

Tarnished together

Fan experience, identity, and participation in Elden Ring TikTok videos

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ABSTRACT

This master's thesis explores the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok through a qualitative thematic analysis of fan-made videos. Being motivated by both academic interest and personal enthusiasm for gaming, this research analyses how Elden Ring fans interpret their game's experience, contribute to participatory culture, and build community through their creative content. Furthermore, Elden Ring's widespread success, critical acclaim, and vibrant presence on social media platforms like TikTok, known for its personalized algorithm and short-form video content, make it a compelling case for studying digital fandom and fan engagement. Using reflexive thematic analysis, four main themes emerged from the fan video: boss fights and hardships which highlights the emotional and challenging encounters, building your own character and skills which focuses on customization and player builds, online how-to guides and progression strategies which emphasizes fan knowledge-sharing, and the beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits which showcases the game's aesthetic appeal. These themes reveal diverse fan experiences, ranging from competitive gameplay and rapid progression to relaxed exploration and roleplaying, highlighting different ways fans participate and contribute to the community on TikTok. These themes reveal a complex fan environment, where some players share fast progression and strategic skills, while others adopt alternative playstyles, such as roleplaying or exploring the game world in a more relaxed manner like a cozy game, reflecting diverse approaches to experience the game. Moreover, the analysis illustrates how fan-made videos serves multiple functions: as a resource for game knowledge-exchange, a creative outlet, to actively participate within the community and to feel a sense of belonging among Elden Ring fans on TikTok. Ultimately, this thesis highlights that Elden Ring fan-made videos on TikTok are more than just entertainment, they act as dynamic environment for participatory culture, facilitating shared meaning-making and collective negotiation of the gaming experience in Elden Ring. All in all, the findings emphasize the significant role of TikTok in shaping digital fandom and highlight how fan communities use social media to co-create cultural value and are making vibrant engagements around highly popular media texts.

KEYWORDS: *Elden Ring, fan community, TikTok, participatory culture, user-generated content*

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1. Introduction

The introduction chapter highlights the central problem and research questions of the thesis, supported by both societal and scientific relevance.

1.1. Research problem and focus

Digital fan communities are shaped by the possibilities of the platforms that host them, raising crucial questions about how meaning, identity, experiences and community travel across algorithmically curated feeds. Positioned at this convergence of different relevant studies, this thesis explores one of the most prominent recent examples which is the TikTok fan community surrounding the game Elden Ring.

For my master's thesis, I will focus on the TikTok fan community of Elden Ring, with the objective of doing a qualitative thematic analysis of the fan-made videos produced by that same community. Moreover, my enthusiasm for gaming and popular culture, especially that of the game called Elden Ring, and the game's incredible success, which is demonstrated by its extensive presence on social media platforms like TikTok, led me to choose this topic. As both a researcher and a fan, my positionality allows me to engage with the material from an academic and insider perspective, strengthening my analysis of engagement and interpretation within the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok. In this research I will be looking into how other fans interpret the game's experience in their fan-made videos, how it contributes to the participatory culture and how this helps building up the fan community. Moreover, this combination of personal investment and scholarly exploration creates a strong foundation for meaningful engagement with the fan texts, as I am able to contextualize trends and practices with both experiential familiarity and required critical distance. The balance between insider perspective and academic reflexivity also help to highlight how emotional attachment and shared identity among fans influence their creative contributions.

1.2. Societal relevance

There are social reasons for conducting this specific research. Elden Ring has had a tremendous amount of success, taking home awards including Best Visual Art, Best Design, and Game of the Year 2023 (Elderkin, 2023). It is important to note, however, that Elden Ring secured Game of the Year at The Game Awards in 2022 (The Game Awards, 2022), while the 2023 awards refer to the Game Developers Choice Awards, underscoring the game's sustained critical momentum. Thus, this in result gives the game a higher status and new media coverages on several platforms that can result in attracting new players and making the fans feel a sense of pride for playing Elden Ring, which may lead to higher engagement and loyalty. For example, Elden Ring distinguishes itself from other modern games by its atmospheric storytelling, demanding boss fights, deep lore, and open-world exploration, with features that not only challenge players but also inspire creative engagement and interpretation. This complexity encourages fans to construct their own meanings and share their personal narratives, creating a rich composition of user-generated content

on TikTok that reflects a wide spectrum of emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual responses to the game. These narrative and features, combined with the game's capturing storytelling, often lead players to seek or build meaning in collaborative and participatory ways. In addition, players are not just reacting to the game's events, but often engaging in speculation, analysis, and reimagining, all of which are visible in their TikTok content. In particular, the fragmented and open-ended nature of Elden Ring's lore invites interpretation, making it fertile ground for fan theories, character explorations, and mythological reconstructions.

Additionally, the trend of niche content becoming popular is reflected in its record-breaking launch, with asynchronous consumption patterns like those in the music industry (Gresham, 2022). Moreover, the digital fan community of Elden Ring has expanded dramatically across social media platforms like TikTok. Most importantly, because of its personalized algorithm and dynamic short-form video format, which exposes content to a wide range of users, TikTok is the focus for this research. It serves as an important social media platform for participatory culture, where fans actively engage in meaning-making a reinterpretation of the game's experience. This makes TikTok a rich platform to explore the engaging participation of the Elden Ring fan community and their interpretation of the game's experience. Unlike more traditional platforms such as forums or YouTube, TikTok's structure prefers brevity, creativity, and immediate engagement. This allows for a rapid and wide-reaching dissemination of ideas, often humorous, aesthetic, or ironic ways that reflect digital meme culture. Its different type of function, such as duets and stitches, enable layered responses and recursive content, where fans can directly respond to or build on one another's videos. In this way, TikTok fosters not only a mode of creative expression but a dialogic and networked mode of meaning-making. The act of making and sharing content becomes a communal process, wherein fans negotiate meaning and collectively articulate shared values, norms, and interpretations.

1.3. Scientific relevance

Furthermore, here are academic reasons for conducting this specific research. This research addresses several understudied topics, which can advance the academic field. Although there is research on participatory culture in more general digital contexts, such as 'Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture' by Jenkins (2009), the distinctive features of TikTok's short-form video format and algorithm-driven content in influencing fan practices have received less attention. Building on Abadin's analysis of "visibility labour" on TikTok (Abadin, 2021, pp. 77-103) and Humphrey's discussion of value affordances in social media engagement features (Humphreys, 2022, p.4), this study foregrounds the platform-specific mechanics that structure fan creativity. Overall, fewer studies examine how TikTok influences fan participation. Yet, while duet and stitch mechanics have been explored in the context of dance-challenge virality (Abidin, 2021, p. 85), their role in re-mediating the dense, lore-driven story telling of open-world role-playing games remains unexamined where this thesis will address that gap. Thus, this research fills gaps in media studies, fan studies, and digital ethnography by concentrating on the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok.

By doing so, it contributes to discussions on digital fandom and social media's role in shaping cultural production and participation that may lead to the contribution of the fan community, highlighting how fans interpret the game's experience. In doing so, the research extends the world-building debates articulated by Gray, Sandavoss, and Harrington (2017) into the age of AI-curated feeds and short-form video.

1.4. Main research question and sub-questions

Moreover, this research builds on recent developments in platform studies that emphasize the importance of affordances, the possibilities and limitations of digital tools, and how they structure participation and creativity. TikTok's affordances, such as filters and use of audio, play a crucial role in shaping the form and content of fan expression. Therefore, a research of Elden Ring fandom on TikTok is not just about content analysis, but also about understanding the infrastructure and cultural logic of the platform itself. In doing so, this thesis offers insight into how digital technologies mediate fandom and influence the practices of world-building, storytelling, and identity construction.

Therefore, the main research question for this research is: "How do Elden Ring fan-made videos on TikTok contribute to the negotiation of the game's experience?" To address this question in greater detail, I have developed two sub-questions:

- What types of TikTok videos do Elden Ring fans create to share their game experience with Elden Ring?
- How do fan videos on TikTok foster interaction within the Elden Ring community sharing their game experience with Elden Ring?

The first sub-question explores the themes presenting in fan-made videos, offering an understanding of how fans interpret and transform elements of their game experience into their fan-made content. The second sub-question examines how these videos foster a sense of community by sharing each other's game experience with Elden Ring. It examines how fans contribute to participation through fan-made videos. By answering these important questions for this specific research, the way in which Elden Ring fans interpret their experience of the game and actively participates on the online social media platform TikTok will be answered. Ultimately, this research sheds light on how digital platforms like TikTok are not only vehicles of entertainment but also powerful spaces for identity formation, cultural production, and social interaction. It demonstrates how fan engagement in video games can extend far beyond gameplay, evolving into a performative and collaborative cultural phenomenon.

The findings will also yield concrete societal insights, informing community management strategies for marketers and developers, moderating guidelines for short-form video platforms like TikTok, and digital-literacy curricula that harness game fandom as an escape to critical media skills (Humphreys, 2022, p. 14). In doing so, this research provides and multifaceted contribution, drawing

on cultural studies, media theory, game studies, and digital sociology, to better understand the shifting nature of fandom in the modern world. It also offers practical implications for understanding how online communities form, maintain engagement, and shape perceptions of cultural product through creativity. As such, this thesis not only examine the specific case of the Elden Ring fandom on TikTok but also reflects broader dynamics of user agency, affective labour, and digital storytelling in modern participatory media.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chapter discusses important topics that will delve deep into the concepts like participatory culture, digital fan community, digital engagement on TikTok, the game community, and fan labour.

2.1. Participation, convergence, and community in online media

2.1.1. Participatory culture and algorithmic dynamics

Fan communities have been extensively studied through the lenses of participatory culture and media convergence by Jenkins, both of which highlight the active role of fans shaping content and engaging with media texts. Jenkins (2009, p.12) defines participatory culture as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorships whereby experiences participants pass along knowledge to novices.” This definition is extremely relevant to this research, which focusses on TikTok, one of the most engaging social media platforms that currently exists. However, more recent scholarship argues that what appears as open participation can still replicate hierarchical forms of visibility and labour because the algorithm privileges certain creators over others, creating what Maddox and Gill (2023, p. 10) define as an “algorithmic culture” that conditions who gets seen and who does not.

Moreover, social media platforms create a setting where people construct their identities while engaging in social interactions (Pérez-Torres, 2024, p. 22170). Thus, by participating they express interests, ideas, and beliefs about themselves. It exposes them to feedback, online audiences, or social comparisons with other users. The study claims that participating audiences have an impact on how adolescents think about themselves. According to (Yin & Xie, 2024, p. 619), the online participatory culture changes where fans come up with their own unique ways of communicating on social media. For example, they mix popular online habits, like staying connected and focusing on likes, shares, and other data, to create new styles of talking and interacting.

Additionally, the paper of Tian and Zhong (2022, p. 727) argues that fan-made content remains a form of “narrowcasting” which targets at specific groups rather than the general audience. Because not all fans participate equally, these narrowcast texts differ from widely accepted broadcast media. Moreover, fan communities and their creations can be somewhat chaotic or even legally questionable, but they also have positive aspect. To capture both the empowering and stratifying dimensions of participatory culture, this research will log creator-level metrics (e.g., viewer count) as independent variables when examining engagement patterns and how impactful the fan-made content is perceived.

2.1.2. Media convergence

Furthermore, Jenkins (2004, p.34) defines media convergence as the transformation of the relationships among audiences, genres, and technologies. Additionally, Jenkins (2004, p. 40) states, “Game companies have seen the value of constructing, rather than shutting down fan communities around their products and building long term relationship with their consumers,” highlighting the growing importance of fan communities to media industries. This viewpoint is essential to this research since it examines the relationship between producers and consumers in fan-made content on TikTok. The success of game companies often stems from franchises that actively incorporate consumer feedback during development and highlight the contribution of outstanding user-generated content. Furthermore, the concept relates to participatory culture because fans who actively participate on social media and actively contribute to the fan community are having an effect on companies where they incorporate the fan communities wishes.

