

ESPORTS: ALTERNATIVE FANDOM RESEARCH IN TURKEY

A Master's Thesis

by

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September 2016

To my family...



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Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

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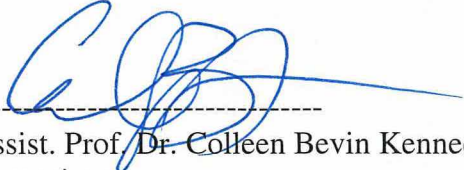
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In

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ANKARA
September 2016

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.



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Supervisor

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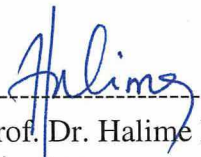
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ABSTRACT

ESPORTS: ALTERNATIVE FANDOM RESEARCH IN TURKEY

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M.A., in Media and Visual Studies
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A fan can be anyone who has both potential media consumer and producer. Fandom as we call, is a community of fans interested in a specific media context such as actor, author or TV series. This study is about the developing fandom around eSports (electronic sports) in Turkey, analyzing game fans interaction with *League of Legends* which has become a product of popular culture. To investigate eSports fandom, this study relies on interviews with professional and amateur players and virtual ethnographic methods. Findings of the interviews and ethnographic data aim to ground the similarities between *League of Legends* players reproducing and code switching techniques in the light of Anglo American studies on series and movie fandom.

Keywords: Fan, fandom, eSports, League of Legends

ÖZET

ESPOR: TÜRKİYE’DE ALTERNATİF HAYRAN ARAŞTIRMASI

Özbıçakçı, Taygun
Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar
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Fan (Hayran) bir medya tüketicisi olmakla beraber, medya üretimi yapma potansiyeline de sahip olan kişidir. Fandom dediğimiz kavram, spesifik bir medya unsuru üzerine, oyuncu, yazar, televizyon dizisi gibi, hayranlar tarafından oluşturulmuş topluluklardır. Bu çalışma Türkiye’de gelişmekte olan eSpor (elektronik sporlar) hayranlığını kaleme almakta ve eSporcuların popüler kültüre yer etmeye başlamış *League of Legends* adlı oyunla kurdukları etkileşimleri incelemektedir. Çalışmada bahsedilen toplulukları incelemek üzere, oyunu profesyonel ve amatör olarak oynayan kişilerle görüşmeler yapılmış ve oyunu incelemek adına sanal etnografik methodlar kullanılmıştır. Görüşmeler ve etnografik çalışmalardan elde edilen veriler oyuncuların yapı ve içerik değiştirme gibi pratiklerini Anglo Amerikan yazarların fan kültürü çalışmalarında ele aldığı dizi, film hayranlığı pratikleri üzerinden okunmaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hayran, fandom, eSpor, League of Legends

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

People express their enthusiasm in different ways, such as supporting a music band, commenting on texts or movies through forums and the internet, participating in conventions related to specific texts are some of them. This enthusiasm also requires a sort of devotion and such performance can transform a person's daily routine, social and way of communicating. Such devotion pushes the limits of someone, allowing them to embark on a new journey. A fan in that sense can be considered as a supporter, an admirer or a devotee. When this admiration and devotion is shared with a group or a community it can be identified as fandom. For instance an individual can identify himself or herself as a Harry Potter fan but Harry Potter fandom refers to the community who participate in Harry Potter related events and activities.

Early 2000s have given a rise to the internet and we had a better opportunity to witness what fandom actually is. The rise of internet gave its way to internet culture and internet communities. Like-minded people who have similar tastes and devotion to create something for community form the core of fan culture. Today observing such a relationship between fans or the object of fandom has become possible via internet culture. For instance, in 2009 English songwriter and composer Imogen Heap asked for her fans participation on her new album (Houghton, 2009). Basically, fans uploaded their sound snippets and Heap created music videos with them. Today,

fans can also join AMA (Ask me Anything) sessions hosted on Internet forums, tweet or post with the objects of their attention.

When we take a look at contemporary Turkish fan culture, it is hard to locate such contributions to the media texts. Forums are among the most common places for like-minded people to gather and discuss the texts yet what is stated by Matt Hills as contribution should be more visible than mere online presence. Actually Turkish popular culture witnessed such tangible fandom activities on early 1960s with Yeşilçam. Dilek Kaya's (2002) study on audience discourse is dealing with more than 200 fan letters written to Turkish cinema journals *Sinema* and *Perde*. In her study fans depicted clearly expressing their adoration to Belgin Doruk, asking for Hülya Koçyiğit's signed photograph, some were asking for a quick visit to set, others were criticizing the plot and casting. However, many aspects of fandom today cannot be compared to fandom of 1960s even if early media fandom does indicate the active role of people in it. However, when we look at the recent texts, movies or TV series, it is very hard for us to find any work helping us to observe this connection audience and authors.

eSports, a term that refers to competitive or professional computer gaming have become a very dominant in digital game culture which is substantially occupied by youth. Competitions in eSports may vary based on genre categories such as fighting games (*Street Fighter*), first person shooter games (*Counter Strike*), real time strategy games (*StarCraft*, *Warcraft*), sports games (*FIFA*, *NBA*) or massive online battle arena games (*League of Legends*, *Defence of the Ancients*). This list can be extended yet each genre carries a potential to generate its own subculture. eSports fandom in Turkey not only carries this relationship between the audience and

performer just like Kaya pointed out for Yeşilçam, but also allows us to analyze it in a digital level through forums, blogs, social media and even the game itself.

The purpose of this study is to analyze eSports fandom in Turkey based on existing theories about fandom. My first aim is to introduce eSports fandom in Turkey as it manifests around Riot Games' *League of Legends* and how Riot absorbed existing gaming culture into their work. My second aim is to find out how eSports players in Turkey define themselves and in what ways they differ from casual gamers.

The second chapter focuses on fandom theories from various scholars like John Fiske, Michel de Certeau and Henry Jenkins. It was also aimed to familiarize the reader about the history of the play theory introducing Johan H. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949). eSports, fan and aficionado relation will be also mentioned, as well as methodological issues on how to study games by Espen Aarseth, T.L Taylor and Tom Boellstorff. It is possible for an ethnographer to stumble as each game environment is different and may require multiple ethnographical approaches. Providing a brief history on their approaches, the chapter also focuses on introducing ethnographical study of *League of Legends* and video game fandom in Turkey.

Within this framework, the third chapter in the study stresses on my methodology to elucidate the reader about the steps I have taken to complete my research on eSports and fan culture. As a dominant tendency among professional eSports teams, the gaming houses become pivotal in developing tactics and building up synergy among teams members. After presenting observations about gaming house culture and game dynamics, I will discuss the gamer and developer relationship within the frame work

of de Certeau's tactics and strategies. In addition, I will introduce meta and meta-gaming and explain their relation to professional gaming.

The fourth chapter focuses on the developer company of *League of Legends*. Ethnographical research into Turkish players reveals that Turkish gamers who were absorbed into Riot Games' debut by breaking down the hegemony of other multiplayer online battle arena games. The glocalization tactics that Riot Games have used to appeal to a Turkish audience in particular will be discussed in detail. Professional and nonprofessional players excerpts will be given and discussed in their relation to Riot Games' policy.

