

**ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGY BEHIND THE PLAYERS’
CONSUMPTION OF VIRTUAL ITEMS VIA GACHA
SYSTEM IN *FIRE EMBLEM HEROES* USING STUART
HALL’S ENCODING AND DECODING THEORY**

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ABSTRACT

Dalam tugas akhir ini saya akan menganalisa ideologi dari para pemain yang mengonsumsi barang virtual dalam video game *Fire Emblem Heroes*. Selain ideologi, dalam penelitian ini juga saya akan mencari tahu kenapa para pemain rela membeli barang virtual menggunakan uang asli. Video game tersebut menggunakan sistem yang banyak digunakan oleh industri game saat ini yaitu sistem *gacha*. Sistem *gacha* adalah sistem yang menyediakan hadiah secara acak dan dengan kemungkinan yang sangat kecil untuk hadiah langka. Tujuan digunakannya sistem tersebut adalah untuk mendapatkan keuntungan sebanyak mungkin dikarenakan oleh keefektifitasannya dan dapat membuat pemain ketagihan.

Dalam penelitian ini, data didapatkan dari responden hasil survei dalam jaringan. Responden kemudian dibagi menjadi tiga kategori yaitu *dominated*, *oppositional*, dan *negotiated*. Pembagian responden didasarkan oleh bagaimana responden menanggapi ideologi kapitalis dari pengembang video game. Dari penelitian ini, dapat ditarik kesimpulan bahwa alasan para pemain rela menghabiskan uang mereka dipengaruhi oleh faktor eksternal seperti identifikasi sebagai penggemar dan elemen sosial, dan juga faktor internal seperti penerapan sistem *gacha* itu sendiri. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bagaimana di dalam proses konsumsinya, mayoritas dari responden telah terdominasi ideologi kapitalisme.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Video games are an interactive entertainment that could be played digitally on some media such as computer and game consoles (Owen). Currently, video game is undeniably one of the most popular cultural products in the world. It is stated by Gough that the number of active gamers worldwide in 2019 has reached approximately 2,471 million. Moreover, Dobrilova stated that video game industries worldwide worth is estimated to have reached the number of \$135 billion in 2018 and it is expected to be increasing in the future. These numbers clearly show how significant video games have become today since it was first invented.

Video games have developed rapidly since their conception in the 1940's. The earliest recognized example of the game machine was invented by Dr. Edward Uhler Condon at the New York World's Fair in 1940 (Chikhani). Since then, one aspect of video games that has developed very significantly is their graphics. Berman stated that the video games in the 80's and 90's were mostly pixelated and had grainy composure on them. However, with the development of the CGI effects

technology, video game graphic become more realistic and similar to real life objects. Another aspect of video games that has changed fundamentally is how the game is played. In the past, video games were played offline as home entertainment, but with internet connection nowadays people can play online video games together with other players who live far apart. Technology allows “millions around the world to enjoy gaming as a shared activity” (Chikhani). In the last ten years, as the use of mobile phones becomes more popular, video game industry also follows with the development of mobile games. These rapid developments of mobile technology “have created an explosion of mobile gaming, which is set to overtake revenue from console-based gaming in 2015” (Chikhani).

In the past, players had to buy video games to consume it. In other words, players had to buy the console and the hard copy of the game to play it. However, most mobile games are now using *freemium* business model or also known as *free-to-play* (Nations). *Freemium* or *free-to-play* app is “an app that you can download for free but that includes in-app-purchase to produce revenue. The players do not have to purchase anything but the items for sale are often feature or extras that make the app more functional or enjoyable” (Nations). Despite being free, the game developer implements such system to earn profit from it by applying microtransactions system. Agarwal stated that microtransactions system is “in-game purchases that unlock specific features or gives the user special abilities, characters or content.” One of many ways game developers could apply in-game transaction is through a system called *gacha* or *loot box*, which is used by most of the developers in order to monetize the player (Batt).

According to Drummond and Sauer, 'loot box' is "a catch-all term for a digital container of randomized rewards." In other words, *gacha* and loot box is a box containing a lot of random rewards that may help the players to advance in the game or to grow stronger by getting powerful items or characters. Players do not actually need to buy the box using real money because there is a virtual currency that they could get by beating quests and challenges. However, there are problems as Harvey stated that the stages may become more and more difficult as the players are in urge to get a better equipment called "paywall." According to Panovska, the paywall system is "designed to allow access to a small portion of content before a pop-up blocks the rest of the content in some way," or in this context is a limit to get the in-game currency for free. Players may therefore start considering purchasing the box hoping they will get rare items. Harvey also stated that loot box or *gacha* may seem to be part of a gaming experience but it turns out to be another way to monetize the players. Griffith stated the other problem of loot box or *gacha* is "the activity definitely constitutes a form of gambling by almost any definition of gambling currently used in the field of social sciences." *Gacha* system is considerably related to gambling activity as the players unconsciously gamble to get the items or characters they want from the box.

Despite the problems, some players still willingly spend their money on *gacha* or loot box. This research aims to find out the reason why the players spend their money for virtual items. It becomes a problem because there is no guarantee that to get the characters that the players want even after they spend their money. *Gacha* or loot box is also related to gambling which makes it more problematic.

One of the games that is using the *gacha* or loot-box system is called *Fire Emblem Heroes*.

Fire Emblem Heroes is the mobile game version of the Fire Emblem series released in 2017. Fire Emblem is a series that comprises strategy/role-playing games with deep tactical elements and depth that increases with every move you make.” (What is Fire Emblem?). *Fire Emblem Heroes* is developed by Intelligent System and published by Nintendo for Android and iOS. The players have to step into battle bringing four units to defeat the enemies in the story mode. Beside the story mode, the players may also compete against other players in the arena and aiming to be in the top of the scoreboard. In order to achieve this goal, the players would need to collect better units as new units would be released every month. In this game, the chance of getting rare units via *gacha* system is around 1% or lower, which is explicitly stated on the game itself. The chance is small enough to make the player desperate to quit the game or to spend their real money in order to get the characters they want.

I choose *Fire Emblem Heroes* as my research object for several reasons. The first reason is because I play the game myself, so I have known this game better compared to other games, which made it easier for me to do a thorough research on it. The second reason is its popularity as it is estimated that the game has reached 14 million downloads from the App Store. Beside the number of downloads, the revenue of *Fire Emblem Heroes* has reached \$400 million worldwide in 2018 as stated by Fogel. The third reason is because *Fire Emblem Heroes* has communities on various platforms like Reddit, Facebook and the others, which made it easier for me to obtain data on *Fire Emblem Heroes* players. I am going to find out the

ideology behind the consumption of the players in this community. According to Cole, ideology is “the lens through which a person views the world.” Therefore, in order to do that I am going to use Stuart Hall’s Encoding and Decoding theory to find out about that particular ideology.

Stuart Hall’s Encoding and Decoding model of communication basically explains that “the meaning is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver and that these encoded meanings may be decoded to mean something else.” (Abugu). This theory is going to be used to find out the ideology behind the consumption process of the players, particularly capitalism. Amadeo stated that capitalism is “an economic system which the productions of goods and services are privately owned and operated for a profit.” Capitalism itself has negative effects as Agarwal stated that “Private ownership of the factors of production enables companies to gain monopoly power. These private companies with monopoly power can exploit their position to charge higher price.” In the other words, with capitalism the company can get as much profit as possible. In case of game company, they can charge the price as high as they want and it gives them power to control the price. It may or may not give advantage to the players. Applying the Stuart Hall’s theory, in this research the developer of the game is regarded as the encoder who send the messages, while the players are considered the ones who receive the message or the decoder.

How the players receive the message will be different depending on the ideology of the players. Therefore, Hall came up with three hypothetical categories form which how the message is constructed (Abugu). The first category is the dominant position, which is described as a time when the encoder “decodes the

message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded” (Abugu). The second category is negotiated position which is “a situation where they must make up their own separate rules to coexist with the dominant position” (Abugu). The third category is the oppositional position, which happens when “the viewer perfectly understands both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way” (Abugu).

In this context, the developer as the encoder sends the message which is to earn money from the players. On the other hand, the players as the decoder is the ones who receive the message. However, in this research, the decoder will be divided into three categories. The first one is those who are aware about the ideology of the developer, which is capitalism, but still willingly spend their money. This category is called the dominated. The second are those who reject the capitalism. This category is called the opposition. The third are those who accept or reject the ideology of capitalism, but with some negotiations which may vary from one individual to another. This category is called the negotiated. The application of this theory will help me find out the ideology as well as the meaning behind the practice of virtual item consumption in *Fire Emblem Heroes*. Thus, whether the players are fully embracing the capitalism ideology used by the video game industry or whether there are other meanings or ideology behind their consumption could be revealed.