Additionally, digital platforms have revolutionized how media content is developed, distributed, and consumed which fosters a more interactive and engaging user experience (Long et al., 2024, p. 168). Yi (2022, p. 1092). However, Long et al. warns that convergence logics frequently advance platform data-extraction goals as much as communal empowerment. According to the research, while user creativity is encouraged, it often unfolds within strict algorithmic and monetization boundaries, subtly shaping the kinds of content that are promoted.

2.1.3. Fan communities and digital belonging

Moreover, Smyth (2018) has looked at how fan communities differ online and offline, especially in terms of belonging. It has been discovered that compared to offline communities, online fan communities promote greater levels of social capital and belonging (Smyth, 2018, p. 18). This insight is especially interesting in this research of TikTok fan videos, to explore the ways in which fans convey their sense of belonging and community inside the Elden Ring fandom. For example, Groen and Hettinger stated (2016, p. 324) that social media fan communities have a high degree of group identification, offering psychological advantages and occasionally disadvantages related to participating in their preferred fandom. These results highlight how crucial social media is for fostering community dynamics and fan engagement.

According to Gao (2022, p. 335), fan communities can help fans to feel like they belong to something and can give them a place that will realise their own self-worth. In addition, Abrams and Hogg stated that social identity is the individual’s knowledge that they belong to certain social groups together with some emotional value significance to them of this group’s membership (2010, p. 180). Moreover, social identity theory shed light on how fans form a feeling of belonging and affiliation in digital spaces through shared interests and fandom-related identities.

Additionally, Feilitzen and Linne (1975, as cited by Giles, 2002, p. 290) states that in order to form an identification with a persona, a user needs to recognize some salient characteristics in the

persona that is also shared by themselves. For instance, the term “fan” draws a contrast between “mundane”, everyday life, and fandom, an alternate domain of cultural experience that restores the enthusiasm and freedom that must be suppressed to operate in everyday life. For example, to enter the fandom is to escape from the “everyday life” into the marvellous (Jenkins, 2006b, p42, as cited in Forcier, 2022). In essence, the motivation for fan to engage in the fan community is to escape from ordinary live into something exciting. Drawing on these theories, this research investigates the real motivations behind the fans to actively participate in these activities. Operationally, posts will be coded for signs that show a sense of belonging, such as the community hashtag (#Eldenring), to test Smyth’s claim about heightened online belonging, while boundary-policing statements, like “real fans”, will be logged following Tompkins and Guajardo’s (2024, p. 11-14) observations on gatekeeping in game fan communities.

2.2. Creativity, power, and participation in fan labour

2.2.1. Definition of fan labour

Furthermore, according to Milner (2009, p. 494) fan communities does not exist without fan labour where creative consumption can naturally lead to a degree of production. For example, game producers are becoming more reliant on fan labour to build their brand and increase their product’s longevity in a media-cluttered culture, which makes fan labour supported by digital-game producers that they can incorporate for their benefit (Milner 2009, p. 496). Thus, information and interpretation are fundamental to fan labour and fan community, then openly engaging fans as extended members of the organization might be more empowering to fans and more profitable to producers (Milner, 2009, p. 506). According to Simon (2016, p. 17), fans are the future when it comes to the role of fans in the production of fan fiction. This amount of user-generated content that is produced triggers a qualitative jump where new modes of interaction between the customers and creators, without necessarily turning the consumer into a full-fledge producer (p. 17). User-generated content within the digital media world plays a more central role (p. 17). Additionally, user-generated content can contribute to changing the understanding of what markets are and how they add value to industrial knowledge (Banks & Humphreys, 2008, p. 416). This also relates to the study of Lanier and Fowler (2013, p. 291), where they suggest a witnessing of the birth of a new economic model because of the realm of digital fandom. Thus, digital fandom overtly reveals the link between producers and consumers through the communal interaction of a commercial text (p. 292). Based on Milner’s idea, this research will investigate fans sharing content and how they are teaching others.

2.2.2. The power of fan labour

Furthermore, the framework, which incorporates critical perspectives on media and power, examines how fan actions might function as forms of cultural resistance and subversion. It investigates power relations within fan communities, including concerns of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, and how fans negotiate and challenge dominant narratives and representations through

their creative contributions and collective activities. In addition, new media provides fans with a platform that is free and open, this sets the next step that changed the way fan follow popular games, that even moves them from being single consumers to disseminators and producers (Gao, 2022, p. 335). For example, this creates fan contributions like fan fiction, fanart, and fan videos. By delving into this framework for this research it investigates what specific kind of user-generated content fans make, and how that contributes to the fan community in social media platforms. Recent work on transformative game fandoms show that TikTok's recommendation system can simultaneously shelter niche communities and reinforce exclusionary gatekeeping (Tompkins & Guajardo, 2024, p. 11-14). This ambivalence will inform our interpretation of Elden Ring TikTok clusters.

Additionally, according to the findings of Benham et al. (2022, p. 606), is that fan knowledge is an important forerunner of fan co-creation and highlight the significance of fan co-creation in promoting team identification in highly engaged fans. Thus, the effect of fan knowledge on team identification through fan co-creation is more significant to those who engage higher with the community than for those who engage low (p. 616).

2.2.3. Textual poaching and transmedia storytelling

Moreover, Bennet (2014) discusses the idea of textual poaching, which shows how fans reinterpret their connections with media and use their audience power to transform stories into participatory storytelling. Fan videos and fan fiction, in which fans reinvent and reinterpret preexisting content, are examples of textual poaching. Because it offers insights into how fans imaginatively understand the game and contribute to participatory culture through their videos, this theoretical approach is especially interesting to the research of Elden Ring fan-made videos on TikTok. Additionally, textual poaching relates to fan labour because of how the interpretation from fans can add more value to the lore in the game or how they can extend the lore by making fan fiction. Furthermore, transmedia fiction is deeply rooted in participatory culture, where audiences are not just passive consumers but active contributors (Xu et al., 2023, p. 12). Fans engage with stories across multiple platforms, such as games, and often shape how narratives evolve. This involvement can include fan fiction, creating art, commenting, reviewing, and promoting their favourite works. In many cases, popularity and visibility of transmedia story depend heavily on fan support and community-based sharing rather than on traditional publishing or critical acclaim. Dedicated fan communities act as informal gatekeepers and co-creators, deciding which stories gain attention and which fade into obscurity. Their preferences and interactions help drive the development, continuation, and even the success of these stories across platforms.

Moreover, there is also a way in which fans interpret media, called transmedia storytelling, and which is being distributed. Transmedia storytelling can be described as a process where each media platform makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of a story (Jenkins, 2006, as described in Schiller, 2018, p. 97). For example, the entertainment industry tries to appeal to young

audiences with digital media which includes new ways of storytelling and complex narratives. It brings social media, connectivity, fan communities, and online-information exchange together. Thus, the game Elden Ring can be told from different points of view, where these narrative universes are typically open-ended. The contribution of fan-made videos and user participation can make these narratives increasingly complex because transmedia stories unfold in different sequences across different timeframes for each audience member (Kustritz, 2017, as described in Schiller, 2018, p. 102). Furthermore, according to Gray (Gray, 2010, p. 6) a paratext is a part of the text. Paratexts are a central part of media production and consumption processes in how a certain text is interpreted (p. 16). It gives context and nuanced images of how they are watched, interpreted and enjoyed (p. 22). These concepts will be explored by analysing how fan-made TikTok videos express fans' contribution, interpretation and experience on this specific platform.

2.3. TikTok as a platform for fan participation

2.3.1. Platform organisation

With an emphasis on the algorithmic influence of digital platforms like TikTok on visibility and virality, recent fan studies have brought attention to how these platforms encourage new kinds of creative expression and community. A platform can be understood as a programmable architecture that is designed to organise interaction between users (van Dijck et al, 2018, p. 9). Van Dijck et al (2018, p. 18) explains that a platform is designed with data which is automated and organized through algorithms and interfaces, where data provides the fuel for a growing connectivity between platforms. Algorithms play an important role where it is used to connect users to content. In this case, when users search, get in touch with Elden Ring content and engage, it will end up on their feed more, or in TikTok's case, on their "for you page". Thus, the algorithm will show you more of the content you interact with. Abidin (2020), for example, looks at TikTok's expansion into South Korea and highlights how it is changing digital engagement. TikTok is a perfect example for researching the relationship between fan creativity and platform specific elements including short-form video formats, trends, and hashtags. In a similar study, Gillespie (2010) examines how the platform's design and algorithms impact fan practices. According to van Dijck and Poell (2013, p. 5), social media platforms operate based on specific logics, such as connectivity and datafication, that influence how fan interactions unfold. For example, fans engage in activities like sharing and developing content, organizing activities and campaigns, and participating in discussions, all of which contribute to a dynamic participatory culture (van Dijck, 2009, p. 50). However, platform algorithms also mediate visibility, privileging certain types of engagement while potentially marginalizing others (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 10). Building on the notion of "algorithmic culture," this research recognises that TikTok's recommender system co-produces community boundaries, therefore the mapping of Elden Ring hashtag network will serve as a proxy for algorithmic clustering effects (Maddox & Gill, 2023). Additionally, metrics such as video views and

likes will be recorded to assess how algorithmically boosted content corresponds with different formats of fan expression.

2.3.2. Platform affordances

Furthermore, platform affordances can be understood as features and properties of social media apps that do not dictate but configure the ways in which people engage with them (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1569). For TikTok specifically, it functions as an escape site that relies on specific way of imagining the app's affordances and engaging with them accordingly (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1577). Thus, users use TikTok for its convenient access and relatable content that catered to their escapist desires and needs where it can also be proved useful as a resource to facilitate social interaction (Schellewald, 2023, p. 1579). Additionally, according to Zulli and Zulli (2022, p. 1873), TikTok prioritize creative interaction over discursive interaction where the emphasis lays on video creation and how it unfolds sociality and develop networks on the platform.

Moreover, a study found that fans who develop platform-specific language competencies, along with communities that engage in shared language practices on social media, often circulate particular formats and action sequences to strategically position their content within the grey areas of platform policies (Yin, 2024, p. 636). This suggest that participants in these participatory cultures possess both technological and linguistic awareness, allowing them to navigate and potentially circumvent platform surveillance and censorship. This suggests that participants in participatory cultures possess both technological and linguistic awareness, allowing them to navigate and potentially circumvent platform surveillance and censorship.

2.3.3. Fan motivations and media use

Rubin (2009) defines uses and gratifications theory as a psychological communication paradigm that examines how individuals utilise media and interpersonal communication to meet their needs and desires. This perspective is different from the standard mechanical view of media consumption, which assumes passive behaviour. Using the uses and gratifications theory, this framework investigates the motives that drive people to participate in fan communities and engage in creative activities. It investigates for example the gratifications that fans seek, such as entertainment, social engagement, self-expression, and identification with like-minded people, and how these motives impact their online behaviours and contributions. Applying uses and gratification theory, this research will investigate what the motivations of Elden Ring fans specifically are.

Furthermore, based on identity formation and community building theories, particularly in online environments, this approach investigates how individuals establish and manage their identities via membership in for example fan communities. Moreover, Chen (2022, p. 15-16) argues that international fans engage in localizing English social media content, not just to translate but to creatively adapt it for local audiences. Fan localization becomes a form of expression, where fans

embed personal emotions, humour, and cultural references into their translations. It's a key part of participatory culture, where fans act as both interpreters and co-creators of media. However, this creative freedom can lead to issues, such as mistranslation, bias, or conflicts over authenticity, especially when content spreads online. The study shows that fan localization is complex, multimedia practice that blends translation, social media use, and fandom. It also points to how fan labour helps shape gaming communities and suggests future research compare fan and official localizations or explore how some fan localizers gain status within their communities.

