

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The fear of losing someone we love is often read as proof of how deep that love is. Strong longing, emotional dependence, and not being able to let go are sometimes understood as signs of real love instead of warning signs. This idea also appears on social media especially on TikTok, short edits of *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025) present Dracula less as a horror character and more as a romantic partner. His endless obsession with Mina is framed as deep love and devotion instead of something dangerous. In attachment theory, this pattern related to anxious attachment where a person always wants to be close to their partner, depends on them emotionally, and struggles to deal with uncertainty in the relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Simpson et al., 2016).

Recent studies show that insecure attachment is connected to relationship dependency and some types of love addiction, where a person stays in a relationship even when it causes pain (Gori et al., 2023). These patterns often involve a need for constant validation, difficulty accepting loss, and seeing emotional intensity or possessiveness as love. Gori, Russo, and Topino (2023) call this love addiction from a clinical perspective, but this study uses the term obsessive attachment to focus on how these patterns appear in digital media and culture, not to diagnose people (a full definition is given in Chapter II). This concept is aligned with Lee's typology of love

styles, specifically the “mania” category, which Raffagnino and Puddu (2018) describe as a pattern characterized by possessive and obsessive behaviour, a strong need for validation and difficulty regulating emotional up-and-downs in a relationship. Different from secure relationship, obsessive attachment creates constant longing and makes it hard to accept loss even when the relationship is painful.

These patterns are not new in cultural history. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), the vampire reflects Victorian fears about sexuality and uncontrolled desire, making him a symbol of moral threat (Craft, 1984). Rong (2024) adds that vampirism was also linked to fears of sexually transmitted diseases and the control of women’s bodies through the Contagious Diseases Acts. In this context, wanting someone too much was seen as dangerous, not romantic. By the late twentieth century, this had changed. Modern adaptations such as *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), *Twilight* (2008–2012), and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017) made the vampire more human and framed intense emotion and devotion to one person as romantic instead of morally threatening (Illouz, 2012; Wester & Reyes, 2019).

A recent adaptation, *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025), written and directed by Luc Besson shows this change clearly. In this film, Dracula is not really shown as a threat anymore, but more as a man who loves deeply and stays devoted. The film focuses on Dracula’s bond with his wife, Elisabetta, and Mina, her reincarnation. Elisabetta and Mina are played by the same actress, but in the film, Elisabetta (the past life) is shown with blonde hair. While Mina, the reincarnation has dark hair, and this is how the two can be told apart. Instead of framing Dracula mainly as a predator, the film presents his

longing, sacrifice, fate, and refusal to accept separation as signs of true love and emotional devotion (Illouz, 2012; Raffagnino & Puddu, 2018).

The spread of these clips is also shaped by TikTok's platform system. Through monetization programmes such as the former Creator Fund and the current Creator Rewards Program, TikTok rewards content that gains high engagement through views, likes, and shares (TikTok, 2023). As a result, this pushes creators toward what Abidin (2020) calls "visibility labour," where creators choose and edit scenes that are likely to attract viewers. As a result, romantic Dracula clips become popular not only because fans like them, but also because the platform rewards emotionally engaging content.

What is strange here is that a violent and monstrous figure becomes attractive rather than frightening. This relates to how romance is often consumed today, as the genre has long marketed intensity and suffering as signs of true love (Illouz, 1997; Radway, 1983). Because of this, obsessive behaviours such as longing, emotional dependence, and difficulty accepting separation can appear as commitment rather than possessiveness (Simpson et al., 2016). The reason people like Dracula not from their supernatural being anymore, but as a fantasy of loving one person forever.

On digital platforms, films are also no longer watched only as complete stories. On TikTok, film scenes are cut, edited, and shared as standalone clips (Kaye et al., 2021; Yin, 2021). The main issue is not just that clips circulate, but which clips become visible. Since TikTok's For You Page recommends content based on engagement, emotionally intense clips are more likely to spread (Kaye et al., 2021).

The way TikTok works also shapes this process. Short videos make scenes feel more emotional and intense (Yin, 2021), looping makes people watch them again and

again, the algorithm rewards content that keeps people watching, and comment ranking strengthens dominant readings (Bouvier & Machin, 2018).

Van Leeuwen (2008) calls this recontextualization, where something is taken from its original context and placed in a new one. When a scene from *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025) becomes a thirty-second romantic clip, its meaning can change. A complex or problematic relationship can appear purely romantic when only selected moments are shown. This becomes stronger when creators focus on longing, sacrifice, and closeness through slow motion, music, lighting, and text overlays (Illouz, 1997; Raffagnino & Puddu, 2018). Over time, viewers may find the edited version more convincing than the full film.