Statement of the Problem

The problems I am going to discuss are:

1. Why do the players spend their money on virtual items in *Fire Emblem Heroes*?
2. What are the players' ideologies behind the consumption process of virtual items via loot boxes or gacha system in *Fire Emblem Heroes*?

Purpose of the Study

Based on problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. To show why the players spend their money on virtual items in *Fire Emblem Heroes*;
2. To show the players' ideologies behind the consumption process of virtual items via loot boxes or gacha system in *Fire Emblem Heroes*.

Method of Research

In this research, I used a qualitative method in which I distributed questionnaires to the community of *Fire Emblem Heroes* on Facebook as well as doing some online interviews to the players answering the questionnaire. Bhat stated that a qualitative research is defined as "research method that focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication." I choose a qualitative method because it enables me to get in-depth information about the meaning behind the practice of purchasing virtual items in *Fire Emblem Heroes*. I distributed the questionnaires for a week. For this research, I chose to obtain the data from *Fire Emblem Heroes* group on Facebook because it is one of the most active communities of *Fire Emblem Heroes* with 4781 members. The target

respondents were in the age range of 18 – 35 or younger because most of the active gamers are in this age range according to Yanev. I also did some internet research in order to help me obtain information for this research. At the end of this research, I want to find out the ideology behind consumption process on Fire Emblem Heroes players.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of three chapters, starting with the Acknowledgment, Table of Contents, and Abstract. Chapter One contains Introduction, which consists of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains Ideology Analysis through Player's Consumption of Virtual Items via Gacha System in Fire Emblem Heroes Using Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding Theory. Chapter Three contains Conclusion of the thesis with the Bibliography and the Appendices, which consist of the answers of the respondents.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCUSSION

Fire Emblem series (hereafter will be called FE) is a series which tells about life at war with the assistance of magic and mythical creatures like dragons and such. Each series has their own background story, some are related and some are not. However, in *Fire Emblem Heroes* (hereafter will be called FEH), all characters from all of the previous series of FE appear. The characters from the very first series of FE can fight alongside the characters from the recent series. FEH also has its own story with its own exclusive characters who have never appeared before together with the other FE characters. In order to get the characters that they want, the players need to summon them using the in-game currency called orbs.

Players may need to collect orbs through clearing stages in story modes or events. Players get one orb for each stage they clear and they could get to five when there are special events. In order to do a summoning session, players need to pay five orbs. There is a total of five stones containing the character that they have to choose when players are summoning characters. There is a limited number of stages that players could clear to get orbs, or in other words the orbs are extremely limited.

However, there are always new characters that are released and can be obtained every month. Thus at some point, in order to do a summoning session players are forced to buy orbs with real money.

In each summoning banner there is a percentage of the chance of getting the units. Three-star unit is 36.00%, four-star unit is 58%, five-star unit is 3% and another 3% for five stars focus unit. There is a total of 134 five-star unit, so the chance to get specific units is very little. There are mostly 3 to 4 units for the five stars focus unit, so the chance of getting the focus unit is about 1% or less. The number of 1% is very little and there is addition of the chance of the appearance of the specific colored stones will make chance even lesser.

The small chance makes players run out of orbs quickly and spend their real money on this virtual item. Despite the small chance of getting rare units, a lot of players still spend their money on FEH. This is proven as stated by Fogel that the revenue of FEH has reached \$400 million worldwide. This case makes me curious about their reasons and their ideology for spending their money for virtual items. Because there is no guarantee to get rare units even after they spend their real money on the game.

In order to answer the question of why FEH players spend their money on virtual items, I chose to distribute a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed by posting the link in one of the most active online group of FEH on Facebook. The reason why I distributed them on Facebook is because the group consists of a lot of people with various backgrounds. The questions were made to ensure that the respondents would make it clear what the ideology behind their

consumption is. Some of the questions that I asked to the respondents are the followings:

- Do you spend real money on this game?
- How much do you spend your money in this game?
- What do you do when you do not spend real money?
- Why do you spend or not spend real money on this game knowing the chance are very little?
- What do you think about games which use *gacha* system?
- What do you think about the practice of spending real money on virtual items?”

According to Yanev, the group aged 18 – 35 years old “apparently plays the most, considering 29% of gamers belong there.” Therefore, the target respondents are in the range of 18 – 35 years old. Yanev also states that in a survey, there are analyzed data about the gaming behavior by student shows that “16.3% of aged 18 -24 stated that they had spent money on video games. They were followed by those aged 25 – 27 with 14.0%, and 28 – 30 years old with 12.2%.” However, the respondent who under 18 are still acceptable as the data show that one of the most active age group are “boys under 18, representing 17% of all gamers.”

This questionnaire was distributed through Google Form to make it easier for me to collect the data and for the respondent to answer. In order to make sure the respondent matches criteria, I also asked about their age and occupation to know their background better. then, respondents who were older than 35 years old were omitted from the survey.

There were 49 respondents who participated in this research, and most of the respondents were in the range of 14 – 30 years old. The data show 25 respondents spend their money on the game and 24 do not. The respondents were divided into three categories. The first one is the dominated, which includes those who accept capitalism and spend their money in the game, the second is the oppositional, those who do not spend their money and reject capitalism, and the third is the negotiated, those who accept or reject capitalism with some negotiation. The following table below shows the responses from the participant:



Table 1.

	How old are you?	What is your occupation?	How long have you played Fire Emblem Heroes?	For what reasons do you play this game?	Do you spend real money on this game?	If the answer is yes, how much do you spend your money in this game?	If the answer is no, what do you do to get the characters that you want? (for examples rerolling the gacha)
1	22	Student	3-4 months?	Because of Robin	No		Save orbs on legendary banners
2	30	Teacher	Since launch	I love it!	Yes	AUD\$12000	
3	30	Bookseller	3 years	Fire Emblem is my favorite franchise.	Yes	Too much, around 30\$ per months sometime more...	
4	20	Cashier	3 Years (Since release)	Its a simple chilled version of Fire Emblem	No		I have a main team, i mainly try to get new skills for this team. Otherwise i will just summon for characters i like.
5	20	Customer Service	Like, a year almost?	It's fun and I like fire emblem	Yes	I try to not spend a lot, but 30\$ here or there maybe	

6	19	Student	3 years and 7 months	Favorite game in Nintendo franchise	No		Either saving orbs or just YOLO (summoning with the last 5 orbs) summons
7	29	Software Engineer	Since the game was released	I enjoy the strategy	No		I just make the best of whatever I get.
8	21	College student	2 years	For fun	Yes	More than 300.000 Rupiah	
9	14	High School Student	2-Jan	I like fire emblem	No		I just pray for characters I want.
10	22	Creating my Startup company	Since June 2017	I Love The Series and for nostalgia since i played sacred stone when i was a child	Yes	I can't recall	-
11	19	Patient Transporter	Launch day	It is fun, fire emblem has been my favorite games	No		Save orbs
12	33	Broker	More than 2 years	I like fire emblem	Yes	4 US dollar total	
13	19	Complicated	Around a year, maybe a half more?	I like Fire Emblem	No		I save smartly and pray

14	22	Student/Lawyer	Seance the beginning	Is Fire Emblem	No		I save orbs
15	21	Indonesia, Bandung	2 years	Gacha and Show off 5 star	Yes	2,5 Millions	
16	16	Clerk	Since 1st summer banner	I like the characters	No		
17	19	College student	2 years	Pass time	No		Save orbs
18	21	Student	Less than a year	Bored and mostly busy. Need some good fast-paced game.	No	Possibly not more than 300k	Try to re-play the whole game using a new account. Try to grind as much as possible. Pray to the RNG goddess :v
19	28	Analyst	2 years	Big fan of the game	Yes	Around \$50	
20	19	Special Education EA	Since Launch	I'm a die-hard FE fan	Yes	Only when a unit I love to death is released	
21	20	University student	Since the launch of the game	My friend recommended it to me because it was strategical-related game.	No		Just save up orbs in certain banners pretty much. Only go for banners that you see a unit you really like or know it'll be OP.