2.4. Online game community

2.4.1. The presence of game community

Several studies have explored game fandoms and their social media presence, highlighting their importance in developing interpretive communities. Particularly in complex, narrative-rich games like *Elden Ring*, Gee (2003) emphasizes how gaming fandoms aid in the collaborative negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, communication and social interaction are key factors that influence a game's success, according to research on the wider effects of social media on game communities and the gaming industry (Bankov, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, Saldanha et al. (2023) looks at how video game communities are organized and finds that they strike a compromise between horizontality and flexibility and traditional hierarchies based on metrics like influence and status. Taylor (2018, p. 258-259) similarly notes that game communities are not just spaces of play but of production and negotiation, where status is earned through visibility, contribution, and interpretive authority.

These studies employ the foundational framework to analyse how the *Elden Ring* TikTok fan community engages with the game through fan videos. These frameworks collectively allow for a nuanced analysis of the ways in which fans interact with *Elden Ring* as a text, TikTok as platform, and each other as a community. The proposed research model involves a thematic analysis of *Elden Ring* TikTok fan video's, combined with an exploration of user interactions (e.g., likes, comments, shares) and community-specific trends to map out participatory dynamics and platform influence.

2.4.2. Fostering game knowledge and shaping skills

Moreover, a digital community can foster a player's game knowledge where the amount of knowledge can influence the size of the community (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012, p. 297). It also appears that a high-knowledge and experienced player act as the central member of the community, for example as a leader or as a guide (p. 298). Additionally, the complexity of growing, moving, changing communities make the use of structures of fans vital because they encourage communities to self-govern as well as producing leaders with desirable characteristics who will help the agendas and behaviours of other fans which also benefits the development organization (Zimmerman, 2019, p. 913). In essence, social platforms and channels like TikTok have been a welcoming addition for communities, where communication and social interaction are one of the key components that drive

the popularity of games and that will continue to impact how games are marketed and played (Bankov, 2019, p. 5)

According to the findings of Rai et al. (2024, p. 2942) gamers that look at game-related information from social media platforms, use this information to build strategies and improve their playing skills. Thus, enhanced knowledge of a game develops a positive mindset in gamers and generates a sense of competition among them (p. 2944). Furthermore, LittleBigPlanet (LBP) is a clear example of participatory culture in the gaming community, where ordinary users and not just experts create and share game content using simple tools (Comunell & Mulargia, 2015, p. 74). Players engage socially by voting, commenting, and remixing levels, showing that success depends more on community interaction than technical skill. LBP reflects a broader shift in digital culture where co-creation is becoming normal, highlighting how participatory practices are evolving.

2.4.3. Active engagement within the game community

According to Gong et al. (2023, p. 143) the motivations to engage in an online game community are perceived enjoyment, perceived escapism, and affective commitment. This further promotes active participation and facilitates subjective norm, group norm, social identity, and normative commitment which are also influential behavioural obligation factors. Furthermore, another study talks about how digital games today encourage some level of interactivity between their players whether it is internal or external (Cheah et al., 2022, p. 942). By external the research talks about social media networking sites as a means to facilitate dialogue and connection with players of the particular game. According to El Afi and Ouiddad (2021, p. 370), game communities are looking to fulfil specific needs which leads them to engage in creating their own experiences. This also is drawn to the uses and gratification theory of Rubin (2009) mentioned earlier in this chapter. Because of the positive influence of personal and social motivations on user's engagement to co-create value it delivers an increase in their loyalty behaviour. In addition, Hamilton et al. (2014) overall research further shows that active engagement is sustained through emotional proximity and live interaction in game cultures, themes increasingly mirrored in TikTok gaming communities.

3. Method

This method discusses how the research will be conducted with important elements such as data analysis, operationalization, method, validity, and reliability. The method is based on *the Methodological Guidelines for Thesis*.

3.1. Research design & data analysis

The method I will be using in this research is thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 86) step-by-step approach, as it is particularly well-suited for exploring fan-made content on TikTok. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the meanings, patterns, and themes embedded in the videos. Furthermore, qualitative thematic analysis is effective in capturing the richness of visual and textual data, making it appropriate method for analysing the interpretive and participation practices within the Elden Ring fan community.

The step-by-step method of Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) includes six phases: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. The first phase "familiarizing yourself with your data" consists of reading and re-reading the data while noting down initial ideas (p. 87). The second phase "generating initial codes" consists of coding interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data set while appointing data relevant to each code (p. 88). The third phase "searching for themes" consists of appointing codes into potential themes while gathering all data that is relevant to each potential theme (p. 89). The fourth phase "reviewing themes" consist of checking if the themes work in relation to the codes and the entire data set while generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis (p. 91). The fifth phase "defining and naming themes" consist of refining the specifics of each theme of the ongoing analysis while interpreting the overall story the analysis tells. Furthermore, in this phase the names and definitions of each theme will be developed (p. 92). The sixth and last phase "producing the report" consists of extracting important examples and relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature. In this phase the results and conclusion chapter will be produced (p. 93). An example of a section on how the videos have been analysed and coded are shown in Appendix B.

3.2. Research questions

This research investigates the role of digital fan practices in shaping shared game experiences through the following main research question: "How do Elden Ring fan edits on TikTok contribute to participatory culture and the negotiation of the game's experience?"

To explore this question more deeply, two sub-questions guide the analysis:

- What types of TikTok videos do Elden Ring fans create to share their game experience with Elden Ring?
- How do fan videos on TikTok foster interaction within the Elden Ring community sharing their game experience with Elden Ring?

The main research question is addressed by analysing how fan edits construct and reframe the gaming experience, revealing broader themes about player identity, shared values, humour, struggle, and narrative reinterpretation. Furthermore, the first sub-question will be explored by identifying themes related to the content, purpose, and style of fan videos, such as humour, lore, skill expression, or fan edits. Moreover, the second sub-question focuses on themes emerging from interactive elements such as recurring in-jokes and themes connecting the experiences of different fans, which reveal how fans engage with one another and co-create meaning.

3.3. Data source & sampling

For this research I will analyse around 200 TikTok short-form videos between 15 seconds and 3 minutes, where according to Lown (2024) 35 seconds is the average video time. It is useful to consider that as the number of followers increases; the video length will also increase. The research will focus on “viral” videos with more than 10.000 likes, to ensure that the analysis captures the most influential and widely interacted-with content in the community on TikTok. This is crucial for understanding the participatory dynamics and identifying how fans actively shape the narrative and engage with their audience. By combining these methods, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between fandom, media content, and platform-specific utilities. The videos chosen to be analysed will be in the timeline between February 25th, 2022, till present. The begin date is the release date of the game (Steam, s.d.) and till the present fan still make videos about the game since there are still updates being released for example. Furthermore, to find the video’s the hashtag and search word “Elden Ring” will be used, I will not add any other tags or search words to analyse videos unbiased. This is because TikTok uses hashtags for specific communities, for example #cleantok or #mukbang, to differentiate their communities and their specific niches where #eldenring is its own niche and community. A viral or popular video on TikTok can be found by typing in the search word in the search engine where the “top” viewed and most interactive video’s pop up. These videos have significantly high views, strong engagements, and shares which shows how the videos are seen as impactful by other fans or users with the same interest. A detailed summary of the dataset is shown in Appendix A.

3.4. Ethical considerations

In this research, ethical considerations are key, particularly the distinction between public and private content. Content from private accounts cannot be accessed without following the user, which limits its availability. Fortunately, TikTok is a predominantly public platform where many content creators choose to share their videos openly. Even within public posts, users have the option to remain anonymous by concealing their face, name, and/or gender. Since this study focuses on fan engagement and user interpretation and experience of the game Elden Ring, demographic details are not necessary for analysis. For this research the information of the fan-made will and cannot be traced back to the original TikTok users to preserve anonymity.

Additionally, this research draws exclusively from the top videos featured on TikTok's discover page. These videos are publicly accessible and tend to have high engagement and reach, making them particularly relevant to the study. Finally, there are no concerns about archiving sensitive content, as TikTok enforces strict community guidelines and removes any content that violates its policies.

3.5. Operationalization

Furthermore, the focus will be on how Elden Ring fans interpret the game and translate it into content on TikTok and what types of video content format is created. Additionally, the way fans try to actively engage with other fans with their user-generated content will also be studied. During the analysis, an excel document will be created to keep track of all the video that has been researched and to keep it as systematic and organized as possible. For example, the sheet will be used to put the studied videos into themes and sub-themes to uncover deeper meanings in how fans interpret the game and engage with other fans.

To systematically analyse the Elden Ring TikTok fan community, key constructs such as interpretation, participation, content format, and engagement are operationalized. First, "interpretation" refers to how fans adapt elements of Elden Ring, such as lore, characters, or gameplay, in their TikTok videos. This concept is based on "textual poaching", a theory by Jenkins (1988). Examples include reenacting in-game scenarios, providing commentary, or creating humorous or stylized edits that reflect the game's themes. Moreover, "participation" refers to how fans engage with the community, including interactive formats like challenges, collaborations, and duets. It also includes the use of platform-specific trends and hashtags (#EldenRing) to foster community and connections and shared creativity. This concept is influenced by the theory of "participatory culture" by Jenkins (2004). Furthermore, "content format" examines the types and styles of videos created, such as gameplay guides, lore discussions, or fan edits. This concept is influenced by van Dijck and Poell (2013), where they mention the specific use of social platforms and how they operate. For example, video length, the use of platform-specific features like text overlays, trending sounds, and effects, will be analysed. Lastly, "engagement" focuses on tone and content of user comments. This helps identify impactful content and interaction patterns within the fan community. The concept "engagement" is highlighted in the theories by Bankov (2019) and Saldanha et al. (2023). These key constructs and theoretical frameworks will help with making the research more organized and specifically go deeper into how fans actively engage with short-form videos in the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok.

3.6. Validity & reliability

This research's validity is based on its consistency, trustworthy, credibility, and transferability and that it examines what it intends to examine according to the research question. Furthermore, in this research I will make sure that the reader has enough information to judge the

extent to which similar results could be seen in similar studies or among comparable research units. This could be done, for example, by addressing how the evidence could have been interpreted differently, what basis I opted for specific interpretations, and how I can account for that. To also ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of my research I will use a specific research technique like double coding, where I will go over my code to ensure that I do not miss any important findings.

3.7. Limitations of the method

This research comes with several limitations. The first is the risk of overgeneralizing the Elden Ring fan community. It is important to acknowledge that not all fans are active on TikTok, and among those who are, not everyone participates by creating fan content. Furthermore, the fan-made videos that are analysed may not fully represent the entire fanbase. As such, the focus of this research is not capturing a complete picture of the community, but rather on exploring how fans engage with the game and identifying recurring themes within their content.

Another limitation lies in TikTok's algorithm. The platform's recommendation system may prioritize certain type of videos while excluding others, even if they also have high engagement. To counter this, a sample of 200 videos was selected to minimize the risk of bias from content that might be overly influenced by personal viewing history or interaction.

Lastly, there is the potential for researcher bias. As someone who is personally invested in the game and identifies as a fan, it is important to recognize how this could influence interpretation. To mitigate this, the research focuses on the hashtag #EldenRing and selects only top-performing videos, avoiding the temptation to seek out content that personally resonates. The goal is to present a broader, more balanced view of how the fan community participates and engages on TikTok.

4. Results

In this chapter the findings of the research will be addressed. For example, how often the themes come up and what they mean will be revealed. The results will be focused on the main theme “experience”, where the focus will be on the interpretation of fans and how they experience and negotiate the game Elden Ring on TikTok with fan-made videos.

The themes were developed by using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p. 86) step-by-step approach: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The last step will be conducted in this chapter.

The analysis generated four main themes:

- Boss fights and hardships – highlighting the demanding and rewarding boss fights in Elden Ring and their emotional reactions.
- Building your own character and skills – exploring how fans make their own character and share their preferences.
- Online how-to guides and progressing in Elden Ring – exploring how fans progress in the game and how they share their own experience to help others.
- The beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits – highlighting the well-developed game and how fans praise it by making creative edits.