The final chapter, in the light of theoretical background provided in second chapter, will provide excerpts and insights on how eSports players define themselves. As an adopter of game and individuals constructing their personal identities around the media products they enjoy; this relationship between gamer and game will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. An Introduction to Fandom

This chapter provides academic background on fans and fandom to understand how these concepts were fathomed in the early 90s and how their definition and studies have been enriched since then. “Fan” is an abbreviated form of the word “fanatic” which is “fanaticus” in Latin. While in Latin, the word meant for a temple servant, a devotee (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*) in time it was abbreviated into “fan” to describe enthusiasts of professional sports events. This later usage was adopted to describe audiences for film, music and games. Early scholars mostly took their inspiration about fans from de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between the strategies of the powerful (that is, of content makers) and the tactics of the disempowered audience. John Fiske (1992) defines fandom as the register of a subordinate system of cultural taste, basing the concept on Bourdieu’s analysis of how cultural tastes can be mapped onto economic status within the social space. Lisa Lewis’s *The Adoring Audience* (1992) depicts fans as the “most visible and identifiable of audiences.” yet she also reflects them as “passive and controlled,” claiming that they are subjected to the dominant culture.

These scholars approached fandom a bit skeptically, however with Henry Jenkins’s canonical *Textual Poachers* (1992), the predominant scholarly

model for fans and fandom began to move from a view of the fan as an obsessive loner to one that sees the possibility for fans to move into the mainstream and assert their own kind of creative agency. The model Jenkins depicted does not demonstrate fans as consumers, but also as producers and content makers in their own right. At this point, we cannot ignore the contribution of Web 2.0 in which it became easier to observe the circulation of fan made texts. As Jenkins (2009) defines: “A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices” (p. xi). The main practices of fans in the early 2000’s can be observed through conventions and fan gatherings often called “Cons” but the increasing effect of the social media and the internet has also affected the forms and practices of the fandom its giving itself a new outlook (Yıldırım, 2015). As Matt Hills (2002) defines it, a fan is not only a person obsessed with a celebrity or a product of popular culture, but a person who can, and does make a contribution to the object of fandom (p. ix).

According to a 2007 survey conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project 64% of teens online create content for the internet (Lenhart, Madden, Smith& Macgilll: 2007). This study includes content making practices in video gaming as well. Teens create avatars – digital representations of the self- to interact with others in gaming environments and in virtual worlds. The research helps us to understand the emergence of

a cultural context that supports participation not only in the production but also in the distribution of media (Jenkins, 2009: 4).

2.2. Methods of Previous Studies on Fandom

Years after the publication of *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins during a conversation with Suzanne Scott in 2012 admits that in his time there were significant number of scholars studying fandom, yet they refused to engage with the fan community, instead adopting distant observation methods which made their work less ethnographical. The term “aca-fan”, an academic who identifies himself as a fan, was not coined by Jenkins (contrary to popular belief) but his self-identification as an aca-fan inspired more participatory ethnographic evaluation of fan culture in academic study. During an interview with Matt Hills, Jenkins advises that to understand academics writing about fandom we must take a closer look to the moments they are writing about. He points to three different moments of fan studies to elucidate his theory. The first generation writers such as John Fiske and Janice Radway tried to remain outside of what they were writing about. Those scholars already realized the active role of audience yet insisted on not showing any affection to their object of study. Jenkins considers himself and Camille Bacon Smith as the second generation of writers who have an understanding of what is to be a fan, yet struggled to change the dominant negative perception of fans and fandom that came out of the first generation writers. The third generation writers, who can identify themselves as both an academic and a fan, can write freely about their experience (Jenkins, 2006: 12).

While academia continues to evaluate its approaches to the study of fandom and how to engage with it for the purposes of research, more recently some parallel methodological concerns emerged in the study of games and digital gaming. According to Espen Aarseth:

The greatest challenge to computer game studies will no doubt come from within the academic world. Making room for a new field usually means reducing the resources of the existing ones, and the existing fields will also often respond by trying to contain the new area as a subfield. Games are not a kind of cinema, or literature, but colonising attempts from both these fields have already happened, and no doubt will happen again. And again, until computer game studies emerges as a clearly self-sustained academic field (2001, online).

It can be understood that methodological concerns reverberated not only to the study of fan culture but also brought to our attention for game culture. Aarseth here calls our attention to the computer games as a new medium which requires new ways of thinking. We may misunderstand and misrepresent the computer games if we use the similar methods used to analyze literature, film and other mass media (Dovey, Kennedy, 2006).

Similarly, fandom revolving around game culture and eSports culture are also calling for new or hybrid methods because it starts in digital environment and overflows into real world with fan practices. While Jenkins's approach stemmed from academic culture with its stereotypical concept of fandom and restrictions on the way scholars position themselves when studying it, these problems are echoed by Aarseth as a methodological issue for game studies, and by extension, studies of gamers.

Recent work has shown that scholars have started interacting with fans and users in cyber space to gather much more reliable data. In *Ethnography and*

Virtual Worlds A Handbook of Method (2012) Boellstorff, Nardi, Pierce and

Taylor explain:

As ethnographers, what interests us about virtual worlds is not what is extraordinary about them, but what is ordinary. We are intrigued not only by the individuals in a group, but by the sum of the parts. We aim to study virtual worlds as valid venues for cultural practice, seeking to understand both how they resemble and how they differ from other forms of culture. We do this by immersing our embodied selves within the cultures of interest, even when that embodiment is in the form of an avatar, the representation of self in these spaces (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pierce & Taylor, 2012: 1).

If we look at the individual works of these authors: Boellstorff's ethnographical work in *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008) demonstrates the potential of ethnography for studying virtual worlds. His methodology was to be present in *Second Life*'s virtual world observing the life in it. T.L Taylor (2006) logs into her *EverQuest* account and draws on her own experience questioning the common negative assumptions about computer games. Even though they did not label themselves as fans in these works, their effort made it clear that "participant observation" is a feasible and fruitful method to analyze both games and their fandoms. These works show that if academics present themselves as an insider they can leap into the mindsets of committed and enthusiastic subjects therefore minimize the risk of misunderstandings, experiences, concerns and desires of fans.

Here, one of the challenges I experienced on my research was the difference in sociocultural practices between Massive Online Battle Arena (MOBA) and Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG). While the latter presents a much more amicable environment to the player, in

MOBAs especially if you are not playing as a team, games are consumed very fast and you find limited time to communicate with your teammates and opponents about your research. Further information about this will be provided in the methodology chapter.

There are also several extant studies done in Turkey about fandom, although they are not all focused on specifically Turkish fans or Turkish texts. Afşar Yeğın (2006) has studied the relationship between the narrative structure of three US-produced TV shows, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* and their fandoms. She brings up the third space theory used in games and argues that all creative works of fans are being done in this area but in her research she does not focus on specific fandom of these shows in Turkey. Another study conducted by Bestem Büyüm (2010) focuses on Japanese anime and manga series. She argues that the fandom around these works has changed with the increasing use of internet. Over the past decade, anime fandom has grown more popular in Turkey but Büyüm keeps her work in a global level rather than centralizing on Turkish fans.

Dağhan Irak (2010) conducted his study on Turkish football fandom. Football is a very global concept but his research was based on Turkish football fans and their social role. Irak's and my research share some characteristic similarities especially in terms of spectatorship.

The last work I encountered was Utku Yıldırım's (2015) work on cross-cultural media fandom in Turkey which investigates the interaction of Turkish media fans to global media products. His findings are intriguing,

especially the resistance that fans show towards mass consumerism and Turkish popular culture. Since my research is about game fandom and the evolution of eSports in Turkey, I will follow a different methodology and the community I address will involve professional and non-professional game fans in a specific play type; MOBA.