22	23	Grocery Store Employee	Aug-17	Big FE fan	No		Just summon on the focus color and hope for the best.
23	25	Engineer	2 years	Because I like Fire Emblem	Yes	\$60	
24	19	Student	8 months	It's addictive and you need to use your brain to make awesome strategies	Yes	1000 Mexican Pesos (like 55 dollars)	-
25	18	Student	3 years	Waifus and strategy	No		Save a ton of orbs
26	23	Retail - Customer Service	Since the beginning	I like the series	Yes	Depends on the banner. No more than \$150	
27	19	Work with my dad for plumbing	Since it came out	Well I really do enjoy tactic games and Fire Emblem is one of them and I do love my characters in FEH.	Yes	5-20 something dollars.	
28	19	College Student	Since it was launched	Better then other gatcha games	Yes	Over 100 dollars	

29	19	Author	A year	For fun, strategy, and to learn more about Fire Emblem	No		Just save up orbs or wait for them to come around again
30	19	School	2 years	I like Fire emblem	No		Skip every banner til the character(s) appear
31	15	Student	1 year	Because I love the fire emblem series and I love gacha games	No		Eh, If I didn't get it then I don't. But I skipped banners sometimes to save up orbs for holiday banners.
32	21	Freelance.	6months.	I like strategy game.	No		Grinding.
33	28	Unemployed	Since Launch	Favorite series	Yes	Rarely	
34	18	No occupation as of right now	Since freshman year	To enhance my fire emblem knowledge	Yes	\$20.00	
35	26	Office Jockey	Since Launch	Hobby/Enjoyment	Yes	I have It spent 5,000 since launch as a total.	
36	17	Full Time Student	Since Release	Fun	Yes	Not a ton	
37	20 years	Kitchener	2 years	For fun and the waifus	Yes	Not much, like 10 dlls for month	

38	20	Collage student	Six months	I saw characters on the game and immediately fell in love with the whole series	No		Save the orbs for the character that I want
39	19	Ceo	At start	Funny	Yes	2k	
40	23	engineer	~6 months	favourite game and does not take too much time	No		skip banners that i find irrelevant
41	16	Schoolboy	almost 1 year	cuz I like fire emblem, and based on the gameplay i saw on youtube, it looks pretty fun	No		save some orbs for them, if the one i like is on *4/*3, i would save their copies
42	23	Science Student	since the first day it got out, 2 and a half year ago	Because I love the universe	Yes	I may have spend 60 spaced on the 2.5 year of playing	
43	20	Studying	Two years	Its fun (but also I've spend so much time on this game that I dont want to abandon what Ive got since meta changes fast).	Yes	240\$	

44	30	Teacher	3 years	Fun	No		Save orbs
45	18	I study	Since launch but I stopped playing and then I started playing again in July 2018	Fire Emblem is my second favorite franchise of all time and I really love it	Yes	I used to spend money constantly but I don't do that anymore, I only buy the promo orbs pack because I think they are fair and not that expensive.	I save orbs, it's not that hard if you have clear goals in mind for your favorite characters or fodder you need
46	21	Undergraduate/University Student	Around 5-6 months	I got interested by my friends playing the game, I've seen my friends played a number of times.	Yes	I've spent around 500 thousand rupiah.	
47	13	School lmao	Since fallen Corrin came out	I like Fire Emblem	Yes	20\$	
48	21	Service crew	1 year	I like playing tactical rpg and i love fire emblem game	No		Saving orbs, playing events and getting daily rewards

49	26	Freelance	Since release	I like FE: Awakening	No		I don't. I just summon and be happy with whatever I get.
	Why do you spend or not spend real money on this game?		In your opinion, why do you or other people spend real money on this game knowing the chance of getting rare units are very little?		What do you think about games which use gacha or loot box system?		What do you think about the practice of spending real money on virtual items?
1	Too expensive		I think it's the concept of the RNG loot box system. The delayed gratification of getting a reward.		Effective and addictive		I have no opinion
2	Because I had a problem. I have since ceased.		They have an addiction like I did or have lots of money.		I don't mind at all.		It's fine in moderation, as is anything.
3	To try To get my favorite characters.		I like To encourage that franchise. If my money can help To create more fire emblem, I'm happy.		It's the only game like that I spend money.		It's like downloading dlc for other games.
4	I love the game but its never anything serious for me i just pick it up and play for a bit, i dont particularly need every unit because i know some characters i just won't use		Its a gacha game, everybody wants a lot from it and its essentially a form of gambling in a way, people will try to gamble real money to get the best things (in this case new heroes). And it can be hard to stop yourself from just adding in some money if you		I think they're okay because they're not something i care too much about, as long as it doesn't turn the game into a pay to win system like FIFA packs they're fine.		I think its good, a lot of people struggle to find enjoyment, for people who dont like or cannot leave their house, Video games might be their only form of entertainment, if people want to invest heavily into a game then they shouldn't

		don't get the unit you were summoning for.		have to be limited. People should be allowed to spend money their own way.
5	I have a gambling addiction	I have a gambling addiction and when i win it gives me serotonin and makes me happy	They are predatory and annoying but I have a gambling addiction and love them	It's really pointless because they're not tangible things but like I also thought it was actually illegal too lol But like anyway Whatever
6	I don't spend money on the game because of how expensive it is for our currency. (Philippines)	Because of investment, fan support and of course, the game is generous enough to players.	It's addictive if done right. Also bad for the psychological state of people which encourages them to gamble.	It's fine as long as it is in moderation.

7	Even if I spent money, I probably wouldn't get everything I wanted.	It becomes an addiction, similar to gambling	It's a bit rough on the players, but I understand companies have to make money and they do what works.	If people want to do it, that's their thing. It's not so different from paying for a video game in general.
8	Because I can	Because they really want to get the character that they want	Fun	None
9	I'm broke lmao	Dominance I guess.	Developers need to make money somehow	Kinda shitty but can't control it
10	Because there are some characters that I want and sometimes luck is not on my side	Because they really want that Unit	Ehh idc. I'm not usually like this type of game since it's the same as gambling but because it's the only FE mobile games why not play it	TBH not good because the money can be saved or used to buy daily needs
11	I don't have the money to whale	To keep the game going	It's ok	I think it can get out of hand
12	I just spent for beginner pack	I don't know	It's ok as long as the rate is fair	They can spend on whatever they want.
13	If I spend money, it should be to guarantee getting something in return, not throwing it all on a game that won't matter in the future and that can make everything you get obsolete by simply shutting down the servers.	The idea "you never know" might play into it and as such, they chance it. ...And it may be a little too easy to simply spend more when you've started paying.	If you buy or spend things, it should be to get what you want in return. Spending money and expecting nothing in return is charity. Spending money and expecting something and not getting it or	The life of something adds to the value of it regardless of price, so something you use forever is near priceless. I guess it depends on if you think the purchase was worth it yourself.

			anything in return is close to being robbed.	
14	Becouse is just a game and I can just save the currency for when my favourite is up.	I think people spend money on this game mostly for merging the units, becouse getting them is not all that hard even with really low pursanteges.	They are like gambling, and that is fun.	Is unnecessary if managed your resources well enough.
15	To get 5 star heroes	Cause this game is so fun and some people want to show off their rare unit to their friends or public. Basically, they want to collide with their wealth.	Fun to collide a wealth and test our luck.	Very nice, make a developer rich. But actually, wasted money for me.
16	Im not stupid	They have money to spare	They alright	Not good idea
17	I do not have enough money to spend on orbs	Increased chances for the characters they like if they can financially afford it.	Can either be frustrating or very rewarding	Currently blown out of proportion

18	I don't really feel the need to spend real money on a gacha game. It feels way too desperate for me. Maybe I would do it in the future, but only if I wanted to support the developer/ game series.	I think it's because people mostly like to live in the present and enjoy the moment (those fleeting moments), though... it's pretty much the same as gambling in a casino, but people do it anyway for a chance for them to be happy. The mindset is somehow a bit materialistic, but In my opinion... Aren't we all a bit materialistic also(?)	I personally enjoy gacha rpg games, mainly because they have a good story that goes along with it, and maybe because I somehow just like to discover new things (new units and such).	I personally think that it's perfectly fine and other people should start treating in app purchase as something that is "real". (Times are changing) I do it every month or so, mainly for rhythm games (where you can unlock songs and play them over and over again without ever worrying of it being "not good enough" (as in gacha games, where as time goes by, the new ones over powered the old one). In my opinion, virtual items especially the ones in game is pretty much real, as it gives us new facilities to enjoy in the game itself and also at the same time feeds those who made the game themselves. After thinking, I think the practice of spending real money on virtual items is not really the problem, but
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				rather the culture of gambling in the game itself.
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19	For the characters	Passion	All or nothing	Depends on personal opinion
20	I just wanna collect them like Pokemon	Because I know I'll get them eventually	Think Overwatch, where Lootboxes are cosmetic	If you earned the money, spend it how you please
21	I don't really spend money on this game because it's more of a waste to do so and if the game ever shuts down, then all that goes to a waste as well.	I think they spend a whole lot of money in this game because they probably just want to show off and use the best of the best units so that everything can be easy for them. Also I don't blame them too much if they really love a certain unit to summon.	I guess it's debatable for some games. Overwatch for instance, I don't really care much about lootboxes since they're only skins, highlights, and all that good stuff. Nothing that'll be advantageous over others which I find it a good thing.	Unless the game will stay forever, I think the money will be wasted. But I understand that money will boost the content for this game as well, which is an appreciation to all the money spenders.
22	I actually spent \$40 trying to get Micaiah when she came out, and I didn't get her. That soured me from ever spending money on the game.	It varies from person to person. Some just want to be elite and be the best of the best, some just the Heroes and want them badly.	I don't care for it much, and Heroes is the only one I play.	I've always looked down on it.
23	I shouldn't have.	Because they want to +10 them	Only good if generous with the premium currency.	Don't do it.
24	-	The point it's how lucky are you. One day you are the luckiest person in the world but another day just not. I thinks that's one of the addictive things of the game.	It's a easy way to make money, actually.	In my case, I only spend money for have better units more faster; in other games I guess it's the same; for go more faster in the game
25	I don't see value in the orbs for sale	They really want them	Its entertaining	I don't see a problem