4.1. Boss fights and hardships

This theme captures how fans create videos related to their experiences with the boss fights and hardships in Elden Ring. Additionally, 48 TikTok videos from fans exploring this theme shows the impact of the boss fights the players experience in Elden Ring. A notable insight is that a boss fight in Elden Ring is a significant moment for players where they capture cutscenes of the introduction and “second phase” of the bosses, their battle experience, relatable boss fight moments, and their favourite boss fights. Furthermore, this theme shows how the game is impactful when it comes to experiencing hardships and the rewarding feeling of overcoming these hardships when defeating a boss or when entering a new area in the game.

4.1.1. *Introducing the Elden Ring bosses*

The first sub-theme explores how fans experience bosses in Elden Ring and especially the first introduction they encounter with these characters. Additionally, as shown in these fan-made videos, in the game before fighting a boss there will be a cutscene of them introducing themselves in a way to show off their dominance and to intimidate the player. In addition, the cutscenes highlight the character’s background more in depth where in Elden Ring you will get to meet more and more bosses which makes the fans understand the game’s lore more and experience the game more deeply.



Figure 1. Streamer's reaction to Godfrey's cutscene before the boss fight

The example above (figure 1) shows a streamer reacting on an opening cutscene of one of the Elden Ring bosses called *Godfrey the First Elden Lord* before the actual boss fights start. Their reactions show how this boss has an impact on them and how “cool” it is. By creating and sharing this video the creator wants to share his reaction or opinion on the boss which can activate other fans to interact and talk about their own experiences with the same or other bosses in the game.



Figure 2. Player walking slowly towards the boss Rykard

The second example (figure 2) shows a video of a player in the game walking towards the boss “Rykard” and showing their first encounter. This video suggests that the player is not scared of the intimidating boss by walking slowly towards it and showing the viewers how they first hit the boss with a sword. This example shows one of the many ways fans create videos encountering bosses in Elden Ring and their interaction with them.

Moreover, Multiple videos have emerged from the analysis showing how specifically streamers react on the cutscenes of the bosses. Most of the reactions are about how good the boss's introductions are and how they watch it with amazement. This shows how the character in the game

has an impact on the game experience where players are looking forward to unlocking new cutscenes of all the bosses.

4.1.2. Memorable boss fight moments

The sub-theme “memorable boss fight moments” highlights the experience of players during a major boss fight. The boss fights in Elden Ring are difficult which is shown in the TikTok video’s where players share their hardships fighting these bosses. Furthermore, fans sharing these moments can a way to share an experience that other players might also have experience and to cope this experience together by sharing and watching it.

Additionally, the boss *Malenia Blade of Miquella* has been mentioned the most overall in the dataset (32 times) when it comes to hard boss fights and memorable cutscenes. It is one of the bosses that players have a notably hard time fighting. Interestingly, Malenia is an optional boss to fight and thus not necessary to defeat the game with. Although, sharing TikTok videos about the fight with Malenia can perhaps be a cause that other players search for her in the game and challenge themselves on one of these optional bosses. Furthermore, in the example below (figure 3), a streamer shows their first boss fight moment with Malenia where it is shown that they underestimate her at the beginning before the fight. Once the fight starts, the player is being killed off in less than eight seconds before even attacking the boss Malenia. This video is a good example of how hard it is to fight the (optional) bosses in Elden Ring, specifically fighting Malenia.



Figure 3. A player fighting Malenia for the first time and dies in 8 seconds.

Moreover, the second example below (figure 4) shows a video with the title “Coming back to fight a boss when your overleveled”. The creator highlights how good it feels to come back to a boss fight when you gained more levels, which means that the fight is easier than the first time he fought the boss. The video contributes by showing a moment that maybe other fans can relate to which adds to the way the player experiences the game. The video also shows how progressing in the game and levelling up their fighting skills helps with making Elden Ring easier to play. Additionally, the video shows the rewarding moment after encountering many hardships in the game and coming back stronger than before.



Figure 4. A player coming back to an Elden Ring boss to fight again but this time being overleveled.

Furthermore, these examples show how boss fights in Elden Ring is one of the most difficult but rewarding experiences in the game. Fans sharing their experience on these hardships with the bosses on TikTok shows how far they come or how they are about to start a big challenge that other fans might relate to. Thus, the videos can contribute to sharing the same relatable feelings and experiences for Elden Ring within the online fan community.

4.1.3. Memes and relatable moments

The third sub-theme “memes and relatable moments” explores how fans create videos that highlight moments in the game that other players might also have experienced in a fun and humoristic way. Additionally, Elden Ring is a game where exploring is a big element, where players will come across different milestones, hardships, and perhaps funny moments for example. Additionally, the gameplay can be quite difficult, and the lore is also dark in a way. Which makes turning a certain moment in the game into a meme, the game and the overall experience more light-hearted.

The example below (figure 5) highlights how other players give each other advice. The advice being highlighted in the video is “get good”, which can be interpreted as how it is a must to build up your (fighting) skills in the game to progress. Which can be seen as the hardest and only way in the game. Thus, you must develop your fighting skills to defeat enemies and bosses otherwise you will not progress in the game whatsoever. Moreover, the TikTok video highlights the point of view of the player experience in Elden Ring and contributes to how others relate to this experience as well.



Figure 5. A meme about “The average Elden Ring player experience”

Another example (figure 6) shows a meme of the “POV” of the Elden Ring bosses. In the video you see a racoon rolling repeatedly near the persons feet. This portrays how Elden Ring players fight the bosses, which can be seen as an accurate portrayal. In order to dodge a boss’ attack, a player can roll over in the game, like how the racoon also does. Additionally, this video also highlights how it might look “ridiculous” from the boss’ point of view, seeing a small entity rolling near its feet. Moreover, the video contributes by sharing a funny POV of the boss fight which can make other fans realize how ridiculous it can look which they might not notice while playing the game themselves.

Moreover, sharing memes of funny or relatable moments in Elden Ring is a way to share their hardships into a more light-hearted way. Moments that are specifically mentioned the most are for example players giving advice to other players, boss fights, POV’s, and character cutscenes. These examples show how fans find the Elden Ring bosses impactful by sharing relatable moments that other fans might also experience in the game. Furthermore, it is about looking back at major boss fight moments in the game which are deemed as memorable. The most noticeable pattern in these TikTok videos are fans showing the cutscenes, introduction, fighting moments with these Elden Ring bosses, and sharing memes of the Elden Ring player’s experience. All in all, sharing these boss fights

and hardships is a way for other players to extend their experience of the game by consuming other players' experiences.

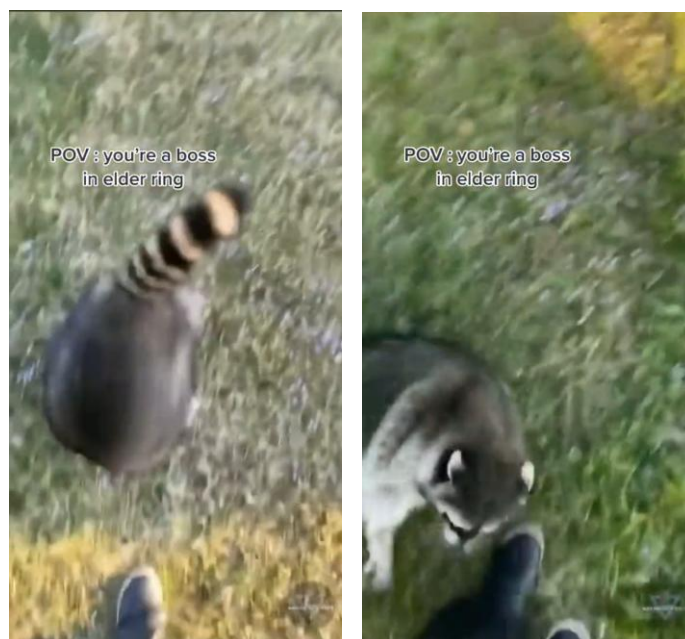


Figure 6. "POV: you're a boss in elder ring"

4.2. Building your own character and skills

The second main theme "building your own character and skills", consisting of 56 videos from the data set, captures how fans share their character customization, build, weapons, and skills. This can contribute to helping other fans out that are more unknowledgeable or want to take inspiration from others. Additionally, the theme also highlights the POV of the player and how they experience Elden Ring through their own character build and customization. Furthermore, the TikTok videos highlight their opinion on what they think is the best build, sharing their customization, and their preferred weapons to kill of enemies and bosses.

4.2.1. Character customization

The sub-theme "character customization" explores how fans share their character customization with TikTok videos. In those videos the main subject is how their character looks in the game and the different outfits they have created. What is mostly interesting, is that the outfit parts can only be found in different areas in the game, which can make the character creation more rewarding and impactful to the game experience. Furthermore, these videos explore how fans interpret their character and experience the game in their own way by showing off their outfit creation which they have gathered across the land and where they can help others out finding the same parts.

Moreover, the example below (figure 7) shows different outfits created by a player. This can be interpreted to show their creation which they are proud of and want to share with others. The comments under the same video shows how other fans are interested in the outfits and mainly ask

where the different parts of the outfits are coming from. Additionally, this video can contribute to sharing different inspiration that other fans can copy for their own character that they're playing with. It can be seen as a guide to style their Elden Ring character which can add more value to the roleplay experience in the game.



Figure 7. "Elden Ring Drip": A video showing different outfit creations.

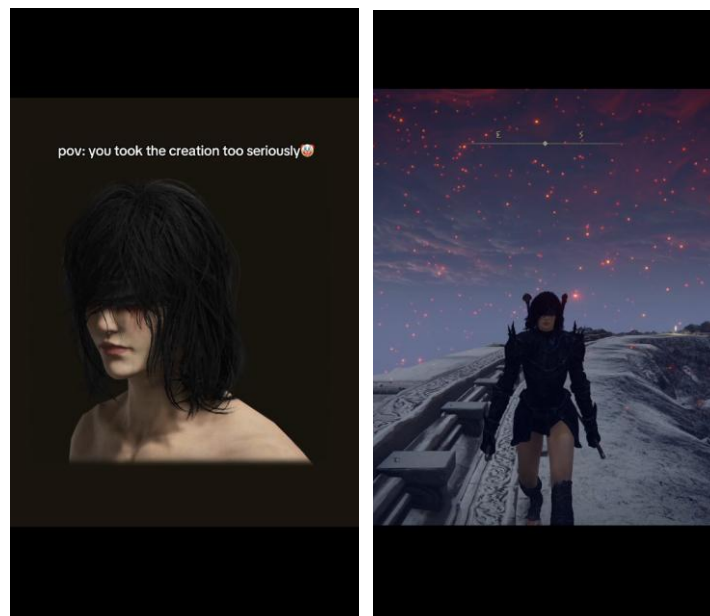


Figure 8. "POV: you took the creation too seriously"

Furthermore, the second example (figure 8) shows a character that the creator of the video made. The video has the caption "POV: you took the creation too seriously", which can be suggested as the amount of time the creator has put in the character customization. Moreover, after showing the face of the character, the creator also shows two separate outfits the character is wearing. The creator shows of their character creation by sharing in an extensive way what their character looks like in the game.

From this type of videos, where a creator shares their character creation from face to outfits, it is shown that fans like to show off their character customization in Elden Ring. Specifically, the outfits they created since it is a separate quest to gather certain outfit parts which makes the outfit creation feel like an achievement on its own. Additionally, it is also shown in the comment section that people like to ask how they created the face and where you can find the different outfit parts.

4.2.2. Character build

This sub-theme “character build” explores how fans make videos showing different character build to help other fans progress in the game or making choices easier for them. Elden Ring is a game where there are unlimited options on how to customize the character build which makes every choice a different experience.