2.3. History of Play Theory

Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is “different” from ordinary life. (Huizinga 1955: 28)

Ludology is a discipline that deals with the study of games in a critical way. It does not merely analyze the games but it looks for gaming cultures effects on society as well. The French sociologist Roger Caillois (1961), a well-known play culture theorist, furnishes us with his understanding of games in four different play formations: agon, alea, mimicry and ilinx. In agon games, players compete against other users or a computer. Alea games are also known as games of fortune like blackjack or roulette. Mimicry games call upon to pretend as someone, like charades, and even *The Sims* would fit in this category. Ilinx are games which create a sense of disruption, dizziness and disorder like riding roller coasters or children spinning until they fall down. Games such as *Quake* series that use visuals of thrilling movements can be also considered Ilinx. It is possible for a game to combine one or two of these categories. MMORPGs especially let their user experience agonistic game play in player vs. player (known as “pvp”)

platforms. In another location of the same game map however, the players can find themselves cracking gems to loot valuable items, an aspect of the game which has aleatory qualities. Caillois also categorized two distinct types of play in which those four types can be located: as rule based (*ludus*) and improvised (*paidia*). *Ludus* are rule-based games, with chess as one of the best-known examples. You do not have to make assumptions in *ludus* type games. *Paidia* involve improvised, spontaneous play. Games like *Age of Empire* and *Warcraft* are known for their creative play style (Dovey, Kennedy 2006: 25).

In practice, *League of Legends* can be defined as a strategy game in which players control a “champion” with unique abilities. Thus, structurally the game differs from *Starcraft*, *Warcraft*, *Cossacks* or *Civilization* series in which the player is expected to control a group of units or a whole empire. In *League of Legends* the players assume the identity of a “summoner” that controls a champion from the pool. Novice players can start with a tutorial to understand the basics of the game. After completing the introductory tutorial, the player can compete in Matchmaking system. In this play, they are matched to similarly skilled opponents from their region.

There are two primary game modes available: “Classic” mode requires the player to destroy the enemy’s main tower (Nexus) and “ARAM” (All Random All Middle) mode assigns each player a random champion to be played (hence All Random) only in the mid lane (hence All Middle). Nexus is located for each of two teams: one in the lower-left corner and the other is in upper-right corner of the map.

Once champions are summoned to the map, players have two minutes to purchase their starting items and go to their lanes. At the end of this duration, minions (basic units) are summoned and move automatically towards bottom, top and mid lanes. If champions successfully kill a minion, they earn gold which can then be used to purchase better items. The players also gain experience points if the champion is present at the death of a minion. As champions level up, it becomes possible for the player to unlock new abilities or boost existing skills which allow them to harass enemy champions or help allies. Champion experience, gold earned and items bought are kept specific to the each match and based on skill difference. One team eventually outmatches the opposing team and destroys their Nexus.

Based on the game summary above, we can say that the nature of the game is agonistic, because it ends when a team destroys the enemy Nexus. Players do not need to mimic any actions and the rules of the game apply to every single champion on the map. You can control champions with mouse and can use their skills effectively with shortcuts on the keyboard. It is possible to unleash surprise attacks on other champions or build up a strategy to alter the outcome of the game. This paidia-like nature of the game and its hybrid model have become so popular that it inspired the establishment of its own eSports community.

2.4. Defining eSports

“Enter, eSports: the professionalization of video gaming. No longer a pastime of purported basement-dwellers and arcade-loitering youths, gaming is now a valid career choice for a skilled few. Teenagers are

earning millions, signing lucrative sponsorship deals, and dating supermodels, all because they can play games really, really well.” (Keach, 2015)

No matter how alluring this definition may sound, like professional sports, online gaming is a highly competitive area. Becoming a professional involves facing a lot of challenges. Players need to increase their ranks to a very high level to draw attention to their profile from professional teams. This sometimes requires a lot of consecutive team wins. Thus stability, perseverance, good reflexes and adaptability are some of the assets that a player must have. Term itself can be defined as “eSports is an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies” (Wagner, 2006: 440).

There are also ongoing arguments about whether it is possible to regard eSports as a kind of sportive activity or not. To Hutchins (2006) competitive gaming has some similar values with sports, including regular training, team work or perfect execution of tactics planned in advance. In *League of Legends* each champion has unique abilities that are called skills. Skills can be passive (triggered automatically) or active to be used for offensive or defensive purposes. What teams are trying to do is to organize the best combination of champions to gain advantage against an opponent. In professional games teams start seeing all the available champions they can pick. Teams first ban the champions that they do not want their opponent to take. Even in the beginning of a match teams may need to alter their strategies because of opposing team bans. While the item build list clearly

explains the attributes of each item, there are also abundant sources for item build guides for each champion. Ultimately it is up to players' preferences and team strategy to combine which items and which champions will be useful for the match.

This competitive environment led eSports to become a major industry. As Katherine Hollist (2015) states: "Those matchups combined with associated commentary, merchandising and ticket sales- comprise the eSports industry" (2015: 826). Just like it occurs in other sports events, eSports players make pre or post-game interviews. Their performance similar to basketball and football is reviewed by analysis desk commentators. Jerseys are custom printed for each team and mass produced to be sold in online team stores.

It should also be noted that games that host professional eSports events adopt a free to play model. You can sign up, log in and you are free to go. In MMOs and MMORPGs, however, you need to invest in the avatar you are playing. It is possible to spend money on *League of Legends* too, but additional skins, a graphical update used to change the appearance of a champion in the game, will only change the appearance of your character without granting any bonus.

2.5. eSports Players: Fans or Aficionados?

Deciding my research topic, I received a lot of resistance from my social circle commenting on if we can consider eSports players as fans. Their main argument was eSports players get paid to play games. The hierarchical system in eSports is somewhat similar to those in football and basketball. In

general, the audience is consisting of amateur players who are the fan of a game and eSports players can be considered as distinguished ones with better skills and timing. As it can be seen in other sports it is possible for amateur eSports players to become professional. In this regard, it is unfair to be so much critical on dismissing their self-interest as a fan once players become professional. Being a fan is not about obsession, but rather a matter of self-identification and performance. Fans shall express this relationship with the text. It is also one of the aims of this study to understand how eSports players define themselves. It should not be overlooked that, despite the strong visibility of fandom around the games it would be misleading to argue that all the players and consumers of those games are actually fans, self-identification is also crucial.

Jenson (1992) attempts to categorize fans based on their attachment to the texts. She continues: “Fans, when insistently characterized as ‘them,’ can be distinguished from ‘people like us’ (students, professors and social critics) as well as from (the more reputable) patrons or aficionados or collectors.” (9) She came up with two crucial aspects to differentiate fans from aficionados: the objects of desire and the mode of enactment. Fandom involves devotion to the text itself and requires emotional displays with sometimes excessive actions. Jenson (1992) continues that “fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged, behavior” and a “pathology” (9). She uses John Lennon’s assassination as an example of a pathological fan. Mark David Chapman after murdering Lennon was spotted reading his favorite novel *The Catcher in the Rye* and he showed novel as his statement. She

continues such a fixation is not very likely to be experienced by the aficionado, who moves with reason. Jenson relates aficionado's attachment to high culture such as becoming an Eliot (George or T.S) aficionado, not Elvis; or painting aficionado not posters (19). To Fiske (1989) fandom means more than being a fan of something, it is a collective strategy to form preferred interpretive communities represented by popular media. When historians started to analyze fandom their approach was to examine the communication between the author and the audience. Jenkins also mentions that fan takes pleasure on creating something and sharing it with a larger community (2013: xxvii). Whether through fan art, fan fiction or some other concrete production or action fans have always been known for their devotion to the text as expressed through these personally invested creative works. Similarly eSports players are also applying their code-switching methods to the game as they play. They form strategies either conventional or unconventional, bending the rules of the game or psychically occupy certain areas as tactics to outsmart their opponents. Sometimes, they reveal what is not obvious to the eye like tips and tricks and share those with the audience.

