

global network player authority PewDiePie guilt god Let's Play angel undead with authentic meurization Skill PVP digital  
 game rule system representation WoW blessing noob kills demon face body fight experience Twitch rebirth discussion wedding  
 religion game analysis The Last of Us death resurrection funeral tunes virtual identity buff priest genesis clan  
 simulation ludology narrative immersion community symbols salvation mage Xbox 360 PVE



Beyond Play in one of Yayoi Kusama's Obliteration Room Installations.

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Special Issue

## **Beyond Play**

edited by

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with the deep integration of gaming within multimodal digital platforms such as social media, livestreaming, short videos, and information platforms (e.g., forums and wikis), the boundaries between games, social, and media have blurred (Frissen et al. 2015). Gaming has become a cultural arena where gender relations and power structures are reproduced, negotiated and transformed through daily practices. Despite the rapid growth of global female gamers - China alone has over 300 million female gamers (Interesse 2024) - platform structures and cultural norms continue to challenge gender equality in gaming spaces (Ruotsalainen and Meriläinen 2024). Existing research indicates that algorithmic recommendations, audience interaction, and content moderation by platform culture reinforce male-centric gaming cultures, allowing male gazes, harassment, exclusion, and biased evaluations to permeate female gamers' experiences (Zolides 2021, Gray 2014). Technology and platforms are not neutral but socio-technical infrastructures where gender power is encoded, debated and reconstructed (Wajcman 2004).

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Existing research on female gamers has shown that they often turn to alternative, female-centric communities, such as GirlGamers on Reddit or Female Gamer Federation (FGF) on Douban, to access information, emotional support, and belongingness (Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023). However, most studies focus on reactive strategies, such as coping with harassment or forming identities (Madden et al. 2021, Scidone, Phillips and Pantaleo 2024, Wong and Ratan 2024). This leaves limited understanding of how women cultivate digital belongingness and reshape gaming cultures within deep mediatization. Female gamers' community practices are not only reflected in responses to gender inequality but also involve collective connections formed through relational interactions and community collaboration (Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023). However, this relational dimension lacks sufficient theoretical development in existing research. Therefore, this study adopts

belongingness as the core analytical perspective (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Unlike dominant approaches to digital feminist activism, which often foreground visibility, resistance and collective mobilization (Vachhani 2024), belongingness draws attention to the relational labor through which females cultivate sustainably affective communities within hostile environments (Yodovich 2021). This perspective highlights how female gamers negotiate the tensions between structural constraints and their fundamental need for social connection and legitimacy. This gap is important because ignoring women's strategic and creative practices risks reinforcing male-dominated platform design and narratives, further marginalizing women's participation and visibility (Arora 2024).

China provides an essential context for examining these issues. Its digital environment is subject to strict state regulations that govern visibility and discourse (Hu and Zhang 2024), while commercial platforms shape user behavior through market-driven algorithms (Lu, Zhou and Fan 2023). In addition, public expressions on gender are highly sensitive, and feminist critiques face ongoing restrictions (Lai and Liu 2024). Meanwhile, female gamers, nearly half of all gamers in China, increasingly influence market trends and cultural norms (Interesse 2024, Liu 2024). For instance, the unreleased Chinese game *Cellveillance* (2025) was removed from Chinese gaming platforms after female players reported gender-based violence and privacy violations on social media platforms in promotional videos released in April 2025 (Zhang 2025). This case demonstrates how Chinese female players, within the broader context of Chinese digital feminism, challenge harmful images and reshape visibility, accountability, and belongingness mechanisms through everyday collective practices, thus extending the digital practice of the contemporary feminist movement in China. These mediated practices reflect a tactical adaptation in Chinese digital feminism –

moving from polarizing, high-risk visibility to decentralized, adaptive negotiation (Wang and Tavmen 2025).