Furthermore, the first example below (figure 9), shows different character builds that can be create in Elden Ring, and according to the player what the “best options” are. In Elden Ring there is an option to choose a character build at the beginning of the game. For example. later in the game the player has the option to choose between weapons, levels, and armour that they want to be upgraded or used during exploration. Moreover, the fan shows with this TikTok video what they think is the best character build for each level statistics (for some weapons a certain level statistic is required before it can be used). Thus, the creator tries to help others by showing what the best level statistics are when a certain build is wanted. Moreover, the character build players choose has an effect on the overall experience of the game and how enemies and bosses are being defeated with the different skills and builds the players chooses. This makes a guide to different builds useful for other players to see how they like to experience the game or what options are available.

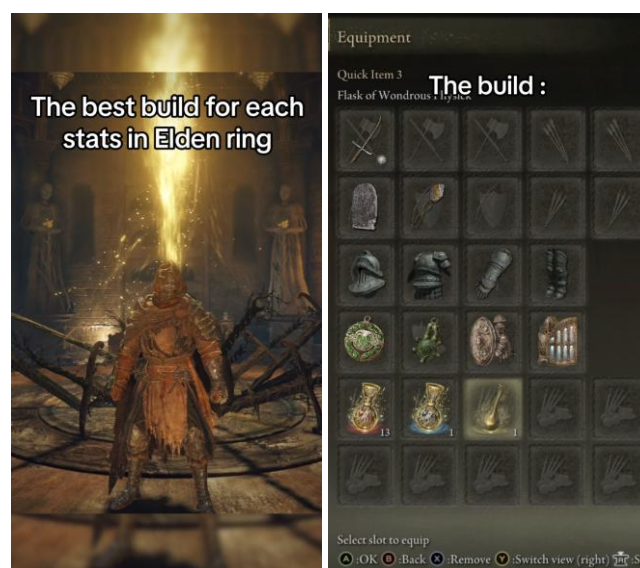


Figure 9. “The best build for each stats in Elden Ring”

The second example (figure 10) shows a video talking about what the best starting class is in Elden Ring. The creator shows that the starting class “vagabond” is the best by giving their

arguments. Additionally, the video can inspire beginners what class they should pick and make the choice easier. Picking a class in Elden Ring means picking “characters” with certain skill levels and starter weapons. The creator shows their preferred class and how they like to play their customized character that they pick.



Figure 10. “The best starting class in Elden Ring”

By sharing information about different character builds can be useful to other fans to see how they want to experience the game. These videos also contribute to the fan community by sharing helpful insides from the game that are especially helpful for beginners. For instance, this shows the care the community has for each other and how they like to share information that can help other make the Elden Ring experience easier. Furthermore, the videos show how customizable the game is and what type of player they are.

4.2.3. Weapons and skills

The third sub-theme “weapons and skills” explores the weapons fans choose to play with and their skills they acquire in Elden Ring. The TikTok videos about this subject highlights the opinion on the different weapons and their skills in Elden Ring. These videos contribute to the fan community by sharing which weapons are available in the game, for which build they are the most useful, which weapons are the strongest, etc.

The example below (figure 11) shows a video of “three weapons you need to get in Elden Ring”. This video explores how the fan thinks that these three weapons are a need in the game and are the strongest to fight the bosses easily and in the end defeat the game. Additionally, in the video the fan shows visually the skills of the weapons and what kind of level statistics are needed to be able to use the weapons. Thus, this contributes by sharing a guide but also a visual on which weapons other players need to get and help them out in their own game experience. For example, other fans might not know that these weapons exist or what level statistics are needed to acquire these weapons.



Figure 11. “3 Weapons YOU need to get in Elden Ring”

The second example (figure 12) shows a player attacking an enemy with a specific skill called the “dragon plunge” which kills the enemy almost instantly. The creator contributes by sharing a skill that might inspire others to also use it in their gameplay. The creator also might share this fight by showing off their fighting skills against a difficult enemy and show how good they are in the game.



Figure 12. A video showing a player using “dragon plunge” on an enemy

All in all, the theme “build your own character and skills” shows how fans contribute to the fan community on TikTok by sharing how other fans can customize their character, what builds and level statistics is the most useful and the best way to experience the game, and what weapons with the best skills are the most useful for a better game experience. Furthermore, the videos show how other fans are helpful towards other fans by sharing this insightful information to help them experience the game in the way they want. Not only are these videos helpful but also to get inside information from multiple fans on their opinion about certain weapons, character builds and how they like to customize their character. In essence, the fans care for other fans on how they can make their character as fitting as they like to experience the game.

4.3. Online how-to guides and progressing in Elden Ring

The third main theme “online how-to guides and progressing in Elden Ring”, consisting of 25 videos in the dataset, explores how other fans help each other to progress in the game. This leads to a value contribution by sharing tips that other fans might not know about and help them defeat the game easier with the help from TikTok videos from fans. These videos highlight how fans can progress in the game. The how-to videos mainly consist of how-to explore, progress, and play Elden Ring in their own way.

4.3.1. How to explore the game

The first sub-theme “how to explore the game” explores how fans create videos to help other fans, who just began playing Elden Ring, how they can explore in the game by following a specific route. The reason for these videos is probably because Elden Ring is an open-world game where there are many routes the player can take. So, this means that players can play the game in many ways. Thus, these “how-to explore” videos are helpful for those who get lost easily in the game, want to get a shortcut, discover new places, and search for the best routes for a more fitted game experience. The fan-made videos contribute to the TikTok fan community by sharing their guides on how to explore the game that fits the player interested.

Furthermore, the first example below (figure 13) shows an “Elden Ring Beginner’s Guide”, highlighting what you should do in the first five minutes playing the game. This can be interpreted as how the creator think it is the best what for beginners to begin the game in their experience. Thus, this video contributes by sharing a guide specifically for beginners who struggle with finding their way in the game. Not only is this helpful but does this help with a better experience in the game, which is not getting stuck at the beginning, but easily and gradually find your way through the game by following these helpful guides from other fans on TikTok. Additionally, the creator perhaps makes these types of videos because they themselves struggle with their progression in the game and

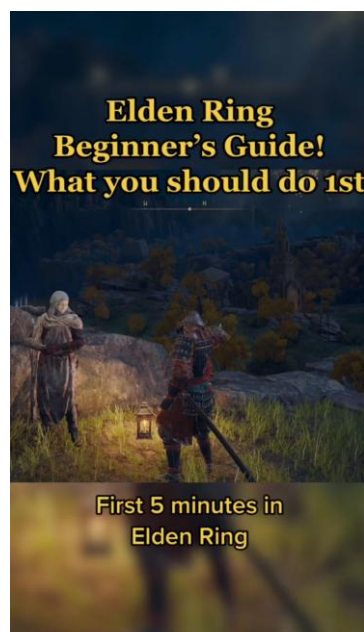


Figure 13. “Elden Ring Beginner’s Guide!”

finding the right route without getting stuck. Therefore, they created these videos, so other beginners have a better start than the fans themselves.

Furthermore, the second example below (figure 14) shows a video of “the best boss order” in Elden Ring DLC. The creator wants to share what they think is the best order to fight the bosses in the game in their experience. This can be seen as an inspiration on how others can experience the game by following this specific order. Other fans might also not know which bosses need to be defeated in order to defeat the game, which make this guide also useful. Moreover, it is also good to note that in Elden Ring not every boss needs to be defeated, there are only a few that are mandatory. Thus, this is why creators making these TikTok videos show a guide what the best order is in order to progress fast and defeat the game. A fan-made video like this contributes to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing how other fans can defeat the game by following this specific order to help them guide and explore in a way that is most sufficient.

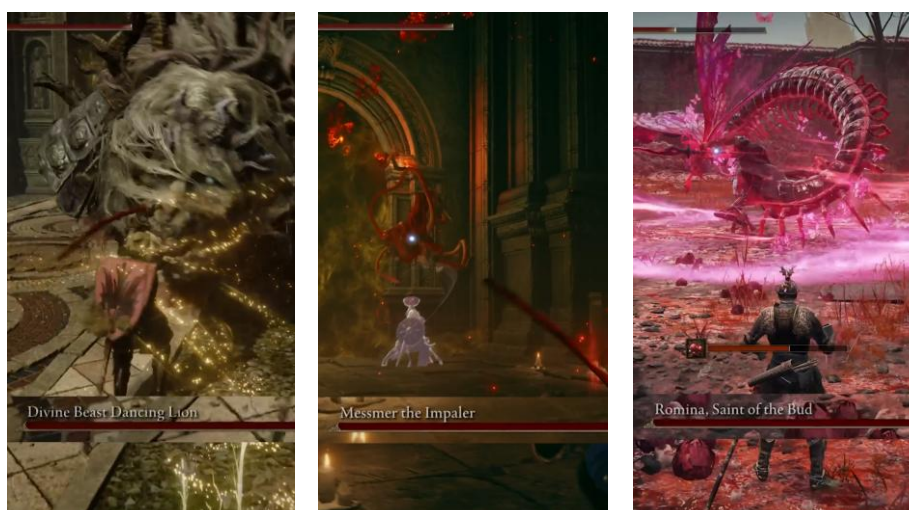


Figure 14. Best boss order in Elden Ring DLC

4.3.2. How to progress fast in the game

The second sub-theme “how to progress fast in the game” delves into ways you can progress faster in Elden Ring. Specifically with the help of *rune farming*, which means to gather lots of runes as fast and easy as possible. For example, with these runes you can buy weapons, armour, and level up the character statistics. Essentially, these runes are very important in the game to progress fast. A big pattern in the analysis is that of the videos helping others to progress in the game which is about certain “rune farming” spots, where players can get as many runes as fast as possible. Moreover, these type of videos from fans contribute to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing information that others might not know and share how they experience and play the game in order to progress as fast as they can. In essence, showing these “hacks” provide a useful guide for other players to have an easier and faster game experience.

An example of a “rune farming” guide (figure 15) is a video showing a specific rune farming place where you can farm 80,000 runes. This is also a technique that is known among several players

called “the dragon technique”. With this technique you must go to a specific place on the map that leads the player to a paralyzed dragon that the player must hit, which takes up to 15 minutes. Thus, it shows that a “normal” player might not know or come across this “hack”, because to do this technique, it takes knowledge and time. Although, it is a hard to spot a “rune farming” technique it is one of the most known techniques on TikTok as seen in the comments below the video where people name this technique and their experience with it. This reveals that multiple fans tried different ways on how to get runes and sharing their experience with these different types of techniques.

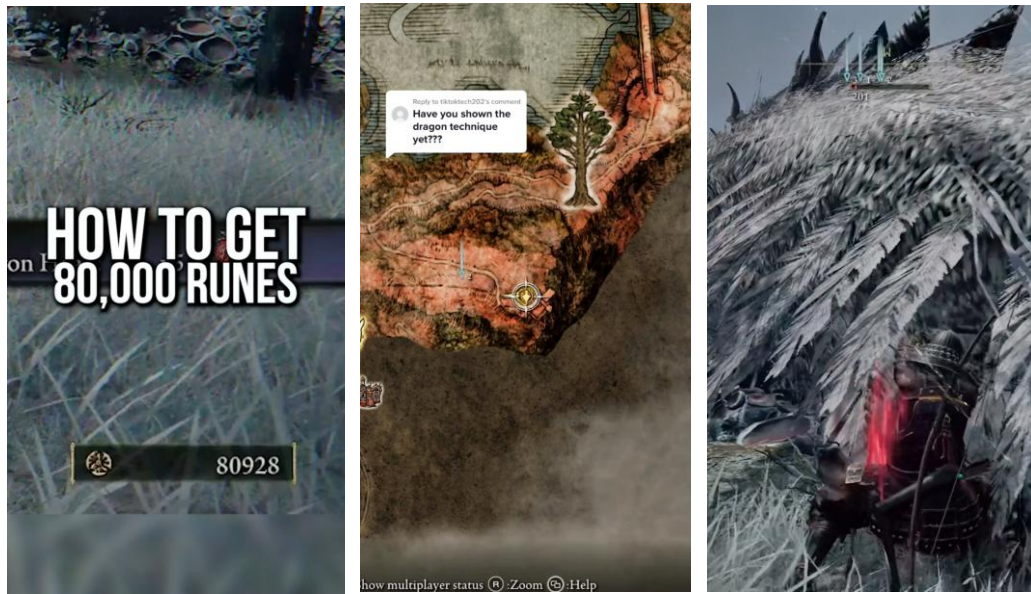


Figure 15. Rune farming spot “the dragon technique”

The second example (figure 16) shows another fan-made video showing a different rune farming spot. This spot consists of taking on a journey with the objective to defeat a demigod in the game. The creator contributes by sharing information that other players might not know about. The video suggests that this is a more difficult rune farming spot which makes it more intriguing to see how the creator has found it.