Stereotypes and over simplifications for video gamers actions are very common, still the characteristics and video gamers level of engagement to the texts (games) are also overlapping with fan engagement (Wirman, 2009). If we consider *League of Legends* as a text just like a book or movie, we can say that eSports players are interpreting the game and bending it at their will just like fans interpret and re-write the texts. The substantial

difference between these two models of interpretation is; eSports players actions clinging on the limits of the game. Their interpretation does not occur the same way it does in movie or book interpretation by a fan.

What Aarseth questions in *Cybertexts: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* is games potential of becoming literature as texts. To clarify, if you start a game and watch the actions of your minions and opponents in *League of Legends*, you will realize that they will attack in the same manner until the game ends. Once your champion is summoned to the battlefield, it remains the only thing you can control until the end of the game. Even though you cannot control other units like minions, by blocking their way or luring other neutral minions to their path, you can hinder and slow down their progress causing anomalies in the game. To sum up, players' summoner accounts may be used like architects in the game. eSports players affect this game continuum mentioned above, they try to do so as much as possible to their advantage. To explain in detail, luring minions gives them significant advantage because their opponent cannot earn gold unless they last-hit the minions and earn experience points which is essential to improve their skills. As these tactics are being understood by other eSports communities, teams are obliged to update their game mechanics to preserve their status. In eSports communities this is being referred to as "Elo rating system" which is a method to calculate the relative skill level of players. The creator Arpad Elo originally designed this matching system for chess play but today it has been adapted to be used in many other games.

2.6. Game Fandom

Online gaming and fandom share many characteristics in common, including similar reactions from the public in general and academia more specifically. Numerous scholars have studied online gaming for its effects on the audience, finding connections between gaming and isolation, (Orleans & Laney, 2000); addiction, (Grüsser, Thaelmann& Griffiths, 2007); and anti-sociality (Kraut, Rice, Cool, & Fish, 1998). However, today online gaming has become a major leisure activity that allows people to communicate, raise social capital and enlarge their social circle.

In 2013, the World Championship finals of League of Legends took place in the Staples Center in Los Angeles and the final tickets to attend to the live event sold out in about an hour (Tassi, 2013). The figure below, published in USA Today compares the viewership ratings of the final match with U.S viewership of the other major sporting events from 2013:

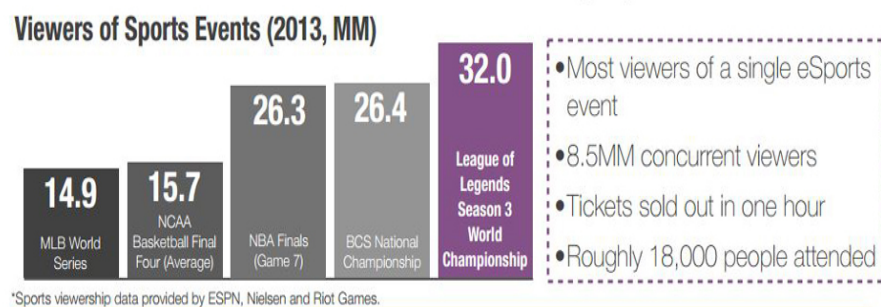


Figure. 1. Viewers of eSports provided by ESPN, Nielsen and Riot Games

<http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/05/league-of-legends-popularity-world-series-nba>

As a new medium for communication, Dimitri Williams has shown that repeated interactions in online gaming can extend the players relationship through shared online play. (2006). There are also studies focused on behavior analysis; indicating that the way players behave in the online world is parallel to the characteristics in physical world, so that to some degree offline group activities are similar to that of online worlds such as sense of mission, sharing and communication (Seay, Jerome, Lee & Kraut, 2004). The increasing amount of participation in online games has allowed game playing to become a mainstream activity (Williams, Yee, & Caplan, 2008). As something becomes mainstream other elements like aesthetics comes to the fore. Attempting to explain what makes popular culture popular Lawrence Grossberg (1992: 51) remarks:

Is it a matter of aesthetic or moral criteria which define the differences between popular texts and other forms of cultural texts (for example, high culture, mass culture, folk culture)? But history has shown us that texts move in an out of these categories (for example, what was popular can become high art), and that a text can exist, simultaneously, in different categories. There are no necessary correspondences between the formal characteristics of any text and its popularity, and the standards for aesthetic legitimacy are constantly changing.

Above Grossberg talks about aesthetics in culture yet his indication is applicable to game culture. In fact, aesthetic is a significant component for a game to ensure its position in popular culture yet aesthetic values are also subject to the taste of the dominant popular culture. In a digital world and a competitive game market, it should be noted that companies must update their game console to keep up their standards and please their consumers. Below extract quoted by Mert Gül a.k.a “React” expresses how *League of*

Legends graphics surpasses *Defence of the Ancients's* (*Dota*) and attracted their attention with constantly changing game patches.

Extract 1

[00.44:56] React: When LoL first came out, each week we were introduced to a new champion and a new patch and its graphics are better. A 12 year old can play *League of Legends* but I do not think if they enjoy *Dota* the same. *League of Legends* can address to taste of everyone, even a 30 year old can enjoy.

Following on our personal conversations React also compared the dark colored theme of *Dota* to vivid colored *LoL* addressing that players can also care for themes and visuals in their preferences.

As we introduce new media to our life, are also subjected to modifications on our cultural practices. For example, the gaming experience before computer games was very much domestic with personal Atari's and arcade consoles. As people start to spend time on forums and blogs, reading about games people could channel their enthusiasm to public sphere (Taylor, 2012: 86).

My observations on Turkish game culture are similar to Taylor's understanding. Before the internet cafés, one of the most well-known locations to play games was the Japanese game console Atari.¹ Atari dominated the video gaming industry in home gaming, arcade gaming and computer gaming between 1970s and 1980s (Wolf, 2008: 59). Early Atari systems were massive and not very suitable for domestic purposes until

¹ For a more complete guide and further information see Mark J.P. Wolf *The Video Game Explosion: A History from Pong to Playstation and Beyond*.

1975 when Atari began converting his arcade design to smaller versions for domestic use (Wolf, 2008: 63). This domestic dominance lasted until the emergence of personal computers (PC) at techno-social environments known as internet cafés. According to Çağlayan two main reasons people would frequent Internet Cafés in the early 2000's were as a social activity and a wish to play digital games. (2001: 205) This transition marks a historical shift between domestic and public gaming. While domestic gaming provides gamers a personal space, public playing in internet cafés triggers a sense of competition. According to Taylor, just surfing on forums and reading about games caused players to move into a virtual public sphere, although with internet cafés this public space also involved shared physical space. Widespread network capabilities of the games (Local Area Networks) are another feature that home play cannot offer (2012). Taylor continues: "From the earliest days of the PC gaming, this desire to connect to others and play head-to head or cooperatively has been present. The old work-around of dragging machines to each other's houses has been significantly supplanted via online networked capability" (87). Taking a similar approach, Demetrovics, Urban and Nagygyörgy, et al. (2011: 823) concluded that "we have to consider that these applications (online games) satisfy basic and concrete human needs in the condition of our modern society."