Building on this research gap, this study asks: How do Chinese female gamers negotiate digital belongingness through cross-platform online discourse and mediated practices? This paper employs cross-platform netnography, combined with multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) textual, visual, and audiovisual content across Douban, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili. This study conceptualizes belongingness as a mediated, context-specific process. Empirically, the findings demonstrate how women's collective meaning-making and platform navigation constitute emerging socio-cultural transformation. Practically, this research offers insights for more inclusive game-community design and platform governance. Theoretically, this paper offers insights into the formation mechanisms of digital belongingness and feminist practices across mediated multi-platform spaces. And with that: Let the game begin.

## Literature Review

### Institutional discrimination in platformized gaming cultures

Gender discrimination in global digital gaming culture is multi-layered, structured, and systemic. It establishes an ideological foundation within socio-cultural norms (Madden et al. 2021), enforces power through platform governance and institutional structures (Fisher, Chen and Taylor 2025), and permeates players' daily interactions and experiences through media technologies (Gray 2014). In parallel, economic structures create profit-driven incentives (Liu and Lai 2022), while psychological mechanisms explain how individuals perceive rejection (Jagayat and Choma 2021, Kao et al. 2024). Existing research indicates the prevalence of such discrimination





consumer group, separate from the mainstream community. In this context, romantic gameplay is packaged as empowerment, yet commodifies women's attention and emotional engagement, integrating it into capital accumulation and producing a subtle structure of exploitation (Liao 2024).

Platforms, as the infrastructure of China's digital ecosystem, occupy a contradictory position, enabling cultural expression while reinforcing structural inequalities. Through algorithmic recommendations, content filtering, and user profiling, platforms enforce subtle forms of gender regulation. Algorithmic recommendations often prioritize male-oriented content and highly competitive game cultures favored by male players. In Chinese video game *Honor of Kings* (2015), for instance, despite female players comprising over half of the base, system rewards, combat mechanics, and community culture remain shaped by male hegemonic norms, disadvantageous to women (Liu and Lai 2022). However, under such structural constraints, Chinese women have also developed coping strategies. Grassroots feminists strategically adopted less polarized labels, which, by choosing more moderate and resonant expressions, effectively mitigated online misogynistic backlash while avoiding triggering platform moderation systems, thus enabling discursive reconfiguration in the constrained digital space (Wang and Tavmen 2025). At the same time, female players have developed creative strategies for micro-resistance, including bypassing censorship through anonymity, slang, and image inversion (Lai and Liu 2024), establishing safe, private communities, building support networks, and reshaping gender identities (Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023).

However, these practices are not isolated or individual responses. In a highly regulated environment, open and confrontational feminist expression is often restricted, prompting feminist practices to shift towards more everyday,

decentralized, and strategic paths (Lai and Liu 2024, Liao 2024). For example, existing research has shown that some gender issues are embedded in interactive narratives through gamification, allowing players to engage with and reflect on gender inequality in a less politically sensitive context, thereby disseminating confrontational knowledge (Huang and Liu 2022). Within this context, games and their associated social spaces have increasingly functioned as important spaces where digital feminist practices are rearticulated and negotiated. The negotiation, expression, and interaction of female gamers in these spaces not only respond to gender inequality within gaming culture, but also reflect the ongoing development and transformation of Chinese digital feminism within subcultural spheres (Cui 2024).

At the same time, these practices also retain a distinctly collective dimension. Research has found that female gamer communities (such as FGF on Douban) can transform individual dissatisfaction into collective voices and public pressure through cross-platform collaboration, thereby influencing game content and industry practices (Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023). This transformation from daily interaction to collective action suggests that female gamers' practices are not isolated forms of leisure, but are better understood as an extension of Chinese digital feminism in the gaming field. Therefore, the collective practices of female gamers in China should be viewed as cultural-political actions embedded in the context of contemporary Chinese digital feminism.