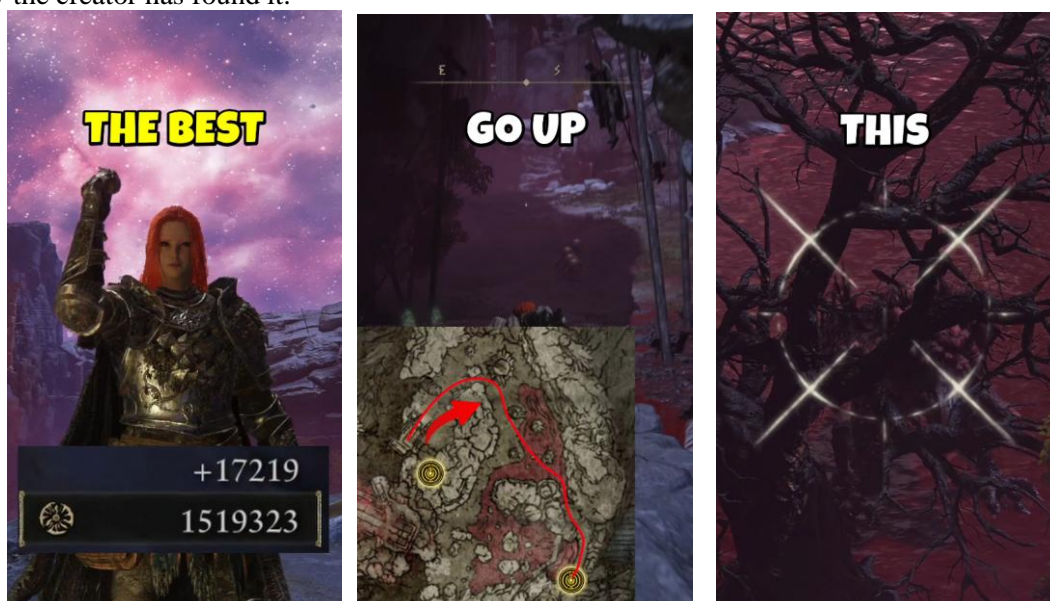


Figure 16. “The best rune farming spot”

These types of fan-made videos are contributing to the online fan community on TikTok by educating other players with useful information showing how to progress fast in the game. The videos can extend the game experience by sharing information other players might not know which makes them play the game more extensively while unlocking new information through TikTok video content made by other fans.

4.3.3. How to play Elden Ring like it is another game

The third sub-theme “how to play Elden Ring like it is another game” explores how fans like to play the game in their own specific way deviating from the game’s objective. For example, the patterns that occur are fans that play the game as if it is a “cozy game”, a “girly game”, or a “role play game”. This sub-theme highlights how fans make Elden Ring a game of their own, how they like to experience it in a nontypical way and how other fans could play the game by sharing their fan-made videos on TikTok.

The first example (figure 17) discovers how a fan explores the Elden Ring game like it is a “cozy game”. Typically, in Elden Ring you go to different areas and defeat enemies and bosses to progress and defeat the game by becoming the Elden Lord, while this creator plays Elden Ring without an objective in mind and aimlessly explore different areas on their horse by avoiding



Figure 17. “Playing Elden Ring like a cozy game by ignoring all the enemies while exploring on my horse”

enemies as if it is a peaceful game to play. This fan made video contributes to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing a different way they can play the game. This video might inspire other fans to try and play Elden Ring differently. Thus, it contributes by expending the game experience even further by creating their own adventure and objective.

Moreover, the second example (figure 18) is a video of two players roleplaying being a mage girlfriend and a knight boyfriend. Which highlights two different character builds the player can choose in the game. Therefore, the creator shows that they are not focusing on the purpose of the



Figure 18. "knight bf + mage gf <3"

game but more on the aesthetics and the role-playing element of the game. This type of gameplay might attract cosplayers and fans that like to roleplay. For example, with character creations and choosing a specific character build, the player can choose how they extend the game experience by adding a roleplay element to Elden Ring by creating a made-up storyline for their own character. Furthermore, this type of fan made videos contribute by exploring different ways the game is played and how important aesthetics and storytelling is in the game.

The third example (figure 19) shows a video highlighting how Elden Ring is a game for the girls. Suggesting that the game is a feminine game, which is how the creator perceives Elden Ring. The fan-made video could also be seen as a counter reaction on the assumption that Elden Ring is only for the boys and wants to proof that that is not the case. The video contributes to the fan community by sharing their game experience and perception of the game that can activate other fans to participate in the discussion where they share their opinion.



Figure 19. “Elden Ring is a game for the girlies”

All in all, as seen in these examples and the patterns of the analysis, it is shown that some fans like to participate and share how you can progress as fast as possible, while other fans like to explore and play the game in their own specific way. This shows a significant difference in how fans perceive and experience the game and their preferences. By participating and making these TikTok videos fans connect and share their gameplay experience that might make other fans inspired or related to it. Thus, these examples show that fans found their own way of playing the game and want to share their game experience and thoughts with others.

4.4. The beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits

The fourth main theme “the beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits” explores fans creating creative fan edits of Elden Ring. In those edits they highlight different elements in the game which they think is the most beautiful in their experience. These types of edits contribute to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing different aesthetic aspects of the game that might activate other fans or people to play the game, share their experience, and share their fascination with these fan edits.

4.4.1. The beauty of the different areas in Elden Ring

The first sub-theme “the beauty of the different areas in Elden Ring” explores the different areas in Elden Ring which the fans highlight in their edits. For instance, in Elden Ring you explore different areas in which every new area the player unlocks the further they progress in the game. Each area has their own style and looks like a completely new environment compared to other areas. Thus, that is why some fans make edits of these different areas because it captured their fascination for the Elden Ring game.

Moreover, In the first example below (figure 20) explores the different areas in Elden Ring.

The fan-made edit shows in a horizontal visual the distinctly aesthetic places in Elden Ring in high quality footage. Additionally, the edit is being played with music in the background that is being streamlined with the cuts in the edit. The fan shows by making this edit the effort that has been put in the video and how beautiful the game Elden Ring is. It contributes to the fan community by making these edits and showing the “average” game experience where the people can see which areas the player might come across when playing the game.



Figure 20. Fan edit of different areas in Elden Ring

Furthermore, the second example (figure 21) shows another fan edit of the different areas in Elden Ring with the title “the beauty of Elden Ring”, which claims that the creator finds these places in the game beautiful. The edit is shown in 1:1 format, which is an unusual TikTok format. The most common one is 9:16 to support vertical videos. Additionally, other fans highlight and support how beautiful Elden Ring is in the comments underneath the video which shows the appreciation of the fan edit. Thus, the fan-made edits of these different areas in Elden Ring contribute by sharing the aesthetics of the game experience with other fans.



Figure 21. Fan edit of different areas in Elden Ring

4.4.2. *The beauty of the different characters in Elden Ring*

The second sub-theme “the beauty of the different characters in Elden Ring” explores how fan highlight the significant Elden Ring characters in their edits and what makes them so important in their game experience. These videos surrounded by the main characters in Elden Ring shows a creative edit highlighting their lore, aesthetics, powers, and skills. Many fans are intrigued by the bosses when seeing their cutscenes and for fans that likes making creative edits it motivates them to create a video to extend their game experience involving these characters. These types of videos made by fans contribute to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing multiple characters in one video. Thus, in this way when other fans might not have explored the characters, they can still enjoy their visuals and experience them in another way on TikTok instead of in the game Elden Ring.

The example below (figure 22) shows a fan edit portraying multiple important characters from Elden Ring. The edit is seen in a horizontal format to give it more of a cinematic feeling. Moreover, the creator participates by sharing this fan edit to other fans that also might enjoy these characters or meeting them for the first time and get a visual of what the game has to offer based on these characters.



Figure 22. Fan edit of different characters in Elden Ring

Besides showing the characters in the edit, a song is also added to the video to give more context about how deep the characters lore is. However, the song itself is not related to the characters' lore but can be seen as something closely related to it. Moreover, the video contributes to the fan community by making and sharing an extended experience of the game and connecting the characters to each other so other fans can also experience it.

4.4.3. The beauty of the “tarnished” in Elden Ring

The third sub-theme “the beauty of the “tarnished” in Elden Ring” explores the experience of the “tarnished” which is the POV of the player. The fan edits highlight the exploration and paths the tarnished experiences. Thus, it shows the objective of the players in Elden Ring and their path to become the Elden Lord when defeating the game. These types of videos made by fans contribute to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing their purpose in the game which extends the usual game experience to find a greater purpose in the game than only defeating enemies and bosses.

The first example below (figure 23) shows an edit of the tarnished (the player) and their journey. The video is shown in a horizontal format, and the song underneath highlights how the



Figure 23. Fan edit of the journey and purpose of “the tarnished”

tarnished managed to be in a place like that, even though the song is not directly related to the Elden Ring game it fits quite good with the story of the tarnished. Furthermore, the video shows how the tarnished is traveling to a lot of places, meeting lots of new characters, and their objective. In essence, the video contributes by sharing how players experience the game with our own specific lore and purpose. This makes the fan community more connected by sharing the same objective and journey throughout the game which is being highlighted in the fan edits on TikTok.

Furthermore, the second example (figure 24) shows the journey of the tarnished in another light. The video, in 1:1 format, shows the purpose of the tarnished in a simple way. From exposing itself to guidance, to the journey, and eventually ending up on the throne as the Elden Lord. In the video the text “the Erdtree was leading you all along” highlights how the tarnished was being led by



Figure 24. Fan edit of the journey and purpose of “the tarnished”

the Erdtree which is being visualized in the game. The Erdtree is a big tree which holds power and within the Erdtree is the tarnished destination to fight the main boss *Radagon*. When playing the game, the tarnished is gradually coming closer and closer to the Erdtree, which is being highlighted in the fan edit. Furthermore, this type of fan-made video contributes by sharing the objective of the players in Elden Ring and their purpose. Thus, the video can make a better connection between the game and the players. By participating, the creator shows other fans how their journey looks like and what the experience looks like overall in Elden Ring as the tarnished.

Moreover, an interesting observation is that most edits are being posted horizontally. This could be the cause to make the videos more cinematic and aesthetic which may be more appealing to the eye. Additionally, creating fan edits is a great extension of the overall game experience showing their different interesting characters, beautiful areas, and the purpose and journey of the tarnished, which are the players themselves. Thus, these edits can make the fans more connected to the game. In essence, fan made videos of the beauty of Elden Ring contributes to the Elden Ring fan community on TikTok by sharing how beautiful the game is, attracting the game to other fans and people that are interested in playing.

4.5. Connection between the themes

Four different main themes and 12 sub-themes have emerged from the thematic analysis. The four main themes consist of the how-to guides, the beauty of Elden Ring, character customization and build, and boss fights and hardships which are all connected to each other, forming the fan experience in Elden Ring. Thus, these four main elements are what fans experience the most as shown in the fan-made TikTok videos. From these four main themes, three sub-themes each have been formed which delves deeper into the meaning of the main theme and what type of experiences and characteristics emerges from these themes. An interesting result is that different sub-themes are almost directly related to each other which is going to be explored further and highlighted

in figure 25.

