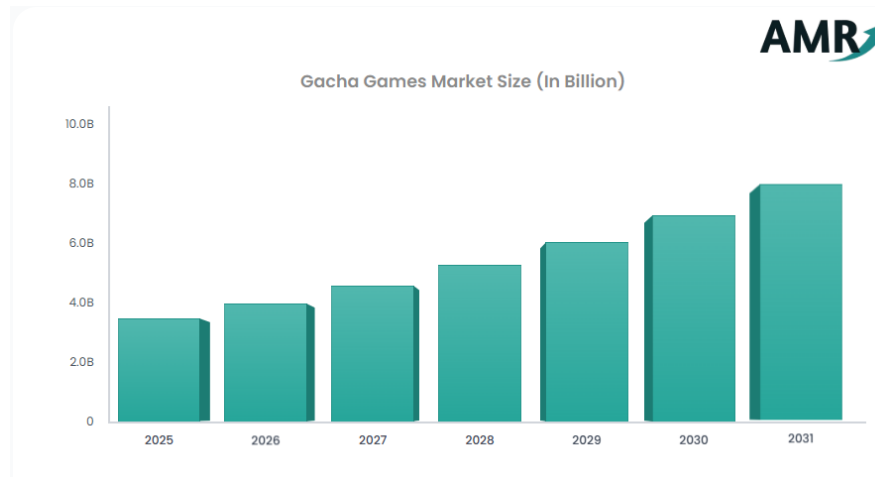


Figure 1. 1 Graphic of increase in Gacha game market size

(Source, <https://www.archivemarketresearch.com/reports/gacha-games>)

This phenomenon is increasingly relevant to the popularity of simulation games such as *Otome* genre games, or narrative games that focus on developing romantic relationships between players and fictional characters. It was found that teenage *Otome* games players in China formed a deep emotional attachment to fictional characters, even developing so-called parasocial relationships. This relationship allows players to feel valued, understood, and have an emotionally safe place in the virtual world, albeit only through scripts and mere artificial interactions. (Gao et al., 2025: 1-3)

From a survey in the form of a questionnaire that has been conducted on September 13, 2025, it can be concluded that *the majority of Otome* game players, the majority of whom are teenage girls, play the game because of the interesting *character of love interest*. Of the 18 respondents, 12 people are actively playing *Otome* games. 83% of the 12 respondents said that the reason they play the game is because of the attractive characters, 50% of the respondents also said that the visuals of a character greatly affect the appeal of *the Otome* game. 83.3% of the 12 respondents also said that the features they like the most in *the Otome* game is the Communication feature, where the fiksi characters in the game

can have conversations, send texts, and telephone with players. This if done regularly can spread the seeds of parasocial relationships.

One of the games that pioneered the popularity of *the Otome* sub-genre among teenage girls was *Love and Deepspace*. Quoted from Gematsu.com, 2023 and Wikipedia, 2025 *Love and Deepspace* is an Otome Gacha game with a 3D style created and developed by Papergames. A studio that has made famous games before, such as *Mr. Love: Queen's Choice* and *Shining Nikki*. Raising the genres of romance, fantasy, and also sci-fi. This game combines the stereotypical aspect of *of Otome*, namely the interaction between characters, with the combat aspect where the main female character works together with the male character in the game.

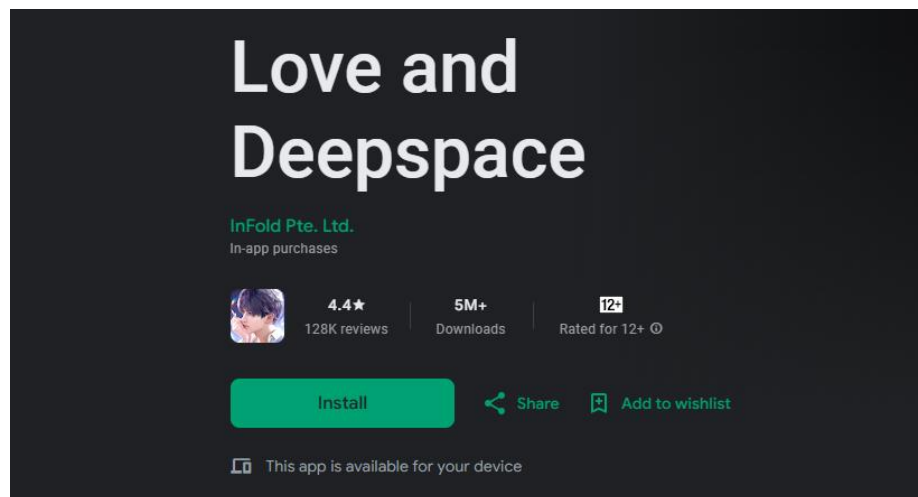


Figure 1. 2 *Love and Deepspace* on Playstore
(Source, Google Playstore)