## Beyond Resistance: Gaming as a Voluntary Pursuit of Pleasure and Connection for Women

Despite the structural inequalities that shape digital gaming environments, female players are not simply passive players of oppression. On the contrary, studies indicate that women's engagement in games is driven by enjoyment, social connection and



Within China's highly regulated platformized environment, female players' behavior reflects individual motivations and strategies for maintaining community connections under structural constraints. Building on this, this study introduces Allen et al.'s (2021) four-dimensional framework, analyzing belongingness as an interaction between structural conditions (opportunities and cognition) and player agency (motivation and ability). The former provides structural conditions for interaction and assessing acceptance or exclusion, while the latter reflects players' communicative skills and ability to navigate community expectations. This approach frames the study of Chinese female gamers' practices within highly regulated digital environments, conceptualizing how belongingness can be examined politically, culturally, and practically.

When situated in China's highly regulated and deeply mediatized environment, belongingness takes on a cross-platform and cross-context character (Hepp 2020). Gaming, videos-sharing, social media, and online communities form a digital ecosystem where platform governance, algorithms and cultural norms shape interaction and exclusion (Lan 2023). In this context, female gamers' cross-platform practices are a structural response to gender constraints, not merely a personal choice (Lai and Liu 2024). Through collaboration, emotional investment and micro-resistance, they sustain community connections and show how belongingness is fostered within institutional constraints.

By conceptualizing belongingness as a cultural-political practice and applying Allen's framework, this study emphasizes the interplay between structural conditions and women's agency within China's digital environment. This approach examines how belongingness is shaped through cross-platform practices and offers a Global South perspective on feminist agency in mediatized societies.

## Method

This study employs qualitative netnography. Through observation, it captures the dynamics of symbols, interactions, and emotions, revealing how users employ humor, irony, aesthetic stylization, and even silence to express themselves and foster community ties within the platform's structural constraints (Kozinets 2015, Kozinets 2023). This method is particularly suitable for analyzing highly mediated data, such as posts on social media. From a feminist lens, netnography analyzes how female gamers' experiences reshape gender and power relations through digital practices, revealing belongingness and resistance as ongoing cultural processes (Vachhani 2024). Furthermore, netnography's cultural sensitivity and adaptability to cross-

platform, multimodal data (Kozinets and Gretzel 2023), along with its naturalistic, non-intrusive characteristics, enable it to capture authentic expressions and community interactions of female gamers on Chinese platforms (Kefi et al. 2024), offering methodological support for this study.

### Cross-Platform Justification

Female gamers in China's gaming space encounter significant gender bias and culturally embedded toxicity. Existing literature consistently indicates that mainstream gaming platforms such as Steam and NGA in China are often characterized by male-dominated cultures, with misogyny, access restrictions, and hostile behavior towards female gamers being prevalent (Li 2023, Liao 2024, Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023). Such circumstances can constrain female players' ability to express themselves and to develop stable forms of community belongingness. At the same time, the deep mediatization of China's gaming industry has transformed gaming into a cross-platform and socially embedded practice, extending beyond game-specific infrastructures into broader media environments (Gamma Data 2026). As a result, focusing solely on traditional gaming platforms would risk overlooking the spaces where female players more actively negotiate and form their belongingness. Therefore, this study chose to use non-mainstream gaming platforms as the primary data source.

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The rationality of the platform selection was supported by a preliminary survey of the first author's PhD project.<sup>i</sup> Results showed that Douban<sup>ii</sup>, Bilibili<sup>iii</sup>, and Xiaohongshu<sup>iv</sup> were the primary platforms for female gamer interaction, significantly higher than traditional professional gaming platforms such as Heybox (n = 28), Steam (n = 17), and NGA (n = 16) (see Figure 1). The survey data are consistent with external reports, indicating these selections have higher female user bases compared to male users<sup>v</sup>

(see Figure 2), further justifying the selection. Gu et al. (2024) focus on Xiaohongshu, emphasizing how female-oriented platforms facilitate active and open gendered expression in China, supporting netnography and content analysis on such platforms. This cross-platform research design ensured that observed cultural practices and community interactions occurred within a meaningful and sustainable context of participation.