4.5.1. The complication of character optimization in Elden Ring

The first connection exists of the complication of character optimization in Elden Ring where “character build”, “how-to progress”, “how-to play in your own way”, “weapons and skills”, and “character customization” are connected. In essence, the way the player builds its character is connected on how the game is going to be experienced. This changes to boss fights, gameplay, aesthetics, usage of weapons and skills, and how it is played in the specific way of the player. According to these connections, fans interpret the game where you can customize and optimize their character exactly the way they prefer. This makes the game enjoyable for most where different parts of the game can be more interesting to some than others. All in all, it shows the complexity of character optimization and how fans experience their game based on all these factors that influences their specific gameplay. This makes the fan community on TikTok interactive by showing and sharing their experience, opinions, and preferences that others might relate to.

4.5.2. The beauty and hardships of boss fights and its major momentum in Elden Ring

The second connection between “beauty of different characters”, “introducing Elden Ring bosses”, and “boss fight moments”, share their similarities to the impact the bosses in Elden Ring has on the fan community. Each of these sub-themes highlight the bosses in different ways. The element that the fans shown in the TikTok videos highlight the most are the introduction scenes before the boss fight which shows not only who the boss is but also their lore and aesthetics. Thus, a boss in Elden Ring is a major moment and milestone within the game where most of the hardships take place but also the most rewarding experience.

4.5.3. The many ways to explore Elden Ring

The third connection between “how-to explore”, “how-to play in your own way”, “how-to progress”, “character customization”, “character build”, and “weapons and skills”, shows how different characteristics of the game can make the exploration vastly different for every player. For example, when a player wants a certain outfit, it will explore to different parts of the game than a fan that wants to find a certain weapon. Another example is that some fans want to progress fast in the game by using “rune farming”, while other fans like to play as if it is a cozy game. The different ways of exploring are all dependent on the needs of the players in Elden Ring. Thus, the TikTok videos made by fans can fulfil different needs and inspiration that help others explore the game how they like the most.

4.5.4. The tarnished and their game experience in Elden Ring

The fourth connection between “beauty of the tarnished”, “memes and relatable moments”, “how-to explore”, “how-to progress”, “how-to play in your own way”, and “character customization”

shows how everything is centered towards the POV of the tarnished which are the players themselves.

In essence, the connection shows how Elden Ring is a game focused on the tarnished where the player can decide with many characteristics how they want to experience the game. Additionally, shown in the fan made videos it is shown that the tarnished has a greater purpose in finding their own way to become the Elden Lord. Thus, within all these guides about best routes, character customization, how to progress, and memes with relatable experiences, it shows how fans connect with the fan community on TikTok to help each other out. In the end, players experience the game differently but also in the same way since they fight the same enemies and bosses and explore similar areas eventually.

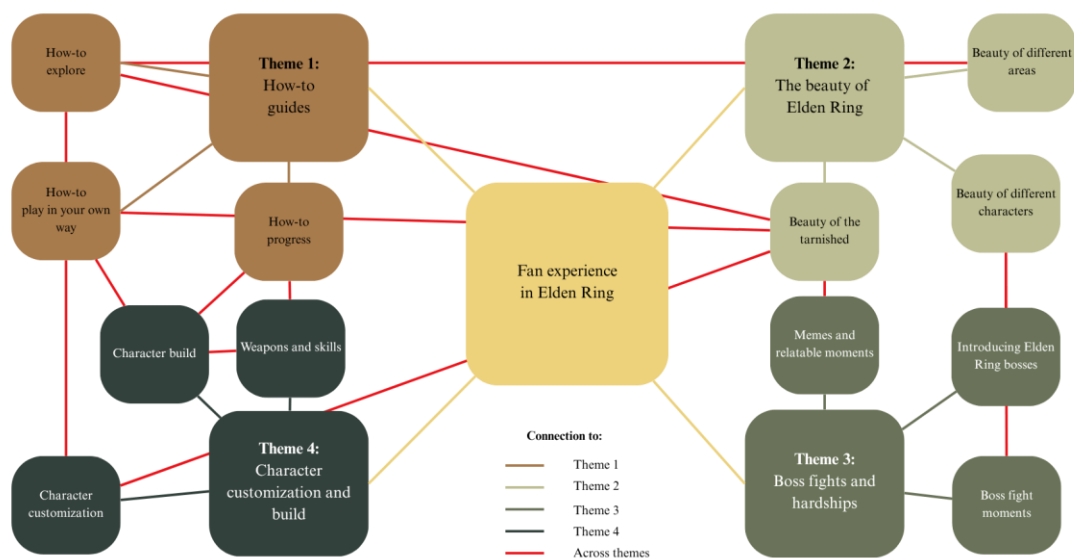


Figure 25. Connection between the different themes and sub-themes

4.6. Summary

The thematic analysis of Elden Ring fan-made videos on TikTok reveals rich insights of interpretations, emotional engagements, and creative practices that showcase how players experience and interpret the game. Additionally, the thematic analysis, rooted in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, highlighting four main themes that reflect different yet interconnected dimensions of fan participation and meaning making on the platform: boss fights and hardships, building your own character and skills, online how-to guides and the beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits, which is highlighted in the coding tree (figure 26) below.

Furthermore, the overarching theme that connects all findings is "experience", how fans interpret, personalize, and communicate their journey through Elden Ring. TikTok serves not only as a domain for these experiences but as a participatory space where fans connect through similar hardships, achievements, humour, aesthetics, and advice.

The first theme, boss fights and hardships, underscores how difficult encounters with bosses become collective milestones in the community. Videos in this category show emotional reactions, humour through memes, and reflective storytelling about difficult yet rewarding in-game moments. These videos often encounter relatability and context among fans, reinforcing the shared emotional challenges and satisfaction tied to overcoming Elden Ring's well-known difficulty.

The second theme, building your own character and skills, illustrates the personalized nature of gameplay. For example, fans highlight their character designs, preferred combat builds, and creative expressions of identity through outfits and weapons. These videos often take on an instructional tone, offering insight and inspiration for others to imitate or adapt. In essence, this theme emphasizes individuality while still supporting community interaction through shared strategies and admiration.

The third theme, online how-to guides and progressing in Elden Ring, represents a more practical, tutorial-driven side of fandom. Fans share their knowledge through guides on exploration, rune farming, boss fights, and alternative gameplay styles. Particularly noteworthy are videos where players creatively reinterpret Elden Ring as a "cozy game", a "girly game", or a platform for (romantic) roleplay, subverting dominant narratives around the game's brutal difficulty and suggesting a flexible approach to meaning making. This demonstrates how fans reshape the experience based on personal or subcultural preferences.

The final theme, the beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits, reveals the artistic engagement fans have with the game. These edits often celebrate the game's visual design, atmospheric environment, and emotional resonance of characters and storylines. Fans use TikTok to show how they deeply connect with the aesthetics and lore of Elden Ring. And more interestingly, fans share their experience as the tarnished in the game with their greater purpose of becoming the Elden Lord.

Overall, the diversity of content and the recurring patterns across these themes show that Elden Ring fan edits on TikTok are more than just entertainment, they are a means of negotiating the meaning and memory of gameplay. Through humour, aesthetics, how-to guides, and narrative sharing, fans co-construct a communal experience of Elden Ring that extends far beyond the screen. The analysis confirms TikTok as a significant site for participatory culture, where fans reinterpret, share, and shape each other's understanding of the game.

Moreover, this thematic exploration also highlights the importance of considering platform-specific dynamics like TikTok's short-form, algorithm-driven, and highly interactive nature makes it uniquely suited to fan engagement. While some content aligns with traditional fan practices seen in

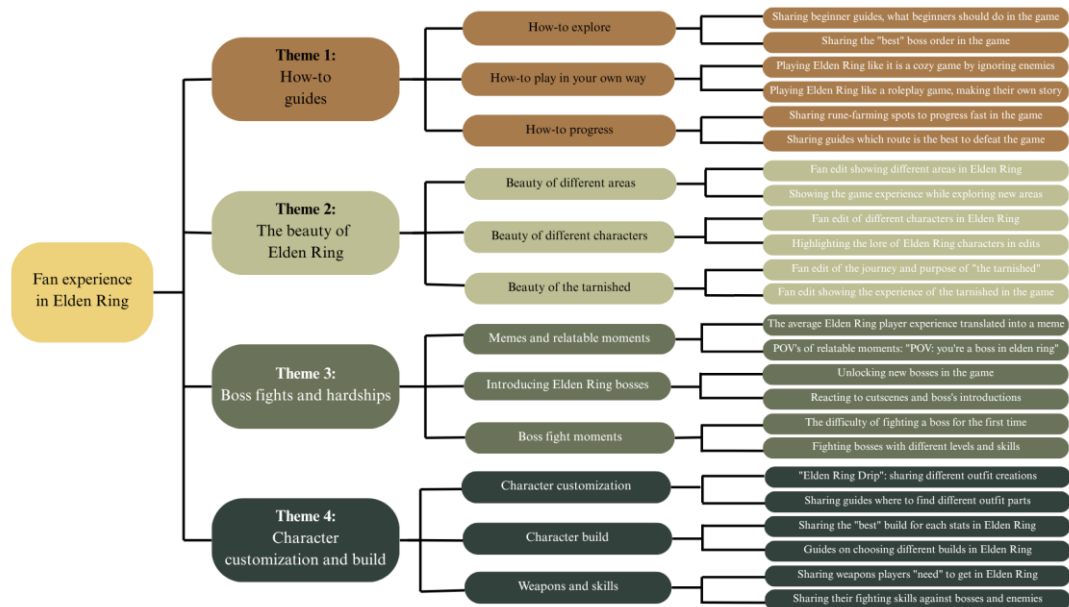


Figure 26. Coding tree

other media (e.g., walkthroughs or aesthetic appreciation), others emerge distinctly from TikTok's affordances, such as viral meme formats and POV trends. In summary, it emphasizes the evolving nature of participatory culture in the age of algorithmic media, where personal experiences become collective narratives through constant circulation and reinterpretation.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion chapter answers the main and sub-research questions and an in-depth reflection on the research.

5.1 Answering the main research question

The main research question posed in this thesis was: “How do Elden Ring fan-made videos on TikTok contribute to the negotiation of the game’s experience?” Through a detailed thematic analysis of 200 viral TikTok fan videos, this research has demonstrated that TikTok acts as a dynamic platform for the negotiation, reinterpretation, and co-construction of Elden Ring’s gameplay experience. The platform facilitates a participatory space where fans engage with one another through humour, tutorials, character customization, and lore reimagining. These fan-made videos contribute to meaning-making processes that expand beyond individual gameplay, showcasing the game’s lore, beauty, difficulty, and customizability. The Elden Ring fan community on TikTok collectively crafts a shared understanding of the game through participatory media practices. This collaborative environment fosters creativity, support, and emotional expression. In essence, TikTok serves as both a creative outlet and a communicative platform for fans to reflect on their journey, share insights, and collectively construct a rich tapestry of shared meaning surrounding Elden Ring. This research has revealed that fans do not merely consume Elden Ring as a fixed media text but actively participate in reshaping and reinterpreting it. Fan-made TikTok videos function as a cultural network sharing different stories and experiences, enabling the reinterpretation of lore, reconfiguration of character identities, and expression of fan values through aesthetic or humorous creations. By editing and recontextualizing Elden Ring, fans assert their freedom over a game that is otherwise defined by its challenging, often solitary gameplay. Through these processes, the boundaries of the game are redefined, allowing players to share their triumphs, frustrations, interpretations, and cultural perspectives with a broad audience. Furthermore, this analysis underscores the platform’s role in sharing the fan experience, giving rise to a variety of interpretations and expressions that might not be visible in more traditional, centralized forms of media discourse. These diverse contributions collectively influence the larger perception of the Elden Ring game, reinforcing the idea that meaning is not static but is actively constructed through community interaction and technological mediation on a platform like TikTok.