26	I honestly shouldn't. The fame might die in the future but it's usually only for my favorite characters but I got bad for a couple months and did it for anything ground breaking and my barracks huge but I use only my favorites and a handful of OP characters. Don't recommend spending unless it's like your all time favorite and that alone.	Gambling addiction for sure. When you get lucky a bunch or finally get the one you want it's just like yes finally. I feel like trying to stay in the "meta" also takes a big toll.	Honestly hate it. Wish there was a way to earn at least one randomized item/unit/skin/etc. out of the ones you want but that wouldn't drive revenue.	Impractical for sure but as long as you don't go overboard I think it's okay to spend money on things you enjoy.
27	Well if the legendary banner comes out then I would spend money since you have a lot of chances of getting the heroes you want since you only get exclusive heroes and don't get pity break from heroes that are not part of the banner	You may never know and it's possible to get lucky	Seems cool and everything but always be careful not to go overboard	Debatable but unsure
28	To get my favorite unit	To get waifu or husbando or even get the units skill for inheritance	Better than single summon and it's very unique	Not much, just gambling or collection
29	I don't need to spend money on this game. It isn't as much of a priority for me as actual money-needing things are	People who spend money on this game either have a lot of money, or they don't make good monetary decisions.	I don't mind them because I know it's random. I'm not necessarily a fan of the pay-to-win format but you don't need broken units to be good.	I don't like it. I only spend money on things I need or things I'll use a lot.

30	Anyone can be good whether they spend money or not	People love the fire emblem franchise and they want this game to last a long time	I think they're good. It just depends on your luck and who you end up getting	I don't see myself spending money on a game just yet. Probably in the future but won't be spending much
31	It is not worth it to buy orbs when the game is quite generous to give orbs.	Of course for their beloved unit. Also because they just want to the strongest in the game	As long as the gacha rate is not bullsh*t as FGO, it is good.	It's not worth it, really. There's much to spend in real life other than games
32	The deal is too expensive.	Because of Waifu or husbando.	Its good	Thats not really good
33	Mostly spend on deals or if I need a unit enough that I'm desperate	Everyone wants to be the best	If the game is free-to-play, I don't see a problem	You can absolutely buy happiness.
34	To get orbs	People want the units that they want even if it's five star focus	Makes me nervous and luck based	Some people may think it's useless to be spending their money, but they should save up Their money it's pointless.
35	The gamble of getting the character I want and if I like the character are factors.	The risk like gambling. You don't know if the odds are in your favor.	I don't like it, but I am biased as fire emblem is quiet enjoyable.	I think it's silly, but I do it.
36	Why not	It's almost like the lottery, you do it because you know there is gonna be a reward eventually	Love em	To each his own
37	I spend	Maybe they are a little obsessed sometimes	It's the worse, but it works	If you have the money and you work for it, go ahead

38	Yes: when I'm desperate and there are no more source of orbs' No: When I'm lucky and already get the character that I want	In my own opinion, it is because that someone is desperate enough to get the character, despite having a little chance	Quiet challenging, but also quiet annoying in a way	Actually it is a bit foolish, but despite being foolish people are driven to do so, including me
39	I wanna have my fave units	It give to low orbs if you buy orbs this the reason why i use so many money	Veey good	Its ok but if it good deal perfekt
40	at the end of the day, it is just a game to enjoy and relax	coz they are whalers lol	in mean thats why it is so good to play, the rng is just too unpredictable and sometimes i get the units from a free summon and it feels good	pricey but then again, thats how they make profit

41	i dont want to be involved with real money gambling	they are desperate	if it is a friendly f2p gacha game, everyone can enjoy it, otherwise if it is a p2w gacha game with a very low *5 rate and without any generous supports from the developers, then that will lead most people to desperation	it is ok as long as it is not used to gamble and it worths the price
42	To make myself a little of happiness, trying to get the characters I like	To find some happiness during hard times or just to get the character we love the most when it's possible	A good way to maintain a game working because it takes time to have everything if not too hard to get the ressources	It helps the game designer to keep it going
43	I know I shouldn't (and I stopped doing it) but it was to get a character I really liked in the FE games.	Maybe because we enjoy that moment the unit is going to appear or just because we don't like to spare orbs (but today I do spare them since I have a good team so I don't spend money anymore).	Honestly it's like casinos, I'm not sure it's the best way (morally) to make the game profitable but since mobile games are usually free, competition is hard. But I think/hope it's going to change (excellent games like DQ or FF are on the store but aren't free).	Well the game has to make profit so the studio can upload new content and maybe make new games. As long as the money spent is paid for a genuine work (or investment for future projects) I'm ok with it.
44	Funds are tight	To get what we want to have fun	Fun as long as I can be just as successful with free to play	No idea really

45	Mm well as I said I think the promo orb packs are not that bad and not that expensive, though I do think its not good to spend real money on a gacha game	Gambling is addictive, once you get the unit you want after spending money its something self-conscious that you kinda want to spend money again eventhough its not healthy unless you have a lot of money.	They take advantage of the playerbase and try to constantly make the player want to spend, they are really bad, thats why I dont really like gacha games and just play feh because I love fire emblem	Its bad and people should be more conscious about it
46	I spent money because first time buying the deal, there is a free unit.	Probably it is our impulse when seeing a microtransaction.	I think it is still good when it is not a pay to win system. When it crosses that line, it is a "bad" game.	It is a good way to support the developer if it is not a pay to win system.
47	Progressing faster	Maybe I'm lucky then	Fun, can just be the worst sometimes	Ok
48	I don't. I dont think its worth. there still a chance that you could get a rare character without spending a money	They like the art or the character or they want to get specific skills	I think its just really about luck whether they spend money or not theres a chance that they could get rare character	Its fine as long as you spend your own money on it
49	It's a gacha and endless game. Spending here brings no satisfaction in my opinion.	Because the desire to get a favourite hero or addictive summoning habit.	They should be free to play.	I think it's fine if you really want the virtual item.

The Dominated

The dominated category as previously mentioned before, consists of respondents who is aware of the developer's capitalist ideology, but still spend their money on FEH. There is a total of 21 out of 49 respondents who in the dominated category. The respondents are # 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 15, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 42, 43, and 47. The respondents are categorized based on the question of whether they are aware of the ideology of the developer and whether they spend real money or not.

Based on the question of how much real money have they spent on *Fire Emblem Heroes*, the answers vary. The average money that the respondents have spent varies from \$20 up to \$150. However, the lowest amount of money is around \$4 and the highest is around \$2000, \$5000, and \$8000. Thus, even though all of the respondents in this category spend their money, the amount of money they spend varies. It shows that people do not always spend a great deal of money even though they are categorized in the dominated category. The amount of money that they spend could also reflect how invested and committed they are in consuming the game.

When it comes to the reasons of why the respondents are willing to spend their money on this game, the most common answer is to get specific characters that they want. The respondents with such answers are respondent #8, 10, 19, 20, 26, 28, 33, 34, 39, 42, and 43. Their answers are all similar. For example, respondent #8 stated that he or she really wants to get the characters that he or she wants. From their answers, it can be revealed that for these players, the main reason for them to

spend money on this game is to get specific characters they want, which could only be obtained through *gacha* system.

Meanwhile, respondent #15 and 33 stated that they spend their money because of pride. Respondent #15 stated that some people want to show off their rare characters to their friends or to the public, and sometimes they want to show off their wealth too. Respondent #33 also stated that he or she mostly spends on deals if he or she is desperate enough to get a certain character, but he or she also stated that everyone wants to be the best or in other words it is pride. From their answers, it can be revealed that by obtaining specific or rare characters in the game, the players can show off their achievement to their friends or the game community. That is why it is common for the players to post pictures of rare characters in a group chat so that they could get praised or get acknowledgement from the others.