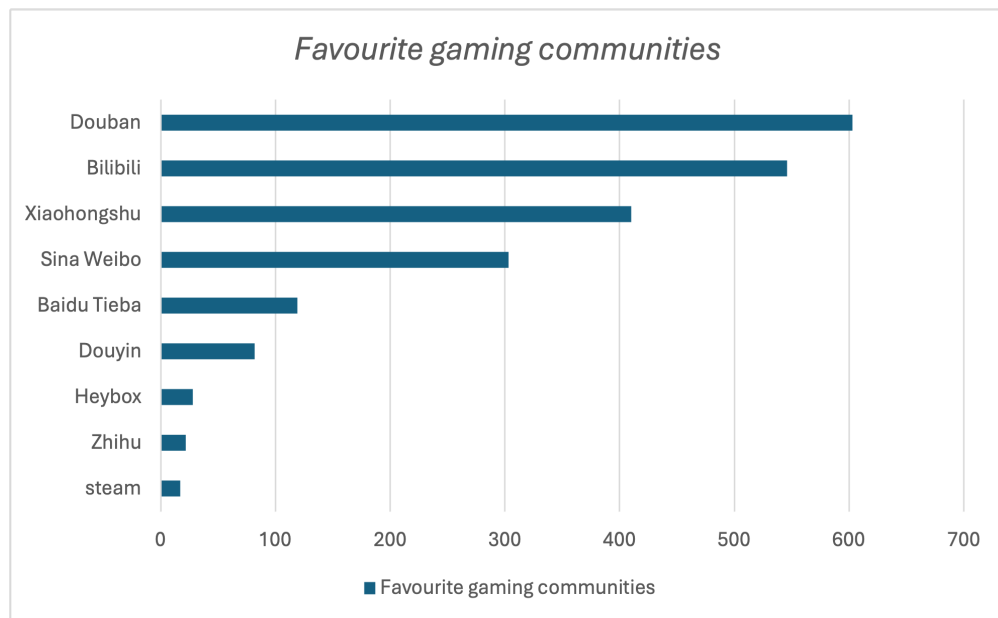
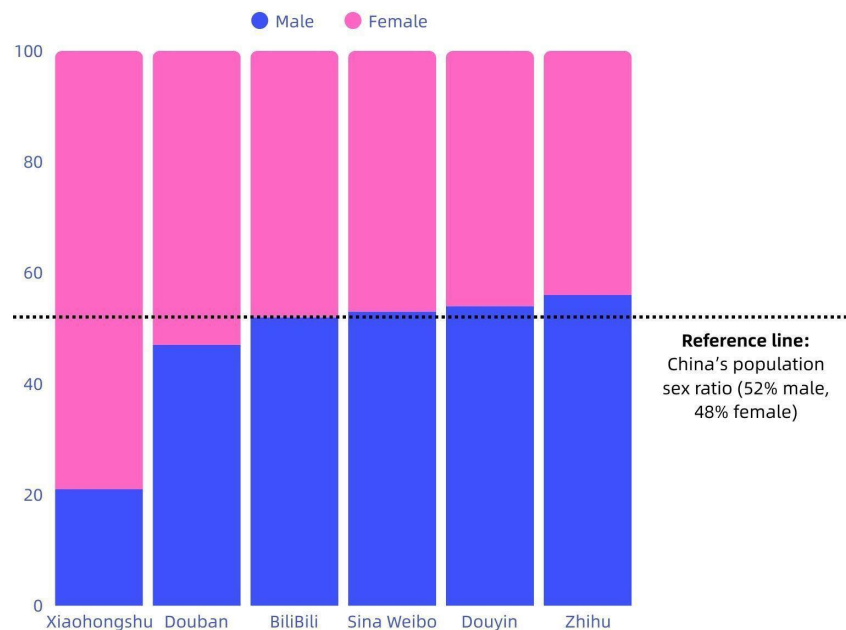


