

# Gameplay Beyond the Game: The Temporal Structures in Gacha Game Participation

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## INTRODUCTION

### Game as temporal structures

Gaming, as a daily activity, is often intertwined with the player's social life, whether they connect to the device (Crawford, 2012). The analysis of Gacha games should be situated within the context of everyday life, not as an isolated island, but rather as part of a complicated networked structure that repeatedly negotiates and intertwines with other daily activities.

The researcher had recruited 48 free-to-play game players in the Chinese mainland for interviews between October 2020 and June 2021 (Dou, 2023). The results show that the players will 'naturally' integrate gaming time into their social schedules: checking the completion of daily tasks before the end of the day, ensuring stamina points, reserving weekend time for game events, etc. As Woods (2022) argued, players apply the hyper-rationalisation of time as a playing resource to replace the investment of real-world currency. Meanwhile, this differs from the playbour model of 'gold farming'; the Gacha game's 'premium' currency usually does not correlate linearly with playtime but rather closely with the mechanism related to out-of-game social time. Those mechanisms, such as daily logins, tasks, and monthly passes, typically lack challenge, instead comprising a series of highly repetitive, simple actions. Normally, the obtainable premium currency is largely concentrated within the first ten minutes of daily gaming and refreshes its availability as real-world time progresses.

This indicates that the Gacha game quest-reward systems refer to a temporal structure of player daily life, a set of guiding rules that embed gameplay within the daily social timetable, and a process of player socialisation in the online game world under the control of a digital system. Taking the example of Genshin Impact (miHoYo, 2020), the Blessing of the Welkin Moon (monthly pass) has a cumulative benefit of approximately 3000 Primogemsi,

which significantly exceeds the 300 Primogems through direct purchase. The source of disparity—30 regular, consistent daily logins—does not exist or is not described by any narrative or gameplay within the game. In other words, what exchanges with the Gacha currency is the player's external participation in the game's internal world. The 'exceeded Primogems' correspond to the physical act of unlocking the smartphone, tapping the icon of Paimon, and the bodily actions performed within the physical world. The player's rationality, specifically, the time investment strategy aimed at maximising in-game gains, becomes the driving force behind adherence to this gamified temporal structure. This characteristic aligns with Evans (2016) 's anylse of 'freemium game impatience economy' (see also Lundy et al., 2024). The freemium players pay for instant gratification by spending real-world currency, whilst the game pays players for sustained, routine engagement by virtual currency. This disparity highlights the different temporal expectations from games system and players on the location and structure of gaming activities, and reflects the negotiations between 'player-system' on the everyday life.

In the research interview, the majority of players exhibited loss aversion, regarding the anticipated rewards from completing logins and tasks as 'rightfully' earned, and elicited strong negative perceptions for failure to complete the game schedule. Consequently, the stable, repetitive, and regular engagement with the game, driven by Gacha mechanics, is an integral part of players' daily temporal structures.

### **The gameplay out of the game**

Friedman (1998) proposed the 'symbiotic circuit' to define the process by which a player internalises the computer logic to learn 'how to play' a game, as he emphasised: "Computer games teach structure of thought" (p. 136). The ability to play games is an acquired skill; video games train players how to employ physical movements to accomplish in-game objectives (Chess, 2005), building connections between the physical body, external device buttons, and in-game feedback (Keogh, 2018). Keogh (2018) called this method of connections the 'performative grammar' of the game.

Within the context of Gacha-based games like Genshin Impact, 'the game's capabilities' extend from controlling the avatar on adventures to encompassing coordinating schedules and negotiating commitments to secure the gaming time location within daily life. Unlike the Blood Moon event in The Legend of Zelda, Genshin's daily logins and monthly passes inherently incorporate external societal time progression. Consequently, the internalisation of the player in game logic naturally includes the reflection of game mechanics on daily life. Gameplay extends beyond the game, where the player logs in daily to calculate the growth of Original Resin, plans pulls by physical days, and arranges playing time between everyday life intervals. Keogh (2018) noted in his book that the X button on the controller and the in-game

jump action possess no inherent logical connection, yet players "instinctively" and almost unconsciously associate the two. In Genshin Impact, the connection between "daily logins" and 'Primogems' is the same game

grammar; the temporal logic embedded in Gacha mechanics was ingrained in players' internalised consciousness through long-term, regular, and repetitive engagement. In Genshin Impact, gameplay is not limited to exploring the world of Teyvat and also involves balancing daily gaming schedule within the everyday life.

The space of play is no longer confined to the virtual world on the smartphone screen, instead, it becomes a hybrid realm (De Souza e Silva, 2006) where digital and physical intertwine. In Gacha games, 'gaming' unfolds across players' social and virtual schedules. This overlap resonates with Markus Montola(2005)'s definition of pervasive games for 'expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally, or socially' (p. 3). Daily logins, stamina systems, and time-limited events consistently orient toward temporal expansion of f Gacha gaming, and also refer to gameplay beyond the digital interface and expand to the organisation of everyday life.

This work aims to contributes to a broader understanding of how Gacha game mechanism shape, occupy, and regulate the temporal structures of contemporary life, and may help to inform the development of more robust ethical guidelines for Gacha games.

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Genshin impact player from 2020 Sep. 28th, with 1593 active log-in days. Experienced on fan fiction