To analyse how these meanings are created, this study uses Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. They explain that meaning is made through representational, interactive, and compositional elements. Representational meaning is about what is shown and emphasized, interactive meaning is about how viewers are positioned through gaze, angle, and distance, and compositional meaning is about how elements are arranged through salience, framing, and rhythm. By analysing visual and audio features together, MDA helps explain how obsessive attachment can be shown in a sympathetic way (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Another question is why these edited clips feel so convincing and real. This study uses Baudrillard's (1994) idea of simulacra to explain how media can create images that feel real even when they are not based on real experience. The romantic vampire becomes an ideal image of love and devotion, and repeated circulation makes

it feel more emotionally convincing. Foucault's (1978) idea of discourse is also used to show how desire is shaped. When obsessive attachment is repeatedly shown as loyalty, destiny, or proof of love, it can appear desirable rather than possessive. Together, these lenses show that digital platforms do not only share content, but also shape how people understand love.

Although previous studies have discussed media representation, Gothic narratives, and attachment, these topics are usually examined separately. Few studies combine multimodal analysis with Baudrillard's simulation and Foucault's discourse to examine obsessive attachment on short-form platforms. This gap is explained further in the State of the Art (Section 1.6).

What was once seen as a warning sign in a relationship is now edited, repeated, and shared as an ideal of love that young viewers can encounter every day. When obsessive attachment is repeatedly circulated as devotion and destiny, it can slowly shape what love is expected to look like without being openly questioned. This makes the study important for media literacy because it shows how emotional editing and platform circulation can make obsessive behaviour appear romantic. Therefore, this study analyses how TikTok clips of *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025) construct obsessive attachment through multimodal elements and how TikTok's platform features contribute to its romanticisation and normalization.

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1.2 Research Questions

1. How do TikTok clips of *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025) recontextualize selected film scenes and construct obsessive attachment through multimodal framing?
2. How do TikTok's platform affordances and algorithm-driven circulation contribute to the romanticisation and normalization of obsessive attachment?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Analyse how selected scenes from *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025) are recontextualized on TikTok and how obsessive attachment is constructed through multimodal elements.
2. Explain how TikTok's platform affordances contribute to the romanticisation and normalization of obsessive attachment in contemporary digital culture.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study analyses fifteen TikTok clips that recontextualize scenes from *Dracula: A Love Tale* (2025), focusing on framing, camera angle, editing, music, and text overlays. The clips are analysed using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis, with Baudrillard's (1994) simulacra and Foucault's (1978) discursive normalization as interpretive lenses. Attachment Theory and Gothic Criticism are used only as context.

The study does not examine audience psychology, creator intentions, or content production. The five most-liked comments from each clip support the analysis, while view counts and video likes are used only for context. Comment likes help identify

visible comments and decide dominant themes when needed, as explained in Section 3.5.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides both theoretical and practical contributions to understanding how obsessive attachment is constructed and normalized in digital environments.

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to multimodal discourse analysis by applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework to TikTok edits and combined with Baudrillard (1994) and Foucault (1978) to explain how obsessive attachment is constructed online. It also shows how vampire representations are reshaped through TikTok (Wester & Reyes, 2019; Rong, 2024).

2. Practical Significance

a. For Media Literacy Educators.

This study can help educators explain how editing, music, visual framing, and platform features shape romantic representations on social media.

b. For Broader Public Discourse.

As social media becomes an important source of romantic narratives for young audiences, this study provides a critical understanding of how ideas about love and intimacy spread online.

1.6 State of the Art

Research on TikTok has shown how the platform shapes content production and circulation (Abidin, 2020; Kaye et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2023). Studies on romance have examined how intensity and sacrifice are framed as true love (Deane, 2026; Raffagnino & Puddu, 2018), while MDA has been used to analyse digital communication (Bouvier & Machin, 2018; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Nurhabibah et al., 2023). Other studies have discussed vampires as symbols of gender, sexuality, and social control, as well as their shift from monstrous to romantic figures (Rong, 2024; Wester & Reyes, 2019).

However, these studies are rarely connected. TikTok research often focus on platform mechanisms without examining how romantic meanings are visually constructed. Gothic studies discuss the vampire's cultural transformation but rarely consider platform-specific circulation.

This study addresses that gap by combining MDA, Baudrillard's simulacra, and Foucault's discursive normalization to examine how obsessive attachment is constructed and normalised through short-form content.