When being asked the same question, respondent #3 stated that the other reason is to support the franchise as he or she stated “I like to encourage that franchise. If my money can help to create more fire emblem, I’m happy.” There is also respondent #39 who stated that he or she spends money because he or she is forced to. The respondent stated that the game is not generous enough to give free in-game currency, so he or she has to buy the in-game currency using real money. From both answers, there can be seen a contradiction between players, who intentionally spend their money to support the game on one hand and some players also spend their money because of the mechanism of the game that forced them to do so.

There are several respondents who stated that they spend money because of addiction. Respondent #2 spends his or her money because of his or her addiction to the game. In other words, he or she loves this game so much that he or she does not mind spending his or her money. However, respondent #5, 24, and 37 are different. They spend their money because they are addicted to the *gacha* system itself. Respondent #24 stated that the game depends on how lucky you are -- one day you may be the luckiest one in the world and the other day you may not, and he or she thinks it is the addictive part of the game. There are also some respondents who think this game is another form of gamble and they like it. They are respondent #5, 35, 36, 43, and 47. Respondent #5 stated that he or she has a gambling addiction. Respondent #35 also stated that he or she likes “the risk of gambling, you don’t know if the odds are in your favour.” It can be concluded that some players spend their money on this game because they have an addiction either on the game or on the *gacha* system that some of the respondents consider similar to gambling.

It can be seen that the reasons why the players spend their money in this game are based on two categories, namely the game mechanism and personal reasons. In the game mechanic, it shows that some players think that they are forced to because of the limitation of the in-game currency. Based on personal reasons, social element seems to be a factor when the players spend their money to show off their rare characters to their friends and community. However, there are also players who spend their money in order to support the developer, and there are some players who spend their money because of their addiction to the game or the *gacha* system itself.

Based on the question of what their opinion regarding *gacha* system is, most of the respondents stated that they do not mind the *gacha* system at all. It is based on the answers of respondent #2, 12, 19, 33, and 42. Respondent #12 stated that *gacha* system is acceptable as long as people are careful not to go overboard. Respondent #33 thinks that *gacha* system is not entirely bad. Basically, they realize what *gacha* system is, but they still do not mind this system even though it is sometimes unfair and highly addictive. There are also several respondents such as respondent #3, 8, 15, and 36 who stated that they basically like *gacha* system, particularly respondent #15 who thinks that *gacha* system is fun for trying his or her luck.

There are also some answers that state that *gacha* system is an effective way to earn money as it is stated by respondent #24, 37, and 39. Respondent #24 stated that *gacha* system is an easy way to earn money while #39 stated that *gacha* system is very good indeed to earn money.

Some respondents actually considered *gacha* system as annoying, but they like it for some reasons. This answer is based on respondent #5, 10, 20, 26, 35, and 47. Respondent #5 stated that *gacha* system is actually predatory and annoying, but because he or she has a gambling addiction, it does not matter at all. Respondent #10 also stated that he or she does not like a game that use *gacha* system, however he or she does not care if it is FE series.

There also some people who stated again that *gacha* system is actually another form of gambling as respondent #28, 34, and 43 stated. Respondent #28 stated that *gacha* system is actually closely related to gambling and collection.

Respondent #34 also stated that *gacha* system is a luck-based system which is simply based on one's luck and the *gacha* system makes him or her nervous because of the result whether he or she gets rare characters or not.

From the answers above it can be revealed that most of the respondents stated that they do not mind about the *gacha* system at all. There is also a respondent who thinks that the developer has succeeded in limiting the in-game currency, so the players would be forced to buy the in-game currency. Some of the respondents stated that such system is favorable for the future development of the game. Some also think that it is related to gamble, but they think it is fine because they like it anyway. It can be concluded that even though they are fully aware that *gacha* system has negative effects, they do not mind *gacha* system, and they fully realize the capitalism ideology of the developer and still accept it anyway. This finding further shows that these respondents have been dominated by the ideology.

Furthermore, based on the question of what they think about the practice of spending real money on virtual items, the majority of the respondents believe that people may spend their money freely. This conclusion is based on the answer of respondent #5, 10, 12, 15, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 47. Respondent #20 stated that "If you earned money, spend it how you please." Respondent #37 also stated that spending real money is fine as long as you have money and you work for it. However, there are also respondents who think that it is actually useless for people to spend their money on virtual items. For instance, respondent #5 stated that "It's really pointless because they're not tangible things" but in the end he or she states that he or she likes it anyway. Respondent #26 also stated that "Impractical for sure but as long as you don't go overboard I think it's okay to spend

money on things you enjoy.” In other words, it can be argued that for these players, buying virtual items using real money is not a problem as long as they have the money. Even though some players think that it is pointless, in the end they still accept it and spend their money on virtual items.

There are also some respondents who think that it is fine to spend real money as long as the money is invested for further development of the game, as shown in the answers of respondent #3, 42, and 43. Respondent #43 stated that “Well the game has to make profit so the studio can upload new content and maybe make new games. As long as the money spent is paid for a genuine work or investment for further projects, I’m ok with it.” These respondents think that investing their real money is one of the best ways to support the developer, hoping that the developer will improve the game, so they could enjoy the new features. The profit of FEH may also be an investment for the further development of the whole *Fire Emblem* series.

Most of the respondents think that people may freely spend their real money in any way they want, whether it is on video games or other things. Some think that it is actually useless to spend their real money on video games, but they still spend their money anyway. Some also willingly spend their money in order to invest further for the game. In conclusion, the respondents accept the ideology of the developer which is capitalism, and fully support them as long as it brings a better development for the game.

All the respondents in this category can be categorized as the dominated. The category is based on the questions how much have they spent, why they spend

their money on this game, what they think about *gacha* system, and their opinions regarding the practice of spending real money on virtual items. All of their answers show that their consumption is in accordance with the developer's ideology, which is capitalism. In other words, the developer has succeeded in earning profit by using the *gacha* system, and the respondents realize about the capitalism ideology of the developer and accept it. Regarding of the game using *gacha* system, the respondents do not seem to mind about the system as some of them like the system in the first place. Most of the respondents realize the ideology of capitalism, and they think it is fine in order to support the developer.

The respondents' answers on why they spend real money on the game reveal the ideologies behind their consumption process, namely materialism and consumerism. According to Awanis, materialism is the belief that owning and buying products is necessary to achieve happiness and desirability. The materialism ideology can be seen from how some respondents spend real money to achieve desirability and happiness, for example to get certain characters or to show their achievements to their friends and community. According to Chappelow, consumerism is the tendency to own or obtain products in excess of people's basic needs. The consumerism ideology can be seen from the answers of the respondents that show how they spend money excessively to support the developer due to their addiction.

The materialism and consumerism ideologies adopted by the respondents support the capitalism ideology of the game developer. This is proven by the encoded message that was decoded by the players without any resistance. The players' intention to gain pleasure through purchasing virtual items excessively in

the game was fulfilled by the developer who took profit from such desire via the *gacha* system. The players' willingness to spend a huge amount of real money for intangible virtual items in the game to a point of addiction cannot be separated from the ideologies behind such actions. Thus, the players' ideologies which are in accordance with the developer's ideology clearly explain the consumption pattern within the dominated category.

The Oppositional

The oppositional category as previously mentioned before, is the group of respondents who do not spend their money and reject the capitalist ideology of the developer. There is a total of 16 out of 49 respondents who are included in the oppositional category. The respondents are #1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 25, 29, 31, 32, 40, 41, 48, and 49.

The respondents' answers based on the question why the respondents in this category do not spend their real money vary. One of the most common answers is because they think it is not worth it and it is only a waste of their money as stated by respondents #16, 21, 25, 29, 31, 40, and 49. Their answers show some similarities. For example, respondents #25 and 31 stated that they do not really see the value that they get from buying virtual items from the game. There is also respondent #49 who stated "It's a *gacha* and endless game. Spending here brings no satisfaction in my opinion." Thus, from their answers, it is revealed that they do not want to spend their money because they think it will waste their money. Even if they spend their money, they will not be satisfied in the end.

Furthermore, respondent #1, 6, 9, 11, 17, 32, and 44 stated that for them, the price of the orbs or the in-game currency is simply too expensive. Respondent #6 stated that he or she does not want to spend his or her money knowing how expensive it is. The price is actually debatable among the players; some may assume it is cheap while others think it is too expensive. However, in the end the price of the in-game currency is still a factor that determines whether or not the players spend their money on the game considering some of the players are on a certain budget.