The popularity of the *Love and Deepspace* game can be seen from millions of daily players to receiving very unexpected awards. With more than 5 Million downloads on Google Playstore, having the very top on the IOS Charts as well as from 30 different countries, up to 50-70 million active players. The *Love and Deepspace* game, which launches in 2024, has been very popular in recent years. Quoted from TechNode.com, 2025 *Love and Deepspace* received the Best Mobile Game award at Gamescom 2025, where this is the first time a *Female Oriented* game has received this award.

Just like other gacha games, *Otome* games also rely on *microstansaction* as a source of income from the game. A study in Japan has been conducted to find out the factors that affect players' motivation and satisfaction in playing *Otome* games and the benefits they

get from this experience. They examined the features of the game and the psychological factors that drive individuals to play *the game of Otome* and suggest that voice interaction, touch functions, and the desire to develop romantic skills and reduce negative emotions are significant motives for Japanese players. The more money a player spends, the better their chances of getting the character they want. Otome gaming companies also implement this gacha system as an important commercial strategy to arouse the interest of players with a youth demographic, increase engagement, increase their attachment to the game, and maximize profits. (Li, 2025: 3-4)

Due to the lack of attention in the negative side of this *Otome game* or rather in 61 teenagers out of 104 questionnaire fillers aged 18-25. From the questionnaire data collected since September 13, 2025, there are 16.39% of respondents who have conducted *microtransactions* with an amount of 300,000-500,000, and 11.48% of respondents who have conducted *microtransactions* with an amount of 500,00-1,000,000. It can be concluded that teenagers are now very vulnerable to transactions for *gacha* or *gambling* in a game.

Adolescence between the ages of 19-29 is a period where they are very easily influenced by the media they consume, because adolescence is the time when an individual develops and forms his or her identity. Experimentation and exploration are hallmarks of the developing individual. At this stage of development, many individuals are still exploring the career path they want to take, the identity they want, and the lifestyle they want to live. (Santrock, n.d. 2011: 416)

It can also be concluded from Santrock (2011:399) that media is an important part of adolescent life, both in the form of television, internet, and other digital media, because adolescents are not only influenced by culture, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. The role of media in the lives of adolescents needs to be considered because it can affect their values, behavior, and the way they understand the world.

From a very *influential* book titled *Understanding Comic*, Comic is a form of work made from a series of images and other symbols that are deliberately arranged, with the aim of conveying information or creating an aesthetic experience for its readers. (Scott McCloud 2020:9). But in the current era of the internet, where teenagers often carry mobile phones, or tablets rather than books. The comic media has evolved according to its times, this is where webcomics emerged. Quoted directly from the Cambridge Dictionary, webcomic is a digital-based comic that can be accessed via the internet.

One of the *popular webcomic* platforms that can be accessed via the internet is Webtoon. Quoted from ToonsMag.com, 2025 Line Webtoon was published internationally in 2014 by the Naver Company. This platform provides *user-uploaded Webcomic* to a global audience for free and easy to access. In addition to its ease of access, for readers, there are comic catalogs that have different genres and styles where all of these comic genres can be accessed with a click of a button. Webtoons also make it easier for writers to get direct feedback, with a comment feature at the bottom of each comic chapter. Webtoon readers themselves also easily build a community globally according to the comics they consume. Webtoon has been downloaded by more than 100 million people from the Google Playstore platform, with a rating of 4.7 on the Playstore and 4.8 on the IOS Appstore.