As the infrastructure of competitive gaming culture was established through arcade and computer gaming, the next step was to find ways to make it even broader. The multi user graphical world of *Ultima Online* (1997) is

considered a breakthrough game of the genre because it showed attention to detail in how players could construct the world around them and design their own clothes for their avatars. (Figure 2.2) As graphical contents of the games advanced through technology personalization of the games become more common.



Figure. 2
Ultima Online (1997)

As an example of personalization in *League of Legends*, Riot Games used tools similar to these that have been offered by MMOs and MMORPGs. Players can both purchase custom skins (costumes) from the store or manipulate the game folders to customize their own skin which is only visible to them.

2.7. Ethnographical Methods to Study Game Culture

Ethnography studies lives and practices of people. Game environment can be considered as a place of interaction between the designer and the player. In games, allowing the players to use strategies and tactics, it is inevitable for the players to witness other players unique strategies based on manipulation of the surroundings. A former *Dota* player Illuven (personal communication, June 9, 2016) gives an example of this manipulation:

“I once saw a Pudge [a champion in *Dota*] in a ranking game started with 15 Tangos [an item allow you to consume a tree in the map, it restores your health points]. He left the regular corridor every player might use and created his own pathway consuming these Tango’s to successfully hook us. [Hook is a special ability of Pudge, if he catches an enemy champion with his hook he pulls it back along with the champion.] Whenever hook is landed we just entrapped there because we are in the middle of trees with no way to escape and Pudge was blocking the other way. What he did was frustrating, because the way he played the champion was unconventional to me but brilliant.”

Such tactics are very useful they redraw the gaming map, and professional players spend a considerable amount of time developing them.

Christine Hine admits that ethnographic methods help us to read these interpretations and observe the social interactions, building a sense of creativity behind the game play and its history (2005).

Boellstorff (2008) claims that participant observation can be a very effective way to study game culture, however he also claims that the term itself is a bit oxymoronic; it is not very likely for a researcher to fully participate and observe simultaneously, but in this confusion anthropologist can still perform their work by taking extensive field notes (2006: 33). For his

research in *Second Life* Boellstroff creates his own account to log-in and socialize with people to study the culture within the game. He conducted more than two years of fieldwork in *Second Life*, participating in numerous events, observing the residents similar to how anthropologists traditionally do and thereby bringing anthropology to an area never studied before. In her *EverQuest* experience T.L Taylor also steps into the shoes of a gamer joining to the online world in which thousands of players participate in a virtual world in real time.

These ethnographical approaches to virtual worlds help us to understand social architecture that shapes the cultural phenomenon. However, the execution of this approach is not very suitable for MOBA format games like *LoL*. The first reason is that, unlike *EverQuest* and *Second Life*, *League of Legends* does not provide a massive online playing environment. In terms of the number of active users, according to 2014 statistics indicated by Riot Games, 67 million people play *LoL* every month, with 27 million of these playing at least one game every day.² Still, the most crowded game map can only host up to 10 players at one time. As a result an attempt to study these groups ethnographically may not be as fruitful as intended. While with every new game you attend, it is possible for an ethnographer to understand different aspects of this particular game culture, nevertheless, the experience can only allow observation of that specific tier. In other words, an account playing on Bronze Level (starter level) would only be matched with opponents at the same level. Put simply, it is not going to be possible for an

2 <http://www.riotgames.com/articles/20140711/1322/league-players-reach-new-heights-2014>

ethnographer with little to no prior experience in Lol to encounter players who are investing great deal of their time into their game play; contrary they will mainly be dealing with enthusiasts who play the game as a leisure activity. For higher tiers, since *League of Legends* is a competitive game, the matches in higher tiers also do not present an amicable environment to the ethnographer.

The possibility of successful virtual ethnography relies on the connection between the informant and the ethnographer. While MMORPGs have plenty of occasions to connect e.g. guilds and dungeons events, in MOBAs players are proposed several alternative game modes. Ranking games are the most popular ones for *League of Legends* players because in this mode participants play against equal level (ranking) rival which stimulates the competition. “In classic ethnographic parlance, we must “acculturate” ourselves to virtual world we study (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pierce and Taylor, 2012: 74). Starting as a newbie is significant for ethnographers to observe the progress they have made through learning the virtual world. Different maps in *League of Legends* come up with new challenges to push the skills of players to the edge. Further discussion related to these challenges will be mentioned in the methodology chapter.

2.8. Video Game Fandom in Turkey

Fans may reflect their expressions in both physical and cyber world. However, the number of studies related to fandom or game culture in Turkey is very limited. However, locating fan practices in Turkey using ethnographical methods seems impractical to study especially for movie or

book fandom. For instance it is easy to find Harry Potter enthusiasts in Turkey, but when you shift your focus to “Potterheads” you may find yourself lost in Turkish cyber world. There are tests and quizzes in Turkish evaluating your level of being a Potterhead, yet in terms of physical action and real devotion to the text; we could not catch even a glimpse of Turkish Potterheads raising their wand’s to mark Alan Rickman’s (Severus Snape) death. In Rickman’s memorial day thousands of Harry Potter fans raised their wands referencing to the movie. (Shoard, 2016) In Yıldırım’s (2015) work he deals with cross cultural media fandom in Turkey and he meets with Turkish *Lord of the Rings* fans successfully formed their community for knowledge sharing purposes but their actions too lack of tangible fan conventions.

The cyber world of fandom through video game culture however stands out as a very popular and more tangible field in Turkey. The competitive play introduced in internet café culture now is brought to the professional arena. Turkey is currently a successor country for eSports, meaning that this tradition of competitive gaming and other features of the eSports culture are brought directly by other countries like Korea.

Unfortunately, some eSports branches ended quickly in Turkey due to lack of interest and lower prize pool issues as it occurred in *Starcraft 2* (Darendeli, 2015). *League of Legends* fandom and eSports culture evolving around it have a much more secured place in Turkish culture. In professional *League of Legends* games teams compete against other teams

in the presence of an audience which is similar to the audience gathered around a football stadium. (Figure 2.3)



Figure.3 Winter Split Finals in Turkey

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter has established the frameworks used for this study. Using models and theories of fandom from Jenson, Fiske and Henry Jenkins, I aim to observe how casual and professional players reproduce meanings in the game by rewriting the tactics and strategies, which as a result gives way to specific game culture based on the readings from Boellstroff and Taylor. On the other hand, using virtual ethnography I have collected field notes within and out of the game to document and better understand common characteristics among the the gamers. A Gaming House interview with Oyunfor.Crew, an active professional *League of Legends* team, will be included to point out their understanding of eSports fandom.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The primary object of this study is to analyze gaming culture in Turkey using methods common to academic studies of generalized fan practices in general defined by academia. In some studies, an identifiable subset of fans in Turkey made clear their rejection of Turkish media and Turkish cultural practices (Yıldırım, 2015: 44). Similar to this, *League of Legends* too was created by an American videogame company and generated the Turkish community around the game. To find a homogenous answer, I conducted my research in several layers such as interviewing with players I have met in game, gaming house visits to an active *League of Legends* Turkish Championship League team.