5.2 Answering the sub-questions

The first sub-question posed in this thesis was: “What types of TikTok videos to Elden Ring fans create to share their game experience with Elden Ring?” The thematic analysis identified a variety of video types, ranging from humorous memes and boss fight reactions to aesthetic fan edits how-to guides. The most prominent themes were boss fights and hardships, character customization and builds, how-to guides, the beauty of Elden Ring in fan edits. These types of videos demonstrate that fans utilize TikTok to express both emotional and intellectual engagement. For instance, boss

fight sequences serve as emotional touchpoints, while tutorials indicate valuable knowledge exchange. Creative edits showcase fans' appreciation for the game's visual and narrative depth, and character builds reveal individual storytelling and their own performance. Further examples include cosplay performances, voiceover storytelling, and fan skits that dramatize or make a meme from in-game events. These demonstrate the hybridization of gaming culture with broader internet culture, where boundaries between genres and forms are increasingly porous. Music is another central element in many of these videos, with fans frequently syncing Elden Ring visuals to trending audio clips, thus embedding the fandom within broader TikTok culture. Additionally, fans use diverse content strategies to engage others. Meme-based videos often contain relatable or humorous scenarios, facilitating collective identification through shared experiences of failure, surprise, or in-game hardships. Lore-based content dives into Elden Ring's enigmatic narrative, providing analysis, speculation, and fan theories. These lore-focused videos expand the perceived universe of Elden Ring by supplementing in-game storytelling with collaborative fan interpretation. For example, artistic videos, such as those that repurpose cutscenes or create cinematic sequences reveal fan's affective investments in particular characters or game environments, highlighting the aesthetic experience of gameplay.

The second sub-question posed in this thesis was: "How do fan-made videos on TikTok foster interaction within the Elden Ring community sharing their game experience with Elden Ring?" Fan-made videos foster interaction through layered features like comment threads, remixes, stitches, and viral audio. Collaborative trends enhance the sociality of content creation. TikTok's algorithm helps surface popular content to a wide audience, encouraging reactions and applying the gained inspiration or knowledge to their own gameplay. These videos serve as participatory tools that activate other fans to respond, contribute, or critique. In short, the act of sharing invites reflection by the community and collective memory-making. Moreover, recurring patterns and inside-jokes form subcultural literacy, enhancing the sense of community and belonging. By participating in trends and using shared formats, fans connect with others who understand the nuances of gameplay and storytelling in Elden Ring. Thus, these videos are embedded in conversations of ongoing cultural production. TikTok also encourages parasocial relationships between content creators and followers. Fans may follow creators who consistently post high-quality builds, insightful lore breakdowns, or engaging comedic content. These creators develop reputations within the community, influencing discourse and fostering networks of trust and loyalty. The interaction is not always direct, it is rather mediated through consistent stylistic choices, thematic motifs, and recognizable video formats. This furthers cement TikTok as a platform not just for individual expression, but for relational and communal negotiation of shared interests. In some cases, fan-made videos even influence gameplay decisions, with players adopting strategies, builds, or theories suggested by content creators. This illustrates the power of social validation and shared knowledge in shaping how the game is played and understood. Moreover, the blend of entertainment and instructional content fosters both

emotional resonance and practical value, reinforcing the idea that fan-produced media is multifunctional. The interaction fostered by TikTok also brings forth a system of reputational capital. Users who contribute consistently, accurately, and creatively gain followers and visibility, which in turn boosts their influence within the community. This system mimics traditional structures of expertise but is deeply embedded in participatory and aesthetic practices, challenging the notion that expertise is centralized or institutionally validated.

5.3. Implications

The findings of this thesis have several implications for academic, cultural, and industry domains. The research contributes to fan studies, media studies, and digital ethnography by examining how platform-specific affordances shape fan participation. The study shows that short-form video platforms like TikTok transform fan engagement into more performative, algorithmically visible acts of cultural production. It emphasizes the need to study not only content but also the surrounding ecosystem, including algorithms and interaction patterns. The study also reaffirms the concept where fans both consume and generate content, blurring boundaries between media creation and reception. Furthermore, Elden Ring fan videos contribute to redefining how video games are experienced socially and aesthetically. By engaging in participatory reinterpretation, fans shape collective narratives and redefine what defines a relatable game experience. The platform enables diverse expressions of identity and inclusivity, from humorous hardships to detailed lore explorations, expanding the meaning of play beyond gameplay. Moreover, fan engagement on TikTok reinforces the idea of games as trending content open to critique, negotiation, and lore reinterpretation. Moreover, game developers and marketers can benefit from understanding how players co-create value. For instance, fan labour on TikTok functions as both community building and local marketing. Engaging fans as co-producers can enhance loyalty, increase visibility, and improve community relationships. Recognizing the value of fan-made content could lead to more open-ended design interpretations and deeper collaborative opportunities to gain more loyal players. Additionally, observing what fans highlight or critique in user-generated content can offer insights into which game features resonate most, guiding future development priorities. There is also the opportunity to collaborate directly with influential creators, using them as informal ambassadors for game updates, expansions, or new releases. This relationship can be mutually beneficial where creators receive recognition and access, while companies receive authentic, trusted marketing that integrates seamlessly into fan ecosystems.

5.4. Suggestions for future research

This study opens doors for several avenues of future research. Future studies could compare TikTok fandom practices with those on other platforms like Reddit, YouTube, or Discord. This would help identify how platform affordances affect fan engagement and the formation of fan communities. Furthermore, a longitudinal analysis of Elden Ring fan videos could reveal how fan

interpretations evolve during DLC updates, the new Elden Ring Nightreign launch, or with community events. This would highlight the temporal dynamics of participatory culture. Moreover, future research could explore how identity markers such as gender, race, and sexuality manifest within Elden Ring fan content. Examining who is visible, whose voices dominate, and how inclusivity is managed would deepen the understanding of digital fandom politics. Another rich area of study would be how game developers or marketer respond to or incorporate fan feedback from platforms like TikTok into their design and marketing strategies.

5.5 Connection to theory

Furthermore, this thesis was grounded in a theoretical framework that draws on participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009), textual poaching (Bennet, 2014), fan labour (Milner, 2009), and platform dynamics (van Dijck & Poell, 2013). These perspectives help explain how fans on TikTok engage with the game Elden Ring not merely as players but as active, contributors to a growing body of user-generated content that shapes the fan community's identity and creativity.

Furthermore, Jenkins' (2009) concept of participatory culture highlights how fans are empowered to share, remix, and create content in a setting with low barriers to participation and strong peer support. On TikTok, this shows in the way fans produce videos that reinterpret Elden Ring through their own emotional, aesthetic, and narrative interpretation. These practices represent a form of fan expression, where fans embed personal meaning into their creative outputs, forming shared languages and TikTok or Elden Ring references within the fandom.

This fan expression is central to identity performance. According to Pérez-Torres (2024), social media platforms are key arenas where individuals construct and negotiate identity through social interaction. Similarly, Abrams and Hogg's (2010) social identity theory explains how belonging to digital fan groups enhances self-perception and group affiliation. The Elden Ring TikTok community reflects this dynamic: fans perform their membership through shared humour, trends, editing styles, and lore interpretation, contributing to a collective sense of belonging.

Moreover, the fan labour invested in these videos also aligns with Milner's (2009) notion of fan labour, where fans not only consume but also produce content that supports and extends a media product's experience. This unpaid creative work enriches the fandom and often benefits game developers by sustaining long-term engagement and implementing their feedback to gain appreciation. Banks and Humphreys (2008) describe this as user-generated knowledge where fans exchange strategies, lore, and emotional responses that add value to the game's experience. As Simon (2016) argues, fans are increasingly central to media production processes, and their creative outputs represent a qualitative shift in the producer-consumer relationship.

This creative process is further explained by Bennett's (2014) concept of textual poaching. Fans do not passively receive content where they actively rework it to reflect their own interpretations, values, and experiences. Though TikTok videos, Elden Ring fans create new narratives, emotional moments, or humorous reinterpretations of in-game events. Jenkins' (2006)

theory of transmedia storytelling helps frame this activity: fans expand the game's universe across platforms, contributing unique perspectives that deepen the collective narrative. Fan-made content functions as paratexts (Gray, 2010), providing alternative entry points into the Elden Ring world and enhancing its accessibility and meaning for others.

These creative videos are shaped and constrained by the dynamics of the platform itself. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) emphasize the role of platform logics, such as connectivity, datafication, and algorithmic visibility, that determine what content thrives. TikTok's algorithm prioritizes engagement, making certain fan expressions more visible based on likes, shares, and views. Schellewald (2023) notes that platform affordances, like editing tools, and short-form video formats, configure how fans express themselves, while Zulli and Zulli (2022) point out that TikTok emphasizes visual and creative over discursive interaction, encouraging performance over conversation.

Uses and gratifications theory (Rubin, 2009) further clarifies why fans engage with the Elden Ring fandom on TikTok. Fans are driven by the desire for entertainment, social connection, identity affirmation, and self-expression. These motivations explain the variety of content produced, from humorous skits and edits to dramatic tributes and knowledgeable guides. Gee's (2003) concept of interpretive communities is also visible, as experienced fans act as mentors or guides for newcomers, strengthening community knowledge and belonging.

Fan expression also carries emotional and symbolic significance. Gao (2022) highlights how fandom provides a sense of self-worth and belonging, while Jenkins (2006b, as cited in Forcier, 2022) views fandom as an escape from the mundane into a world of excitement and creativity. These motivations are reflected in the depth and diversity of fan-made TikTok's, which often serve as a form of emotional storytelling and collective world-building that extends their daily lives' experience.

However, fan expression is not without complications. As Tian and Zhong (2022) argue, much fan-made content functions as "narrowcasting," targeting niche communities rather than the broader public. While this fosters intimacy and group identity, it can also lead to exclusion or conflict. Chen (2022) points out that in fan localization and creative editing, tensions can arise around accuracy, bias, and authenticity, especially in fast-moving, highly visible online spaces. Where for example Elden Ring fans have a preferred way in how they like to experience the game.

Finally, the hybrid model of Saldanha et al. (2023) helps explain the structure of the Elden Ring TikTok community. While the space remains largely open and participatory. Influential creators often act as informal leaders or guides (Hsiao & Chiou, 2012), shaping trends and community standards. This balance between horizontality and influence reflects the evolving dynamics of digital fandom.

In conclusion, the Elden Ring TikTok fan community is a vibrant example of participatory culture, where fan expression, identity performance, creative labour, and platform engagement intersect. Fans are not passive viewers but participating cultural producers who expand, reinterpret,

and circulate media texts in creative ways. TikTok, in this context, functions not just as a platform but as a cultural space, one that enables the co-creation of meaning and reinterpretation, fosters belonging, and reflects the changing nature of digital fandom where fans find new ways to connect with each other.

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Appendix A. Summary table of collected material

Source platform	Number of videos	Search terms	Average views per video	note
TikTok	200	#EldenRing -> This leads to the top watched video's regarding Elden Ring	314.000 views	All videos are fan-made videos related to Elden Ring
Theme	Number of videos	Source platform	Note	
Boss fights and hardships	48	TikTok	Videos capturing boss fights and challenging experiences in Elden Ring	
Character customization and build	56	TikTok	Videos showing character design, player builds, skills, and weapons	
How-to guides and game progression	25	TikTok	Videos offering tips and progression strategies in Elden Ring	
The beauty of Elden Ring	51	TikTok	Creative edits focusing on the game's aesthetics of different areas, the POV of the tarnished and different main characters.	

Appendix B. Section of thematic analysis

[illegible]

Appendix C. Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information

Name: Iris Groenewegen

Student ID: 695304

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5050

Supervisor Name: Dr. Argyrios Emmanouloudis

Date: 6/5/2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:



Date of Signature: 6/5/2025

Extent of AI Usage

☐ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'S' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Date of Signature: 6/5/2025