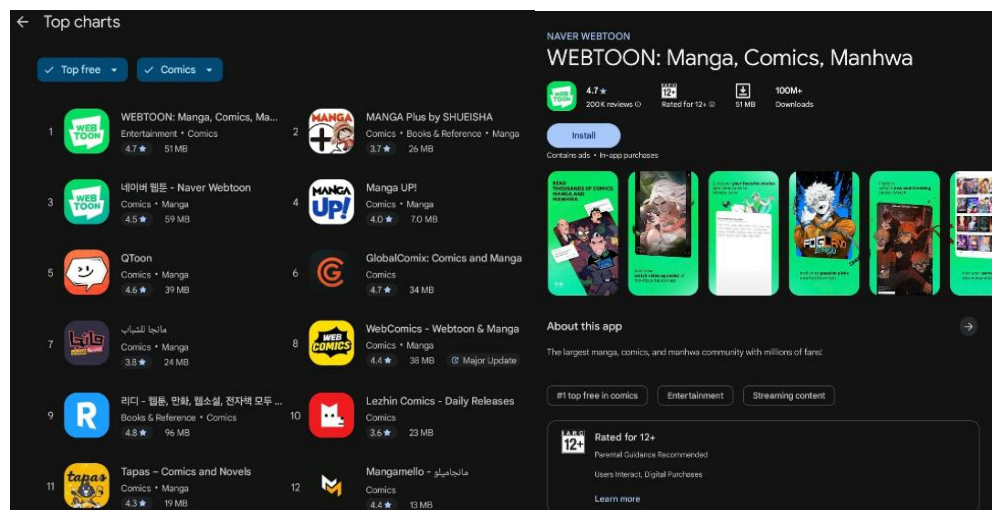


Figure 1. 3 Most popular comic apps on Google Playstore and app ratings
(Source, Google Playstore)

Comics and webcomics are very popular media for teenagers. From the questionnaire-based research collected, from 61 respondents, 36.1% of respondents used mobile phones for 7-8 hours every day. 68.9% of respondents also answered that they read *Webcomic* in their spare time, with romance and fantasy genres being the most popular genres, with a ratio of 57.4% for romance and 37.7% for fantasy, therefore *Webcomic* media is an effective medium in conveying messages

1.2 Problem identification

1. Teenagers aged 18-25 are particularly vulnerable to online game microtransactions that cause financial problems early on. From the research conducted by Sebastian Risco and Devin J. Mills in 2025, the data obtained is that of the 582 participants divided by 475 men and 107 women. 57.7% spend money on gacha (Risco & Mills, 2025: 1-5)
2. From the results of the observations that have been made, in the current era, the prevalence of parasocial relationships experienced by *Otome* game players, especially in adolescent girls aged 18-25 years. Research in Indonesia conducted by Nabila Putri Harbowo, Roswiyani in 2024 also noted that the results of the analysis of 437 participants, the majority of whom were 21 years old and had student status, found that 73.2% had parasocial relationships in the medium category (Putri Harbowo, 2024: 1)
3. Based on the results of the Questionnaire that has been spread from 2025, it can be seen that there is a lack of educational media and media of appeals about the adverse effects and also parasocial interactions of games in the *Otome genre* (Personal Documents, Questionnaire Results)

1.3 Problem Formulation

How to Design a *webcomic* regarding the adverse impact and parasocial interaction of *otome* game players on women aged 18-25 years?

1.4 Problem Limitation

1. The target audience of this *Webcomic* design is teenagers aged 18-25 years
2. The design of this *Webcomic* will be published on LINE Webtoon
3. The adverse impact and impact of parasocial relationships on *Otome* game players socially and emotionally
4. The adverse impact and impact of parasocial relationships on *Otome* game players financially

1.5 The Purpose of Planning

1. Increase the understanding of adolescents aged 18–25 years old about the risks of microtransactions in online games, especially the gacha system, in order to reduce consumptive behavior and prevent financial problems from an early age.
2. Educate teens, especially girls aged 18–25, about parasocial relationships in Otome games, in order to understand the limits of virtual interactions and avoid excessive emotional attachment.
3. Designing effective and accessible educational media and appeals, in order to overcome the lack of information related to the impact of microtransactions and parasocial relationships, so as to increase awareness and digital literacy in the target audience.