In the first layer I created a *LoL* account and played in Justice Arena to familiarize myself with the rules of the game. In time as I play with familiar nicknames I asked the other players if they would like to participate in my research. The goal was to see a snowball effect, after several successful conversations, with more players coming forward to participate. However, I wanted to limit my research on several *LoL* players whose ages are 20 and 26 with background in other MMOs and MMORPGs believing that their insights will be more useful to make comparisons across the gamers. The participants did not sign any consent form, and furthermore did not want our conversations to be recorded. I conducted three separate Skype interviews with each. The subjects of the interviews were about their background as gamers, eSports fandom and fandom in general. Both of these participants are currently enrolled at a university in Turkey, even though they are non-professionals, they have

active connections to eSports clubs at their universities. I introduced myself as a casual gamer and told them my background with games which made it a lot easier for them to cross reference other games to explain their ideas in detail. My observations based on my own experience in the game, from observing others' play to spectate formal competitive matches and subsequent interviews. In the second layer, I conducted an interview with a professional *League of Legends* eSports team. While it is possible to find tour videos about gaming houses of European and Korean teams, my research is also required me to talk to Turkish team players about their insights. The initial responses from Turkish teams were negative, and only after struggling for a while was I able to get a positive reply from Oyunfor.Crews team members and scheduled my interview.

As it was explained before, interviewing with participants through the game was a bit challenging because of the tier system. I conducted 32 interviews in total with 4 professional and 6 nonprofessional players. Only Oyunfor.Crew's interview recorded. Some interviews required follow-up interviews to clarify some important details as it did with B, the only female participant in the group.

Among the participants, only Flaren and B know each other in person. All the interviews took place between January 2016 and July 2016. Mert Gül, Gökhan Uçar and Umur Akıncı were interviewed as a group in Oyunfor.Crew's gaming house. I conducted this collective interview session with the team on 20 June 2016 at their gaming house in Ataşehir, İstanbul. The interview was recorded using an Ipad application called AudioMemo. The duration of the interview

was 57:12 minutes. During the interview I also collected extensive field notes on key points.

The rest of the players, except Anıl Işık, Flaren and B, interviewed through *League of Legends* and through Skype. Flaren and B's interviews were conducted in person between June 2016 and July 2016 in İzmir, and Anıl Işık's interview was conducted through his Facebook account. In Table 1, the demographic information of the participants has been disclosed such as their occupation, age, gender etc.

Table.1 Participant Profile

Name/Alias	Education	Profession	Age	Gender
Mert "React" Gül	University Student	eSports Player	24	Male
Gökhan "Maddness" Uçar	Highschool graduate	eSports Player	20	Male
Umur "Xhr" Akıncı	University Student	eSports Player	26	Male
Anıl "HolyPhoneix" Işık	University Student	eSports Player	22	Male
Flyleaf	University Graduate	Engineer	24	Male
Flaren	University Graduate	English Teacher	26	Male
B	University Graduate	Operator Assistant	26	Female
Pyromancer	University Student	Unemployed	24	Male
Losser	University Student	Unemployed	27	Male
Illuven	University Student	Unemployed	23	Male
			Average: 24	

3.1. Becoming a Summoner

In *LoL* each player is entitled as summoner, who has an ability to spawn a champion to the field and take advantage of spells, runes and masteries to improve his champion. Not having previous experience in professional competitive gaming, I started playing a MOBA game called *Defense of The Ancients (Dota)* at 17. While having a background in MOBA is useful to understand the dynamics. As each entry level player is expected to, the first thing to come up with an alias. An alias, especially in professional gaming may surpass your given name among fans and spectators e.g. *League of Legends* commentators are attentive to use the alias of the players in their comments.

League of Legends Justice Arena welcomes players to the game with their rules and regulations known as Summoner's Code aiming to familiarize you with the ethics of play. After you initiate the game, as a beginner you start with level 1 account and can play with limited champions from the pool. In this respect, *LoL* introduces you to MMORPG like leveling system. To play in ranking games you have to increase your level to 30. To be able to play with other champions you either need to purchase Riot Points, which is the game currency or collect enough Influence Points to unlock a champion.

Secondly, players need to choose their roles in the game. The standard team composition consists of 5 players distributed to bottom lane, mid lane, solo top lane and jungle. The bottom lane is occupied by a marksman champion a.k.a. Attack Damage carries who are strong champions in terms of physical damage (AD carry) and a support player to keep marksman alive. Mid Lane is played by mage or assassin type Attack Power carries who can harass opponents with their magical damage. While an Attack Power carry inflicts a lot of damage

through spells, AD carry champions inflict lots of damage through their auto attacks. Jungle stays off lane, tries learning as much as experience and gold through minions spawned in jungle. Because of their position in the map they can easily go to help bottom and mid lane. The solo top lane players usually pick tank, fighter or hybrid type champions. The role of solo top players becomes significant as game progresses because among all the roles in the game they remain the majority of the other players play closer to the right bottom of the field.

Communication with other players is possible if you introduce yourself early at the game. Because when game is over, your team and opponent team are moved to another chat window where you can discuss your and others performance. My primary objective was to have meaningful conversations with low ranking players however as casual gamers they can easily show their disinterest and log out from the chat-window at the earliest opportunity. After doing some research, I have also realized that there are third party organizations marketing 30+ level accounts to gain profit from those not willing to spend so much time to leveling because it usually takes 150 to 200 matches with current statistics to reach level 30.³ However the players I interviewed admitted that they prefer to engage in the game believing that they will be able to improve mechanics naturally. This personal engagement can also be observed in other studies about fandom in Turkey. A *Mad Men* fan Yıldırım (2015) interviewed differentiates himself from others saying: “My difference is that I spend more time, I have a bigger engagement” (55). While some of the fans interviewed distinguish themselves as more engaged to the

³ See <https://www.unrankedsmurfs.com/>

game (playing more than 5-6 games a day), Jenkins (1992) also states the playful engagement and active interpretation of fans pull characters and narrative issues to an area based on fans own conception of the series (155). Typically in game culture creative gaming and reinterpretation of the standard tactics of the game can be achieved via such engagement. As a new player I usually check the guidelines for starters to advance my ranking yet this cliché guides minimizes ones chance to become creative in the game. The 25 year old nonprofessional Pyromancer admits that some players learn quickly and improve their skills. He has been playing *LoL* for four years, but has never competed at a professional level because he could not come up with an effective team. He states (personal communication, May 10, 2016):

“Some believe that level is important in ranking matches but they are wrong. One of the things I learned from this game is there are always others who can outplay you. Your play is never going to be complete and perfect but practice is very significant. We are not robots and we will make mistakes, the team who makes lesser mistakes has a higher chance to win in that sense. That’s why you see a lot of Turkish player making videos on how to play properly or skill videos on Youtube, they are trying to educate people.”

What Pyromancer explains here is that there is no direct connection between the level in the game and the performance. This is also typical in physical sports, where sometimes even top players have trouble putting on their best show and this in turn can affect their team’s performance. Even though playing *LoL* is not as physically demanding as playing football, Pyromancer implies that the success is based on both collective and individual performance of the players. He also emphasizes the participatory culture around *League of Legends* in which players upload guideline videos about specific champions and proper ways of using their skills. Observing the tactics of individual

players and professional teams, novice players can start adopting hybrid methods and learning how they can bend the rules of the game, just like fans re-interpret the texts. Further discussion and details will be provided in the final chapter.

3.2. Visiting Oyunfor.Crew's Game House

Gaming houses can be considered as a clear marker of status between casual and professional gaming. A game house not only gives space to players to practice their skills, it also serves as a social space for team members to build trust. There are 8 teams participating in Turkish Championship League, and all of them host their players in gaming houses.