On the other hand, respondent #4 and 14 think that they do not spend their real money because they do not need all the characters in the game. Respondent #4 stated that he or she loves the game, but he or she thinks he or she does not really need all the characters in the game knowing he or she will only use several characters. The developer may provide the players with hundreds or thousands of unique, attractive, or strong characters. However, the players may not find some characters to be attractive or useful for them and decide not to get some of the characters. this realisation becomes the reason why the players do not spend their real money for it.

Some of the respondents do not spend their real money because there is no guarantee to get the characters they want. Those respondents are respondent #7 and 48. Respondent #7 thinks that he or she probably will not get everything even if he or she spends real money on the game. Respondent #48 also stated that because there is a chance for the players who do not spend their money to also get rare characters, he or she decided not to spend his or her real money. Based on the answers, there is a chance to get rare characters for the players who do not

spend money, and there is no guarantee to get the characters even if they spend real money. These factors became considerations for some players who decided not to spend their real money on the game.

However, respondent #41 has a different reason on why he or she does not want to spend his or her money. Respondent #41 stated that he or she does not want to spend real money because he or she does not want to be involved with real money gambling. Some players may think the *gacha* system is closely related to gambling and thus, it becomes the reason why they do not want to spend their real money.

It can be seen that the reason why the players do not want to spend their money is because they think it is not worth it and it only wastes their money. Even if they spend their money, there is no guarantee that they will get the characters they want. The players also do not necessarily need all the characters in the game. The players think that the *gacha* is closely related to gambling and the price of the in-game currency is too expensive. All the factors above are the reasons why the respondents in this category do not spend their real money on the game.

Meanwhile, based on the question of what their opinions regarding *gacha* system are, most of the respondents stated that they actually do not object to the *gacha* system. This conclusion is based on the answer of respondents #11, 16, 21, 25, 29, 31, 32, 40, 44, and 48. Respondent #25 stated that *gacha* system is actually entertaining for him or her. Respondent #40 also stated that “in mean that’s why it is so good to play, the RNG (random number generator) is just too

unpredictable.” Thus, the respondents’ answers show that they actually like the *gacha* system where you can get the characters through random chances because that what makes it fun as long as they do not need to pay for it.

However, some of the respondents think that the *gacha* system is actually related to gambling, which becomes a factor why they do not like it. It is stated by respondents #4, 6, 7, 14, and 41. Respondent #6 stated that *gacha* system is actually bad for psychological state and encourage players to do gambling. Respondent #4 also has a similar opinion when he or she stated “Its a *gacha* game, everybody wants a lot from it and its essentially a form of gambling in a way, people will try to gamble real money to get the best things (in this case new heroes). And it can be hard to stop yourself from just adding in some money if you dont get the unit you were summoning for.” Thus, it is revealed that the respondents think that the *gacha* system is actually not good for the players because it encourages them to gamble. Its similarity to the real gamble can make players addicted which may become one of the factors why the respondents do not spend real money on the game.

However, there are also respondents who do not like the system. Those respondents are respondent #9, 17, and 49. Respondent #9 stated that he or she does not like *gacha* system because the results are too unpredictable. Respondent #49 also stated that games which use *gacha* system should not need real money to play with. Thus, it is revealed that some players do not like the *gacha* system due to the unpredictability, but it could be tolerated if it does not cost real money.

However, respondent #1 has a different opinion. Respondent #1 stated that the *gacha* system is actually effective for the developer to earn money, and this system is actually addictive for the players. Therefore, it becomes the reason why some players do not want to spend their real money as they may become addicted to the system.

Most of the respondents' answers indicate that the *gacha* system may not always be related to the decision to spend money. In fact, the *gacha* system may become the reason why the players were interested to play the game in the first place. Some players also think that the *gacha* system is effective and addictive. However, the *gacha* system is problematic for some players as they think it is closely related to gambling and it is considered a bad system. Furthermore, despite different effects of the *gacha* system on the players, the players do not find reasons to spend money as they reject the capitalism ideology.

Furthermore, based on the question of what they think about the practice of spending real money on virtual items, most of the respondents in this category consider it unnecessary. Those respondents are #11, 14, 16, 17, 21, 29, 31, and 32. Respondent #29 stated that he or she does not like it and only spend his or her money on concrete items that he or she uses in real life. Respondent #31 also has the same idea as he or she stated that it is not worth it considering that in real life, there are more important necessities to spend their money on other than video games. thus, it is revealed that the respondents think that it is not worth to spend their money as there is a lot more to spend their money on besides games.

However, there are some respondents who stated they understand that the company needs to earn money from the game. It can be seen the answer of respondent #7, 9, and 40. Respondent #40 stated that the price of the in-game currency is expensive, but it is understandable as the developer needs to earn profit. Respondent #7 also stated “It’s a bit rough on the players, but I understand companies have to make money and they do what works.” Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents understand that the company needs to earn money from the game; however, they still think that the price is too expensive for them and they decided not to buy it.

There are also some respondents who stated that the practice of spending real money is actually acceptable. Those respondents are #4, 6, 25, 41, 48 and 49. Respondent #4 stated that it is fine for the players to spend real money on virtual items. Respondent #41 and 48 have similar opinion, stating that it is fine to actually spend real money on video games as long as it is not used for gambling. Thus, it can be revealed that for some players it is fine to actually spend real money on virtual items. However, some players decided not to spend their money as the *gacha* system may be misused for gambling.

Most of the respondents in the oppositional category consider that spending real money on virtual items is unnecessary. They think that it is better to spend real money on real items instead of video games. However, some of the respondents think that it is actually fine to spend real money on virtual money as long as it is not for gambling. Some also stated that the developer needs to earn profit for further development. In conclusion, some of the respondent may find the practice of spending real money on virtual items is not worth it and some are

fine with it. However, they still do not spend their real money because the price of the in-game currency is too expensive and *gacha* system is considered closely related to gamble.

All the respondents in this category can be categorized as the oppositional. The category is based on the questions of why they do not spend their money on this game, what they think about *gacha* system, and their opinions regarding the practice of spending real money on virtual items. All of their answers show that their consumption patterns are not in accordance with the developer's ideology, which is capitalism. In other words, the developer fails to earn profit by using the *gacha* system as the respondents realize the capitalism ideology of the developer and reject it. Regarding the *gacha* system and the practice of spending real money on virtual items, both are considered acceptable by some of the respondents in this category. However, for some of them the practice of spending real money on virtual items becomes a problem when it is used in the *gacha* system as it is considered as another form of gambling due to its unpredictability.

The respondents' answers on why they do not spend real money on the game reveal the ideologies behind their consumption process, namely frugalism and moralism. Frugalism is the practice of spending less money only to fulfill basic needs and saving more (Ingrid). The majority of the respondents stated that it is not worth it to spend real money on the game, and they do not need all characters anyway. The answers of the respondents are in accordance with the frugalism ideology. on the other hand, Moralism is the idea against the act that is immoral (Truitt). A respondent stated that he or she does not want to be involved with real money gambling as it is considered immoral, and it shows the ideology of moralism.

When faced against the capitalism ideology of the game developer, the frugalism and moralism ideologies contradict each other. It is proven by how the encoded message of the developer was decoded differently from what was intended. The developer could not gain any profit at all as these players think the products in the form of virtual items are not worth spending their real money for, and the *gacha* system, which is considered as a form of gambling, is immoral. The negative perception of *gacha* system prevented the players from spending their real money on the game. Thus, the players' ideologies which contradict the developer's ideology explain the consumption pattern within the oppositional category.

The Negotiated

The negotiated category as previously mentioned before, is the group of respondents who accept or reject the capitalist ideology of the developer, but with some negotiations which may vary from one individual to another. The respondents are categorized as negotiated because they may or may not spend their real money depending on the circumstances. For example, they may only spend their real money because there is a special deal. There are total of 9 out of 49 respondents who are included in the negotiated category. They are respondents are #13, 18, 22, 23, 28, 30, 38, 45, and 46.

Based on the question whether they have spent real money on FEH, five of the respondents said they have and four of them have not. Respondent #22, 23, 27, 45, and 46 stated that they have spent their real money, and the amount of money varies from \$20 to \$60. On the other hand, respondent #13, 18, 30, and 38 stated

that they have not spent their real money on the game. However, they stated that there is a possibility to actually spend their real money in the future.

The respondents' answers based on the question why the respondents in this category spend or do not spend their real money vary. The most common answer for those who spend their real money is because there is a special event. Respondent #27 stated that he or she only spends his or her real money on special events with a higher rate to get rare characters. Respondent #45 and 46 have the same reason: they spend their real money only when there is a special deal which gives them discount or privileges in the game. From their answers, it is revealed that special deals or events became the main reason for some players to spend their real money on the game.