Figure 1. Favorite gaming communities for the survey participants (n=752)



ensuring the sample represented female gamers. The tag-based approach reflects retrieval efficiency and the interplay between platform algorithms and user practices. As Wan et al. (2025) note, female users strategically employ tags to signal community membership on Chinese platforms. Using gender-specific tags functions as a form of self-presentation and belonging confirmation, allowing researchers to systematically observe women's identity expression within the ethical bounds of publicly available data

## Data Analysis

This study employed an inductive approach with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to examine how female gamers' interactions negotiate emotional, cultural, and political dimensions. RTA, due to its flexibility and interpretive depth, enabling a nuanced understanding of complex digital practices (Braun et al. 2023). RTA facilitates a nuanced interpretation of shared meanings within mediated online narratives, allowing for a deep exploration of how female gamers negotiate belongingness through their digital discourse.

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MDA as a social semiotic approach (Kress 2009) focuses on how multiple symbolic modes collaboratively construct meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020). It emphasizes how visual, linguistic, and symbolic choices achieve interpersonal, experiential, and discourse metafunctions (O'Halloran 2023). MDA is employed to examine how gendered experiences are semiotically mediated through the collaborative interaction of visual, linguistic, and symbolic choices on digital platforms.

All sampled content (text, image, video) was transcribed as necessary (e.g., video content) after processing. Data was encoded using NVivo 14, allowing themes to

This study was guided by a feminist perspective. While it relies on social media data rather than active co-creation, we remain committed to addressing power asymmetries by treating users as active agents and respecting their diverse



Chinese female gamers mobilize humor and critique to challenge mainstream gender representation across platforms. Their practices span meme-based commentary, visual reinterpretations of character design, and culturally situated critiques of localization. Our analysis shows that female gamers frequently use memes as critical reflection, turning the female stereotype of irrational or overly emotional into a perceptive perspective. A widely circulated texted meme, *Not sensitive, but, perceptive* (不是敏感 而是、敏锐) has become a discursive tool to distinguish feminist criticism from stereotypical oversensitivity. Its red background, condensed typography, and asymmetrical layout amplify a sense of assertiveness, reframing women's emotion as sharp insight into gendered injustice. This meme practice resonates with emerging



This short and lighthearted conversation critiques gender assumptions in games. It suggests that a care-theme game *Sky: Children of the Light*, is so feminine-dominated that male players' presents seem almost unbelievable.

While critiques of hypersexualized avatars reflect a broader feminist awareness of gendered representations, Chinese female gamers' responses to localization reveal contextually specific critique. Localization, as a discursive process, adapts global content through language conversion and the resemiotization of symbols to correspond with the cultural logic of a particular audience (Jiang and Vásquez 2020, Mehta 2020). By comparing translations across game versions, these players' critiques reflect how global gender biases integrated with local cultural and linguistic resources, reproducing and normalizing them within Chinese patriarchal context. For instance, they closely examine translations across languages and regions: English versus Simplified Chinese, as well as Simplified versus Traditional Chinese. These comparisons uncover subtle shifts in tone, connotation, and gender implication that often go unnoticed in mainstream discussions. For example, a player commented on a stark difference between Traditional and Simplified Chinese translations of titles in the game *Valorant* (2020)'s battlepass.<sup>viii</sup>

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"In Traditional Chinese, the level 5 and 15 titles are little rascal (小屁孩) and basic (基础), but in Simplified Chinese, they've become a bro (是哥们) and not a bro (不是哥们). 😊 I can already guess that the original English has nothing to do with gender, but the Simplified Chinese translation just has to inject masculinity everywhere. 😊"

and

"In English, they're called agents; in Traditional Chinese, it's translated as special agents (特务); but in Simplified Chinese, they're all called heroes (英雄). Maybe I'm being too sensitive, but it just feels weird when most of the characters are women and they're all called heroes – it feels odd..."