Oyunfor.Crew's gaming house, at the time I visited, was really close to Riot Games' office in Ataşehir, İstanbul. I did not have any expectations about the place going into visit as I had not seen any gaming house in person before. Rather than a high-end venue, this gaming house was actually an apartment that was situated next to the community pool. When I asked the security staff about Oyunfor.Crews apartment number, he referred them as "*oyuncu çocuklar*" (gamer kids). I rung their bell and Mert Gül (React) welcomed me to their house and kindly asked me to wait to finish their game. Cables were taped to and fro and five guys were fully focused on their game. Beside them their coach Umur "Xhr" Akıncı was giving them tactics about their pick and what to do in the following minutes. At the first glance, it reminded me of an internet café but a very serious one. As their opponents picked their champions, Oyunfor.Crew members started commenting on their options for potential anti

champions. They were discussing each potential champion with their pros and cons.

As I watched their match, I realized that they were discussing the new updates on the game and testing how those updates affected those champions they played. I also realized that they were playing a “scrim” (preparation) match with a European Challenger team. Even though they had not met their opponents in person, the whole team was quite knowledgeable about the profile of their opposing team. Even though Oyunfor.Crew had just been promoted to the league that season, I assumed that team members must have watched their opponents’ previous matches to analyze their strategies. When the match ended I didn’t understand if it was the final one or not as they usually play best of five format (the team who win 3 round wins).

My ethnographical work in gaming houses was a bit challenging as explained. The way you approach gaming house managers is very significant. Even though teams are financed by the owners it is ultimately management departments’ consent which makes it possible to take part in your research. Having a positive answer also does not guarantee you an opportunity to interview with all members because after becoming informed about your research topic they may decide not to participate in the study. The Two of Oyunfor.Crew players decided not to participate and continued their solo queue (playing in individual mode) games.

Read the news about eSports, I encountered several names who successfully visited and interviewed other teams. Kaan Kural the former NBA TV commentator was one of them. I tweeted him about my research subject and difficulties experiencing to get in touch with a gaming house. He introduced

me to Kürşad Demirer who is working at Riot Games' office. He accepted to help me and gathered contact information for 8 teams participating in the league. Gaming houses, for most of the teams, are subject to change after each split (season) and players only stay there for 4-5 months per year. In their free time, teams evacuate their gaming house and players go back to their families. It is also possible for future researchers to schedule interviews with players in cafes or public places. However, for my research it was also significant to be present at a gaming house.

The preliminary analysis of recordings resulted in breaking the collected data in different categories. My field notes on the virtual and non-virtual ethnographical research were also categorized in the same manner. Combining and comparing those similar categories were essential to conclude this research.

At this point, I cannot ignore my cultural background in gaming and fandom, which were thoroughly influencing my interviews and field notes. However, as it was stated in Chapter 2 there is also a shift in academia to look for different methods to study game culture. My aim was to observe the mannerism of professional and non-professional gamers to realize if their behavior fits to recent fandom theories echoed by numerous scholars. As I discussed *League of Legends* with more players via game and forums it has become indispensable for me to include an intermediate chapter to this research before moving directly to conclusion. How a company policy can be effective to spread the game by penetrating into social places like internet cafés and universities will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

GLOCALIZATION OF LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

Extract 3

[00.43:15] Umur “Xhr” Akıncı: There is an only reason how Riot Games spreads so quickly, they spare no expenses.

The introduction of this chapter will start with the short history of the Riot Games game development company. Following that it will focus on the company policy to break down hegemonic gaming structure of Turkey to acculturate Turkish people to their game. When Riot Games announced *League of Legends* there was already an established MOBA playing culture in Turkey; while they first released their game without a Turkish server, in 2012 Riot Games opened their office at Istanbul. Before that time, LoL was being played by Turkish gamers through Europe-West, Europe-East and US servers. Following the announcement of their office in İstanbul, Riot Games initiated the adaptation period of *League of Legends* to Turkish culture.

4.1. History of Riot Games

Established in 2006, Riot Games is known as a video game developer and publisher. The company was founded by Brandon Beck and Marc Merrill later Steve “Guinsoo” Feak and other notable developers from *Dota* team joined the crew. In 2009, the company launched its debut *League of Legends*. In a short time, their game became a mainstream game for not only in United States, but in Asia and other European countries as well.

To me there is one thing that requires close reading to this advancement, Riot Games' policy which is also called The Riot Manifesto.⁴ Their desire to form their own community, seek and accept feedback from users also made it possible to expand *League of Legends* fandom. The player React mentioned that the game was being updated regularly to fix the errors showing that the complaints raised by the audience were heard and resolved by Riot Games. However, it would be wrong to argue that all players started to play *League of Legends* at the moment it was released; rather, the company took significantly strategic moves to spread their game around the country.

The term glocalization stems from a marketing strategy term “global-localization” or glocalization (Robertson, 1995), which refers to the practice to adapt globally distributed cultural products to other cultures. As an example of entertainment content glocalization of entertainment are presented locally in adapted versions to the audiences aware or unaware of their origin. This strategy has become a systematical practice by companies especially competing in the global entertainment area (Sigismondi, 2011).

Of course, it is not my intention to go deep into the capitalistic business practices yet we must pay extra attention to Riot Games steps to acculturate Turkish audience to their new game. They had to build this structure surpassing the existing dominant game culture in Turkey. The team used different methods to localize their game and present them to the audience such as introducing free to play model, Turkish content of the game, spreading *League of Legends* to universities and dynamic goal settings.

⁴ See <http://www.riotgames.com/riot-manifesto>

4.2. Introducing Free to Play Model and Influence Points

Game developers usually go between three different models in their infrastructure while designing a game: Pay to win, pay to play and free to play. In pay to win business model, players can buy better gears which give advantages over other players, particularly those who have not purchased the same gear. Skills are still important however it also creates an unbalanced game environment between the paid and the unpaid players. In pay to play model, the players have to pay a fee just to play the game. This type of game introduces the possibility of a different imbalance, with premium (generally more expensive) accounts granting special bonuses over other accounts. The user is then motivated to choose the premium offer, which is generally based on monthly or yearly subscriptions to access the game. The free to play model grants access to the significant part of the game without actually incurring any expense. In MMOs we usually see this free to play model with microtransactions allowing you to have extra content in the game (usually personalization like skins or costumes) but these add-ons do not grant a player any advantage over the others during game play.

League of Legends was announced as a combination of these two models, creating “freemium” content. The firm introduced both Influence Points and Riot Points system to players. While Riot Points can only be purchased with real money, Influence Points can be earned as you play games and complete them. Players are allowed to use both of these points to unlock new champions in the League so that they can practice and master other significant characters, thereby allowing paidia-type play. During my time in the game I repeatedly

asked other players whether they are purchasing their characters through Riot Points or not. Most of the players I have encountered admitted that they have not purchased Riot Points, they only unlocked champions through their influence points. There is also another microtransaction page to allow you to make custom changes on the appearance of the characters using Riot Points only. Flaren (personal communication, April 12, 2016) states:

“We were playing *Dota* before *League of Legends* but the second game of the company, *Dota 2* beta version distributed to the users with serial keys. Unless you had one it was not possible for you to play the game. Since we were playing as a group it seemed us better to start playing *League of Legends*.”

Flaren’s explanation is useful to understand the expectations of general mass playing online games in Turkey. Even though there are those willing to pay to play, the priority of some players is to play games not asking for any advance payments. For those who are not willing to spend so much time to unlock champions there are still available third party organizations who are selling accounts with unlocked champions. Flaren also stresses the group allegiance of gaming, where players are acting as a group and decide together what to play as a team. Players form this online allegiance using Whatsapp, Skype or third party programs like TeamSpeak to communicate with each other. Asım Doğan Dirim who is also the owner of Turkish Championship League team Aurora also refers to this will to togetherness as “synergy” during our conversations (personal communication, January 10, 2016). He explains that playing together as a team is essential at the competitive level. “Players need to know, what their friends are capable of doing so they can trust them.”, he says, adding, “I used to play *Counter Strike* in internet cafes as individual, and I cannot explain

how frustrating it was to play with random players in your team and lose in the end.” The implication that togetherness and community are essential components of successful play is mentioned in several of my interviews with professional and nonprofessional players alike. However, players who started as individuals like Flaren can also form their teams and participate in the league as well. Thus, in addition to building their individual skills, players are also seeking this clan, guild or group synergy both to further improve their gameplay and to get to know new people.

