

Rituals of the Wish: Performing Luck and Identity in Genshin Impact's Gacha Culture

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gacha games have become a major phenomenon in mobile gaming, taking their name from Japanese *gachapon* capsule toy machines (Kanerva, 2023). They are primarily free-to-play video games that incorporate a lottery-style “pull” or “summon” mechanic, where players spend in-game currency to receive a random item such as a character, equipment, or cosmetic. Each pull has a specific probability of reward, and the system is often not transparent, leaving players uncertain of their exact chances (Thavamuni et al. 2025). Many gacha games alleviate this problem by introducing a “pity system”, which guarantees a rare reward after a certain number of pulls (Ma, 2025). These systems have been analysed as revenue mechanisms that balance chance, guaranteed rewards, and player behaviour, with some resembling gambling under certain conditions. (Chen and Fang 2023).

Developers like HoYoverse use limited-time banners and compelling character design to encourage long-term engagement and spending (Qi 2025). Yet, player response may not be fully determined by these mechanics alone. Many players engage in elaborate “summoning rituals” before attempting to pull for a desired character, believing that certain contexts or behaviours might influence the outcome. In *Genshin Impact* (HoYoverse 2020), such rituals often take place at collectively constructed “lucky” spaces, and are treated by players as meaningful sites of homage where symbolic luck could matter. Many travel to specific in-game locations such as “Barbatos' statue in Mondstadt”, “the Grand Narukami Shrine”, “Qingyun Peak”¹, among other locations tied to a character's lore or spots the community has deemed lucky, before summoning desired characters. Others engage in communal “prayers” in online forums (USC Digital Folklore Archives n.d.; Huang 2023) or perform exaggerated in-game “sacrifices” meant to summon luck or appease the “Gacha Gods”².

These practices emerge organically within player communities, and circulate through livestreams, TikTok, YouTube, Twitch streams, and Discord servers, where reactions to luck or misfortune become entertainment and social currency (Zhang 2024). Pulls performed on stream are viewed as authentic moments of joy, frustration, and disbelief, strengthening bonds between players, audiences, and characters. Players often describe themselves as “lucky,” “cursed,” or “blessed,” suggesting that luck

becomes more than a mechanic; it functions as an identity marker shaped through community interaction. This raises questions about what gacha pulls actually *are* for players. The rituals suggest that gacha systems might function not only as transactional mechanisms but as possible sites of player-driven devotion, where affection and desire become ritualised.

This paper seeks to explore whether these patterns can be understood as part of a broader emotional economy, using Genshin Impact as a primary case study. Rather than treating pulls as discrete probabilistic events, it will consider how players may transform them into emotionally charged performances that balance desire and disappointment. The aim is to examine whether these ritualised practices offer new ways of understanding the affective dimensions of gacha play, expanding beyond addiction or monetisation-focused frameworks. With the use of digital ethnography across Genshin-related online communities and discussion forums on Reddit and Discord, this study shall attempt to analyze rituals, trends, and shared superstitions around gacha luck. It also analyzes publicly shared summoning videos to identify recurring ritual patterns. Together, these methods will allow the paper to explore how players collectively produce meaning around gacha systems and how these practices may transform gacha pulls into socially shaped experiences rather than isolated, individual acts.

In doing so, this investigation may provide insight into how gacha can be understood as a socio-cultural practice. Accordingly, this paper seeks to contribute to game studies by reframing gacha pulls as potentially ritualised, performative, and identity-forming practices. It considers how livestream culture might amplify emotional performance and how players possibly create meaning and belonging within systems defined by chance. Ultimately, players appear to participate in an affective economy of luck, where social recognition and personal identity may become intertwined with the randomness of the pull.

ENDNOTES

¹ These locations are frequently cited in player discourse across Reddit forums, player-created guides on HoYoLAB, and short-form YouTube videos. See, for example, the community-authored compilation on [GenshinDB](#).

² The term “Gacha Gods” is a colloquial expression used by players to personify luck or fate within gacha systems. Most commonly found in memes, satirical forum posts, and livestream commentary.

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BIO

Alina Qureshi is a graduate student in game design at Aalto University, studying how games tell emotional stories, build community, and shape player relationships. A longtime player of gacha games, they explore engagement, and identity in these systems. As a generalist programmer in the games industry, she enjoys making games of all genres, from roguelites to otome. She thrives in game jams, debugging, and experimental development, blending research and practice to craft meaningful, player-driven experiences.