The Chinese word 英雄 (yīngxióng) for hero carries a strong masculine connotation: it refers to martial masculinity – associated with fighting, strength, and ambition –

especially the ambitious man (Hird 2019, 351). This linguistic feature gives Chinese female gamers' critique a distinctive character. Rather than offering a general feminist or gaming critique, it reflects tensions in contemporary Chinese gaming culture, where patriarchal norms continue to shape everyday interactions. By critically engaging with localized translations and comparing linguistic and regional versions, female gamers expose how sexism is not only imported through global gaming culture, but also domestically reproduced through localized practices of language selection, symbol re-coding, and platform culture. Their critique functions as both resistance and recognition, affirming the collective sense that what may appear trivial in translation can have profound implications for gender identity and belongingness in Chinese female gamer communities.

### **Everyday Digital Activism: Negotiating Governance and Collective Accountability**

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In response to gendered marginalization, Chinese female gamers are actively engaged in a range of collective resistance strategies. Small-scale collaborative actions such as mutual assistance and reporting harassment, demonstrate how women reshape cyberspace around safety, care and inclusion. In an unstable digital environment, where public feminist discourse is often censored or stigmatized (Lai and Liu 2024), female gamers turn to irony and emotional resonance to articulate their critique and sustain community cohesion.

Mutual aid and collective reporting exemplify grassroots action. On Douban, FGF group coordinates support through the platform's informal Post-Help After Search section, where members share advice and collaboratively develop strategies to address challenges. A female gamer became the target of repeated harassment after promoting a female-only *Monster Hunter* (2004) group that excluded male players on

the male-dominated Heybox platform (小黑盒, a gaming platform in China). Despite multiple reports to Heybox moderators, she received no official response. Turning to FGF on Douban, she wrote: "If you have time, please help me report it on Heybox platform, sisters. Thank you." Within days, her post on Heybox was taken down. She later commented on Douban: "I found the post deleted on October 7! I'm so happy. It must have been the sisters' reports — thank you, everyone!" This incident goes beyond individual support, and it demonstrates a form of digital feminism: where female players collaborate to reshape online spaces around safety, solidarity, and inclusion. Through decentralized mutual aid and informal platform negotiation, they resist male-dominated platforms and create safe spaces for themselves and others.

Direct criticism of the gaming industry is rising even within the highly state-regulated Chinese context. Female players openly challenge symbolic representations in so-called female-oriented games, calling out the industry's superficial assumptions and its tendency to prioritize male approval while marginalizing authentic female perspectives. One female gamer criticized: "All the so-called female-oriented games in China are aimed at taming women. Are there any concerns about women's empowerment?" Others condemned the commercial exploitation of female gamers: "They're not female-oriented; they're female-wallet-oriented."

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These everyday activists scale up in high-visibility cases that emerged in the data, exemplified by the controversy over the mobile game *Code: Kite* (代号鸢 2023).

Originally marketed toward women, the game provoked widespread backlash in 2024 after incorporating sexist tropes and insider jokes widely viewed as objectifying (Feng 2025). On Xiaohongshu, female players expressed emotional outrage, documented economic consequences, encouraged others to boycott the game, and tracked revenue decline. These posts demonstrated clear demands for structural change,

featuring emotionally charged titles including: "Not only an apology and compensation, but also punishment! They are rotten inside," and "Now, everyone is waiting to see the limits of what female gamers will accept." The economic dimension was documented through posts, for example, titled, "12.16 Lingxi Interactive Entertainment *Code: Kite* revenue report." This post detailed the collective impact: "Revenue has been cut in half. Let's continue to see if it can fall below the bottom line." The post further outlined strategic action, encouraging female players to "go to download one soon so that you can give them a low score. Can anyone teach me how to give a low score on the Xiaomi application platform?" This collective action produced immediate economic impact, demonstrating female gamers' capacity to demand structural accountability and transforming leisure practices into digital civic engagement. One player mockingly remarked, "No woman will continue to pay for such a disgusting game." These posts were widely circulated on Xiaohongshu and later contributed to broader public discussion, with some criticisms and screenshots featured in news media (Feng 2025).