Respondent #22 and 23 have a similar reason why they spend their real money. Respondent #22 stated that he or she spends his or her real money to get his or her favorite character. In FEH, there is a system that allows the players to merge same characters to make them stronger. Thus, respondent #23 spends his or her real money in order to get the copies of his or her favorite characters to make them stronger. It can be revealed that for some players, their identification as a fan of certain characters became the main reason why they willingly spend their real money on the game.

However, for those who do not spend their real money on the game, the most common answer is because they do not feel the need to spend their real money yet. Those respondents are respondent #18, 30 and 38. Respondent #18 stated that he or she does not really feel the need to spend real money on the game. Respondent

#18 also stated that in the future there is a possibility to spend his or her real money when he or she has played long enough and decided to support the developer. Respondent #30 and 38 have a similar reason in which they stated that they do not spend their real money because they are fortunate enough to get every character they wanted without spending real money. However, they will spend their real money if they are unfortunate and running out of the in-game currency. It can be revealed that some players feel that they do not need to spend their real money yet, but for them there is still a possibility in the future that they would spend their real money.

On the other hand, respondent #13 has a different opinion. Respondent #13 stated that he or she does not spend his or her real money because of the insecurities to spend real money on *gacha* games. There are a lot of cases where players do not get the characters they want even after they spend a lot of real money on the game. Therefore, he or she thinks that the developer should guarantee to give something in return when the players spend their real money. Thus, it can be revealed that some players do not want to spend their real money because they are insecure about not getting rare characters after they spend real money on the game.

Some of the respondents in this category spend their real money and some do not. The most common answers for those who spend is because there are special events or special deals which are provided by the developer. There are also some respondents who spend their real money for specific characters only. However, the most common answers for those who does not spend is because they do not feel the need to spend real money on the game yet. There is also a respondent who does not spend because of the feeling of insecurities. Therefore, the respondents who spend

their real money are categorized into the negotiated category because they only spend it due to a very specific condition. For those who do not spend, they are categorized to the negotiated category because there is a possibility for spending their real money in the future.

Some respondents in this category may or may not spend their real money on the game. However, what differentiates the respondents in this category from the others is the negotiation process that they do when playing the game before deciding whether to spend money on the game or not. They were able to enjoy the game without fully accepting or rejecting the capitalism ideology of the developer. Those who spent their money negotiated by only buying products with special deals, which could give the players more benefits compared to the regular products. Those who did not spend their money negotiated by doing the practice of rerolling, such as respondent #18.

Respondent #18 has his or her own way of enjoying the game without having to spend his or her real money. Respondent #18 stated that he or she avoids spending real money by rerolling the game. Respondent #18 explained that rerolling means players will have to play the game from the beginning by creating a new account until they get a satisfying result from the *gacha*. It can be revealed that some players may have their own way of enjoying the game, one of which is by rerolling the game.

Similar to the oppositional category, spending real money is not the only way for some players to get the characters that they want. Some players are saving the in-game currency until the specific characters or events come up.

Some players also have their own way of getting the characters; for instance, by rerolling the game. However, the possibility that they would spend their real money under specific conditions is what makes them categorized to the negotiated category.

Meanwhile, based on the question about their opinion regarding *gacha* system, most of the respondents stated that *gacha* system is actually interesting. Those respondents are respondent #27, 30, 38, and 46. Respondent #38 stated that *gacha* system is interesting and annoying at the same time as you may be happy or disappointed at the characters that you get. Respondent #46 stated that *gacha* system is fun as long as real money is not the only way to win. Thus, it can be revealed that *gacha* system is still considered fun for the respondents as long as real money is not the only way to enjoy the game.

However, it is different for respondent #13, 23, and 45 because they think *gacha* system is bad. Respondent #13 stated that spending money without getting the items that you want is close to being robbed. Respondent #45 stated that *gacha* system is bad as the game developer takes advantage of the player and constantly tries to make the players spend real money. However, respondent #45 also stated that even though it is bad, he or she still plays FEH because he or she loves the series. It can be revealed that *gacha* system is considered a bad system because you may not get what you want even after spending real money; however, for some players the system is acceptable as long as they love it.

Respondent #18 and 22 do not really care about the *gacha* system. Respondent #18 stated that he or she does not really care about the *gacha* system

itself and instead he or she is focusing on the gameplay of the game itself. Respondent #22 stated that he or she also does not care about *gacha* system as FEH is the only *gacha* game he or she plays. It is revealed that some players do not focus on the *gacha* system, but instead prioritizing the gameplay or the game itself.

Similar to the other categories, the most common answer regarding their opinion towards *gacha* system is they do not really mind the system as some players find it fun. Some players may also find the *gacha* system as a bad system which attempts to take advantage of the players by persuading them to spend real money, but they still play the game nevertheless. Some players also do not seem to be bothered by the *gacha* system as they are more focusing on the game itself. Therefore, it can be concluded that despite of their various opinions toward *gacha* system, they may still find ways to enjoy the game. Their opinions regarding *gacha* system that they are able to enjoy the game without fully accepting or rejecting the capitalism ideology which make them categorized to the negotiated.

Furthermore, based on the question of what they think about the practice of spending real money on virtual items, most respondents consider it bad. Those respondents are respondent #22, 23, 38, and 45. Regarding the practice of spending real money on virtual items, respondent #45 stated that “It’s bad and people should be more conscious about it.” Respondent #38 also stated that it is actually foolish but people still do it including him or herself. Their answers indicate that even though the respondents consider spending real money on virtual items as a bad thing, they still spend it anyway.

However, some respondents also stated that the practice of spending real money on virtual items is actually acceptable. Those respondents are respondent #13 and 27. Respondent #27 stated that it is acceptable as long as people do not go overboard. Respondent #13 also stated that it is still acceptable if you are guaranteed to get something in return. It is revealed that for some respondents the practice of spending real money on virtual items is acceptable as long as they do it moderately and do not risk losing the money without getting anything in return.

Respondents #30 and 46 also stated that the practice of spending real money on virtual items is a good way to support the developer. Respondent #46 stated that it is actually an investment for further development of the game. Respondent #30 also has a similar opinion, but he or she also added that he or she has not seen him or herself spending real money on the game yet. It can be revealed that the practice of spending real money is good to invest for further development of the game. However, players may have to meet a certain condition where the players love the game that they want to support the developer.

However, respondent #18 has a different opinion compared to the other respondents. Respondent #18 stated that people should start treating the virtual items as real items as people may enjoy the virtual items as much as they may enjoy real items. "I personally think that it's perfectly fine and other people should start treating in app purchase as something that is 'real'." Respondent #18 also stated that he or she has to play and develop feelings toward the game in order to spend real money. Virtual items especially in video games give the players the amusement so that they can fully enjoy all the facilities in the game. At the same time, it may become a way to support the developer of the game itself. The respondent also

stated that the practice of spending real money is not really the problem, but rather the culture of gambling in the game itself. It is revealed that some respondents may have seen the perspective of the virtual items as real items. However, some respondents also assume that the problem of the practice of spending real money is the culture of gambling or the *gacha* system.

Most of the respondents in the negotiated category consider the practice of spending real money as something negative. However, it does not stop some of them from spending real money anyway. They may spend real money on virtual items as long as they meet certain conditions such as being guaranteed to get items in return. Some of the players also consider the practice of spending real money as a good way to support the developer. Some players may also have considered virtual items as real items. Furthermore, they may not find the practice of spending real money on virtual items as a problem, compared to the culture of gambling in the game itself.

All the respondents in this category can be categorized as the negotiated. The category is based on the questions of why they spend or do not spend their money on this game, what they think about *gacha* system, and their opinion regarding the practice of spending real money on virtual items. The negotiated category has similarities to the dominated and the oppositional categories, in which some of the respondents willingly spend their real money and some do not want to. However, those who spend their money need to meet certain conditions such as discount, while those who do not spend still have probability to spend real money in the future.

All of their answers show that their consumption patterns are not fully in accordance with the developer's ideology which is capitalism. In other words, the developer fails to earn as much profit as they can by using the *gacha* system because the respondents are aware of the capitalism ideology of the developer and do not fully accept nor reject it. Regarding the *gacha* system and the practice of spending real money on virtual items, both are actually acceptable for the respondents in this category as long as they meet certain conditions such as discounts. Some respondents are also able to find another way to enjoy the game without paying real money and they do this by manipulating the game mechanic using the reroll practice. Using the reroll practice, the players may create new accounts several times in order to get specific characters. On the other hand, for some of them the practice of spending real money on virtual items can be a problem when it is used in the *gacha* system as it is considered to be another form of gambling due to its unpredictability.