1.6 The Benefits of Planning

1. The design of *this webcomic* can help readers understand how parasocial relationships with fictional characters can have a negative impact on emotional health, loneliness, and psychological dependence. With visual representations in comics, readers can be more reflective of their own gaming habits.
2. *This webcomic* can be an effective educational tool to provide an understanding to adolescents aged 18–25 about the dangers of parasocial interactions and microtransactions in *Otome games*.
3. The design that will be displayed on LINE Webtoon can be a medium that reaches a wide market. By delivering messages in the form of *Webcomic stories*, this design is able to build discussions and communities that are more aware of the issue of the negative impact of *Otome games*.

1.7 Planning Framework

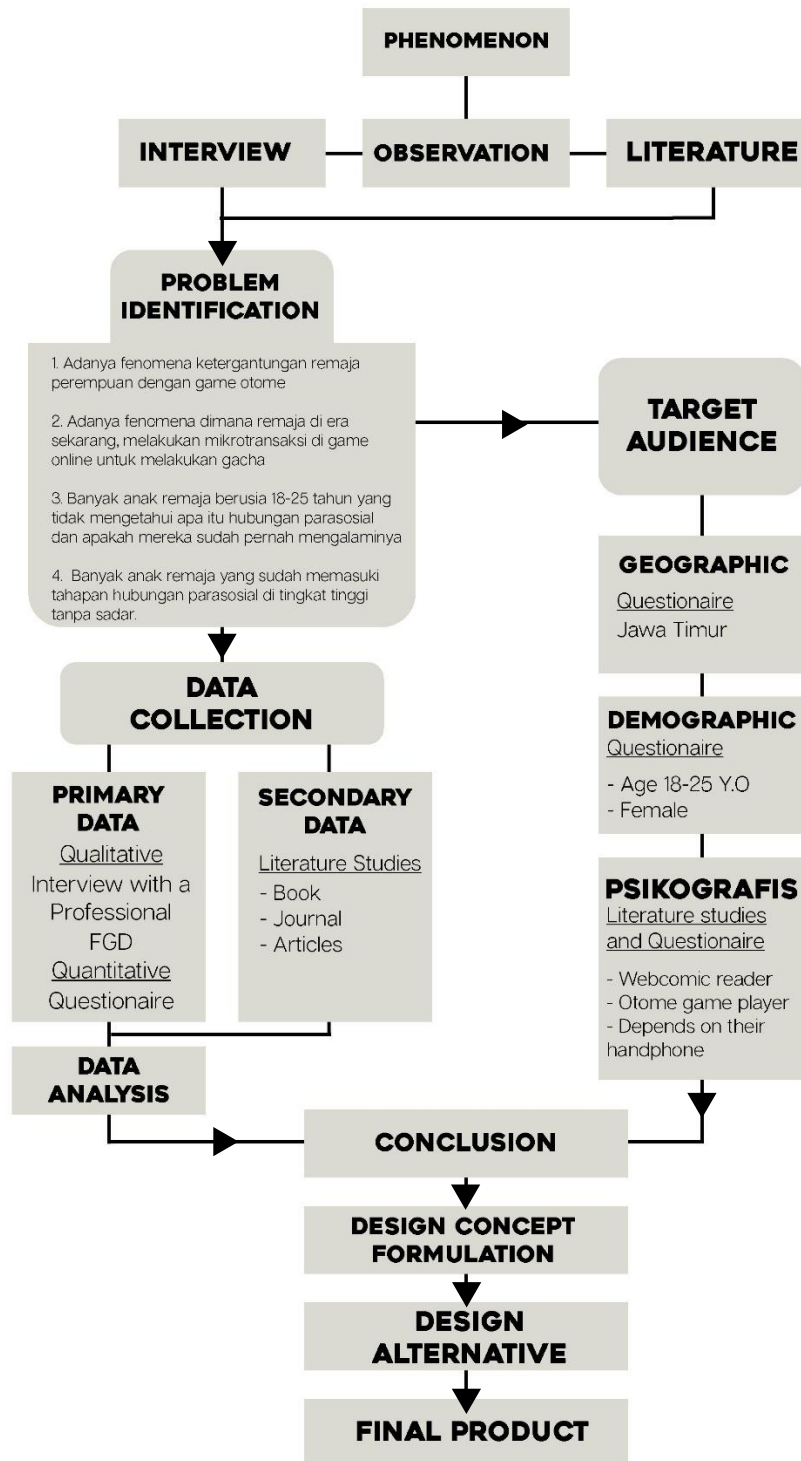


Figure 1. 4 Planning Framework

(Source, Private Document)