Beyond critiquing game content, female gamers extend their attention to structural practices of game companies, monitoring labor conditions and industry norms both domestically and internationally. These activities exemplify digital leisure as everyday activism: by sharing and discussing reports on contract violations, harassment, and managerial gaslighting on Xiaohongshu, Weibo, X/Twitter, and Reddit, they hold companies accountable while exercising their participatory rights (Arora 2015, Kozinets and Seraj-Aksit 2024). In addition, female players share critical posts with humor and irony within community spaces, enacting ludic activism – a form of resistance that employs parody to convey political perspectives (Kjølsrød 2024). In the digital era, such resistance plays a vital role in cultivating camaraderie among young, media-literate activists and strengthens collective identity. As one player posted:



as a motive for collective resistance, provide emotional release, and build solidarity among female gamers.

Together, these practices form a dynamic feminist community uniquely adapted to the Chinese media environment. They reveal the close interweaving of belongingness and resistance: by creating a safe zone, amplifying each other's voices, and challenging systemic injustice, female gamers resist patriarchal platform governance and gender inequality, while creatively expanding space for gender discussion within an environment where feminist discourse is restricted and censored (Jinyan 2021, Zheng 2021). Through decentralized collaboration and digital safety strategies, the communities demonstrate how collective action persists despite self-censorship and online governance (Chang 2025).

### **Negotiating Digital Belongingness: Affective Bonds and Cultural Transformation**

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A third finding reveals how female gamers construct legitimacy, recognition and connection, where emotional bonds redefine the value, pleasure, and community identity within gaming spaces. In a male-dominated culture where competitive skill defines authority (Vermeulen et al. 2016), female players' central achievement is redefining what counts as legitimacy. Rather than simply claiming space through participation, they cultivate meaningful involvement through practices of emotional bonds and care (Scidone, Phillips and Pantaleo 2024).

Our findings suggest that care and emotional connection drove this transformation. On Xiaohongshu, female players shared in-game friendships through screen recordings of their gameplay together. For example, a post of *Honor of Kings* gameplay emphasized the female's camaraderie over the competition, with





asymmetry it aims to resist. This decision does more than maintain a sharp critique of male-centered narratives. It also reveals the strategic differences within the community. By selectively narrowing the scope of critique, participants exhibit strategic insight and political consciousness, avoiding the traps inherent in the structures they seek to challenge. This shows how the deepest belongingness emerges from the ability to participate in, and even shape, cultural authority over what is considered valuable.

These examples show that Chinese female gamers leverage the cross-platform structures to actively build communities that challenge patriarchal gaming culture. Their actions indicate that the desire for belongingness in digital spaces involves constant adaptation and negotiation between structural constraints and emotional tensions. Within gendered spaces, women must confront the politics of (in)visibility and reconfigure their positions within unequal participation structures. This engagement requires them to transcend the male-dominated gaming authority while drawing on local cultural experiences to expand their emotional and social values embodied by digital games. In this sense, Chinese female gamers' redefinition of the value and meaning is deeply rooted in their pursuit of emotional connection, fair expression, and cultural reinvention.

## Discussion: Belongingness and Transformation in Deeply Mediatized Game Cultures

Unlike previous research that primarily focuses on structural gender-based discrimination in gaming cultures (Adefope and Bayraktar 2025, Ruotsalainen and Meriläinen 2024), this study focuses on the context of deep mediatization, exploring the adaptive feminist agency exhibited by female gamers in China. We analyze how

female gamers strategically navigate institutionalized gender discrimination, negotiate platform rules, and actively cultivate digital belongingness through cross-platform practices. The findings suggest that their practices function both as social interactions and as a continuation of the contemporary Chinese digital feminist movement within gaming space. Here, belongingness is conceptualized as a continuously negotiated cultural practice: under the multiple pressures of patriarchal structures, platform regulations, and cultural expectations, female gamers actively construct legitimacy and identity within digital gaming spaces by constantly negotiating and adjusting their identities and expressions. Their practices reflect more than an emotional longing for inclusion; they reveal collective action and power dynamics that are deeply embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts, demonstrating how belongingness can serve as a means of resistance and a form of political agency in non-Western contexts.