The respondents' answers on why they spend their money on the game or not reveal the ideologies of opportunism and frugalism. According to Luo and Meyer, opportunism is the ability to look for opportunity to get personal advantage. The opportunism ideology is shown from how the respondents are able to find an opportunity to get personal advantage from the *gacha* system. A respondent was also able to get personal advantage from the practice of rerolling, in which the respondent does not need to spend his or her real money to get the characters that he or she wanted. The respondents show the frugalism ideology by not spending real money, and saving the in-game currency instead. However, this ideology is different from the oppositional category because there is a possibility for them to

actually spend their real money in the future, if they consider the deal that the game offers personally advantageous for them.

The frugalism and opportunism ideologies of the respondents contradict and complement the capitalism ideology of the developer at the same time. This is proven by how the players were able to decode the message well, but negotiated the message itself. The players may not spend their real money, but may also spend their real money when some requirement such as special deals are fulfilled. Some players also managed to outsmart the system, so that they could enjoy the game without spending real money. How the players in this category behave to achieve pleasure might have resulted in the developer's earning some profit, but not as much as in the dominated category. Thus, the players' ideologies which have gone through the negotiation process with the developer's ideology explain the consumption pattern within the negotiated category.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the players' consumption of virtual item via *gacha* system in *Fire Emblem Heroes*, in this chapter I am going to draw some conclusions regarding the capitalism ideology from how the players consume the game using Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory. Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory is used in order to analyze the ideology behind the players' consumption via *gacha* system in FEH. The communication model basically explains the message that the sender, or in this context is the game developer, may be received or decoded differently from what it was initially meant.

How the players receive the message will be different depending on the ideological stance of the players. Therefore, Hall came up with three categories on how the message is received. The first category is those who are aware about the ideology of the developer, which is capitalism, but still willingly spend their money, or "the dominated" category which consists of 21 respondents. The second are those who reject the capitalism by not spending real money on the game, and this category is called "the opposition" which consists of 19 respondents. The third are those who

do not fully accept or reject the ideology of capitalism, but find another way to play and enjoy the game. This category is called “the negotiated” category which consists of 9 respondents.

When it comes to the reasons why the players spend or not spend real money on the game, the negotiated category provides reasons that are similar to the dominated and the oppositional category. The negotiated and the dominated category’s reason to spend their money is to get their favorite characters. Meanwhile, the negotiated and the oppositional category’s reason for spending their real money is because there is no guarantee to get the characters they want even after spending real money. However, the negotiated category is different from the dominated because five respondents who have spent their money need to meet certain conditions such as special deals. For those who have not spent their real money, they stated that there is a possibility to spend their real money in the future. Thus, it can be concluded that when it comes to spending real money, the dominated fully accepts the capitalism ideology, and the negotiated fully rejects the capitalism ideology. On the other hand, the negotiated does not fully accept nor reject the capitalism ideology of the developer.

The oppositional category and four respondents from the negotiated category do not spend their real money on the game. As spending real money is not the only way to get the characters in the game, these respondents are saving their orbs and waiting for certain characters to be available to be obtained. However, among those who do not spend money, respondent #18 in the negotiated has a different way as he or she is doing the practice of rerolling, which is restarting the game from the beginning to get certain characters. Thus, it can be concluded that

although these respondents do not spend their real money, respondents from the negotiated and oppositional categories manage to find different ways to enjoy the game without following what the developer's expectation.

Similarities can also be found when it comes to their opinions towards the *gacha* system. There is a total of 24 respondents from all the categories that consider the *gacha* system as a negative feature as it is addictive, predatory, annoying, and closely related to gambling. Meanwhile, there are 23 respondents that consider *gacha* system fun and it is one of the factors why players are interested to play the game. However, two respondents in the negotiated category have different opinions. They stated that they are not really focusing on the *gacha* system but the gameplay instead. Thus, it can be concluded that even though the players have different opinions regarding *gacha* system, they are still dominated because the system that is applied by the developer cannot be avoided by the players.

When it comes to the practice of spending real money on virtual items, all of the categories also provide similar opinions towards it. There are 33 respondents in total who stated that the practice of spending real money on virtual items is actually bad as it is annoying and addictive. However, the other 16 stated that it is actually acceptable and it is considered a good way to support the game developer. Among those who accept the practice, respondent #18 of the negotiated has a different opinion. The respondent stated that virtual items should be considered real items as they give the same amount of enjoyment as real items nowadays. Thus, it can be concluded that their opinion towards the practice of spending real money on virtual items may not affect their ideological stance. Some respondents from the dominated category may state that it is bad, but still spend their real money anyway.

Meanwhile, some of the respondents in the oppositional category may consider the practice fun and acceptable, but still do not want to spend their real money on the game.

On the reasons why players spend their real money on virtual items in *Fire Emblem Heroes*, the three categories show similar reason which is their identification as a fan. They had known the main series before and were interested to play the simple version in their mobile phone. Players may have developed a certain feeling of attachment towards the series or characters that make them willingly spend their real money on the game. However, it is also shown that the other reason why players spend their real money on virtual items is because of the system that the developer applies, which is *gacha* system. The respondents from all the categories stated that *gacha* system is predatory, unfair, and addictive. Therefore, some players may be addicted to such system they willingly spend their real money. Moreover, FEH also has a system that limits the in-game currency that may have pushed the players to spend their real money instead. Players may become desperate enough that they decide to quit the game, or spend real money instead.

In conclusion, the capitalism ideology that is applied by the developer may have left a negative impression for most of players. There is a total of 21 respondents from all the categories who stated that *gacha* system is bad, predatory, and addictive. However, the developer's strategy such as limiting the in-game currency, or providing special deals seems to have worked for some players. It can be seen that from 21 respondents, only 12 respondents stated that they are annoyed by such system and refuse to spend real money because of it, meanwhile the other 9 still accept it and spend real money anyway. Despite their answers, in the end the

one who gains the most profit is the company because as can be seen from the answers from the dominated category they gain profit because there are more people who spend money than those who do not, which is shown in the oppositional. However, it does not mean that the players are powerless and fully controlled by the ideology. From the oppositional and the negotiated categories, it can be seen that the players still have choice on how they play the game and they could still gain pleasure of playing the game even without having to purchase items with real money like the developer intended them to do.

Each category has their own ideologies which explain the pattern of consumption of virtual items in the game. The dominated category's ideologies are materialism and consumerism. The materialism is shown by the act of purchasing the virtual items to achieve desire and happiness. Some players also showed the act of consumerism by purchasing a high amount of virtual items to gain pleasure by showing it off to other players. The oppositional category's ideologies are frugalism and moralism. The frugalism is shown by the thought that purchasing virtual items is useless and waste of money. Some respondents also show the act of moralism because they are against the *gacha* system that they considered as a form of gambling, which is immoral. The negotiated category's ideologies are frugalism and opportunism. The frugalism is shown by considering the necessity to purchase the virtual items because the respondents do not feel the need to spend their real money. The respondents also show the act of opportunism because of their ability to negotiate the capitalism ideology and gain personal advantage from that act. Even though each category implies certain ideologies, the materialism and consumerism are the most dominated ideologies. It is shown by the finding which indicates that

the majority of respondents within the dominated category show the act of materialism and consumerism ideology. Thus, it can be concluded that the players started to consider virtual items as real if the amount of pleasure they receive is equal with the pleasure they receive when buying real items. The players did not show hesitancy when spending real money on virtual items, and they started to adopt the materialism and consumerism ideologies. At the same time, such behavior resonates the capitalism ideology of the game developers, who were able to obtain profit effectively by applying an in-game mechanic such as *gacha* system.

In my opinion, the game developer has succeeded in attracting the players to spend their real money on the game by applying *gacha* system. This is proven by the fact that the majority of the respondents are categorized in the dominated category. *Gacha* system is also proven to be an effective system to make the players act the way the developer expects to in order to earn as much profit as possible. As one of the players, this research enlightens me on how the other players think of this game. How players have different views on the game and virtual items is amusing as I discovered new aspects and could relate with the views of the respondents as well. Before doing this research, I used to only play and enjoy the game without paying attention to the others players. However, doing this research makes me understand that every player has their own way in consuming the game. I also think that mobile games like FEH will keep developing in the future. It is most likely that the game developer as producer will keep using *gacha* system as it is the most common system to earn huge profit in the mobile game industry. The players as the consumer will also gradually accept the *gacha* system as it is applied in most of mobile games despite its negative effects. How the players accept such

system may also be caused by the increasingly blurred line between purchasing virtual or real items due to the players no longer differentiate between what is digital and what is concrete as both provide enjoyment. However, there is also a possibility that *gacha* system will be replaced in the future once the players lose interest in it which could eventually force the game developers to make an alternative system to attract the players. Therefore, as the game industry keeps developing rapidly, the ways the players consume the game keep changing as well.



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