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Specifically, Chinese female gamers construct multi-layered and complementary spaces for belongingness by flexibly switching between multiple platforms and leveraging the unique media environments of each. This practice results from their collective perception of gender discrimination within mainstream gaming culture (Liu and Lai 2022). In mainstream gaming culture, female gamers have long been stereotyped as fake gamers, or candy crush gamers (Paaßen, Morgenroth and Stratemeyer 2017, Naidoo, Coleman and Guyo 2020). They are not only marginalized but also have their emotional needs routinely misunderstood or dismissed (Lai and Liu 2024). This, in turn, fuels strong motivations to belong (Allen et al. 2021), as they seek alternative spaces beyond mainstream structures where they can find emotional connection, skill recognition, and cultural resonance (Zhang, Mu and Huang 2023). This emotional drive serves as the foundation for their practices of constructing belongingness.

While individual strategic expression provides the foundation for constructing belongingness, in the Chinese cultural context, relational, collective practices truly transform belongingness into a force for resistance. In a collectivist and patriarchal society, the stability and sustainability of individual identity often depend on

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mechanisms to generate unique and contextualized pathways of resistance. These strategies avoid direct confrontation while fostering meaningful transformation.

More importantly, this study reveals how Chinese female gamers have reshaped the value system of gaming culture through emotional care, collective creativity, and critical engagement. Traditional gaming culture emphasizes skill proficiency, rank competition, and masculinity, which are considered the legitimacy of real gamers (Paaßen, Morgenroth and Stratemeyer 2017, Liu and Lai 2022). In contrast, on social media, Chinese female gamers embed belongingness through diverse expressions such as video creation, humorous critiques, and community reviews into cultural practices, reshaping gaming into a cultural space where emotional and social significance coexist. This cultural reshaping represents a diversification of gaming interests and evaluation criteria, challenging the authority of mainstream gaming narratives. Also, it promotes a loosening of the discourse power of gaming culture, reflecting the challenge and reconstruction of mainstream narratives by marginalized gamers.

For instance, in the *Code: Kite* incident, participants continuously criticized the game company for the objectification of women. Through collective action, they drew public attention and promoted accountability for the company. This critique not only resists male-dominated gaming discourse, but also asks females to rethink the true value of female-oriented games, further expanding their understanding of gender culture. Furthermore, this critical action extends beyond the realm of game texts to encompass the patriarchal structures in society. Many female gamers have deepened their knowledge of real-world gender inequality through analyzing phenomena such as the male gaze in games through platforms including Douban, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili. For example, through game translation, they have exposed how patriarchal

Despite its insights, this study has some limitations. The qualitative data were collected from Douban, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili, which may have excluded relevant dynamics present on other social platforms, including TikTok and Weibo. In addition, this study primarily employed qualitative analysis; it does not quantify the perceived impact of belongingness or resistance strategies. Nevertheless, this study addresses a gap in gaming culture research by examining the digital practices of Chinese female gamers from non-Western backgrounds, focusing how emotional labor, collective creativity, and critical engagement intersect to reshape meaning and challenge patriarchal gaming structures. By bringing belongingness theory into a collectivist and situated context, the study demonstrates how female gamers creatively negotiate identity recognition and cultural transformation within structurally constrained

This study deepens our understanding of platform feminism in the Global South, revealing how female gamers' everyday acts of belongingness, which are cultivated within a deep mediatization context and the shadow of recommendation algorithms, could spark a broader reshaping of digital public spaces. It emphasizes that within this cross-platform practice, digital belongingness is not merely an outcome which challenges and reshapes male-dominated gaming culture, but rather it is a relational and affective force through which Chinese female gamers assert autonomy, cultivate communities, as well as navigate and sustain practices of care, critique, and cultural production.

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