In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins recognizes fans relationship to the texts as a tentative one (24). To extend his explanation he continues showing the parallelism between fans behavior and Certeau’s “poaching” analogy. Certeau indicates: “Far from being writers ... readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174).

This analogy can be applied to *League of Legends* too. While book or movie fans manage this struggle to retool the narratives outside the text, gamers also act like readers and nomads as they keep up with the updates in a game or simply migrate to another game just like Flaren and his friends did. *League of Legends* players call these updates “meta”. Meta consists of a collection of strategies that are accepted as strong ways of playing a game. For instance, being able to use both hands in tennis, gives a significant advantage over a single-handed opponent. However, meta in *LoL* is not permanent like it is in some physical sports, on the contrary it is constantly being updated by game

developers. Some champions become popular due to their versatility in certain meta. Champions pick, win and ban rates distributed to the players through websites keeping statistics like pickban.com or lolking. As a result keen players mainly try to pick those strong champions. This leads them to practice strategies around these certain picks, study skills and items to play meta champions as most efficient as possible.

However, game meta in *LoL* is being updated constantly as Flaren calls it “necessary evil” especially in the professional area “because of versatility”. These updates in meta force players to practice different champions, enlarging their champion pool (the list of champions a professional player can use effectively). In that sense, gamers’ effort is a bit similar to nomadic style moving across lands (champions) to enjoy the game. It would be wrong to consider professional players truly passive in this context, because they are still performing as actors. This explains why in post-game interviews, announcers refer to players’ performance as “show”. Meta argument will be touched upon again in more detail in Chapter 5 predicated on players comments.

4.3. Turkish Interface

Riot Games presented *League of Legends* with several language options. Europe West players can choose among German, Spanish, French and Italian; Nordic and Eastern European countries can also play the game in their own language. Knowing that English is an acquired language for Turkish people, Riot designed a patch for Turkish users including voice overs, texts and some other secret effects. Secret effects do not give you significant bonuses, but they do provide some inconsequential Easter eggs (hidden features in an interactive

platform) e.g. if a player brings the police characters Caitlyn and Vi together, since they both are police champions fighting against criminals , Vi's secret taunt allow her to eat donuts; a typical police stereotype from American culture.

Complete Turkish content made it easier for new players to understand the game rules at the same time, the structure of forums and contents, both in Turkish, were being prepared to develop the participatory culture of the game. Forums acted like venues for gamers to raise their questions and discuss their tactics. On Turkish interface following extract could be helpful to observe how much important it is for players to have a Turkish language preference in the game.

Extract 3

[00.48:58] Interviewer: If the only language option for *League of Legends* were English, do you think such a huge crowd would still play?

[00.49:07] React: I am good at English but I play it in Turkish to know every detail. Since my native language is Turkish, there might be some words that I do not fully understand.

Going further, the voices for all available champions at the time were dubbed by Turkish voice actors. The team recruited 56 different voice actors to dub more than 100 champions.⁵ They also added Murat Kosova, a well-known football commentator, to their team to vocalize the game.⁶ In 2012, following the establishment of *League of Legends* TV, they recruited Kaan Kural, the

⁵ <http://forums.tr.leagueoflegends.com/board/showthread.php?t=553>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0UcW2XZwIA>

former basketball commentator from NTV, to their squad. On April 2, 2015 Kural announced his recruitment through his Twitter account:

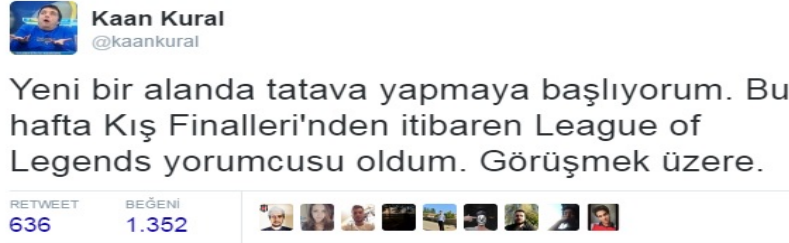


Fig.4 Kaan Kural’s Tweet

Kural’s tweet can be loosely translated as: “I am embarking on a new journey. From now on, following the Winter Finals I will be a *League of Legends* commentator. See you soon.”

As well-known figures in the traditional sports media, Murat Kosova and Kaan Kural played an effective role in spreading the game via their contacts in TV. To me these recruitments also signaled the fanaticism movement in eSports for Turkish people. The very first sponsored, professional *League of Legends* teams were supported by existing eSports sponsors like Hardware Arena and Dark Passage. In 2015, January 21st Beşiktaş became the first sport club in Turkey to make a move to online world. Metin Albayrak, team representative stated “The world is changing, and for our new generation, computers and the internet mean a lot. Thanks to our friends, we now have a new unit that will not compete on the field, but online” (Oelschlagel, 2015).

4.4. League Spreading to Universities

“If it doesn’t spread, it’s dead.” This catchy phrase is used in the title of the first chapter in Jenkins’, Ford’s and Green’s *Spreadable Media* (2013). While *Spreadable Media* provides great deal of knowledge on creating value and

meaning in networked culture it can also be considered as a marketing agenda (Bury, 2013).

According to 2012 statistics, 85% of the LOL players are between 16 and 30 years old while 60% of them are enrolled in or have completed university (Kenreck, 2012). Considering the importance of the younger generation playing these games, Riot Games encouraged students to establish eSports Clubs at their universities to get them to start spreading the word of *League of Legends*. Usually announcements are made through Riot Games' website to sign in as university delegate.⁷ To invite high school players to the competition, Riot has announced the beginning of weekly internet café tournaments around Turkey taking place in selected cafés located in major cities like Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara to initiate participants to assemble their teams. Flaren admitted that he applied for delegation position in 9 Eylül University in 2012 and worked with his friends to found the very first eSports team in his university.

These two organizational attempts not only encouraged high school and university students to organize their teams, but in return these ventures also rewarded the developers with increasing participation. Daily *League of Legends* events around the country can be followed in events page at Riot Games website. Players and café owners organize their events, announce them in events page. Prizes are distributed by Riot Games to the winning accounts.⁸

At this level it is worth mentioning that even though Riot Games announced the number of players playing *League of Legends*, particular offices are not allowed to share their data. However, teams and their rosters year by year can

⁷ <http://tr.leagueoflegends.com/tr/news/community/community-programs/kampusun-sihirdarlari-yeni-elcilerini-bekliyor>

⁸ See events page and prizes <http://events.tr.leagueoflegends.com/>

be examined in detail to follow the increasing contribution.⁹ There are still 8 teams in Championship League in Turkey but apart from long-established teams like HWA and Dark Passage the tendency is to meet new players in the league each year. Victorious Ace and SuperMassive TNG have joined the Turkish Championship League in 2016 following their victories over opponent teams: Çilekler and TeamTurquality.

4.5. Dynamic Goal Settings

The ultimate objective in competitive games is to be victorious. The victories mean increasing your position in the ranking system. In *League of Legends*, it is particularly difficult and tricky for players to keep their status because the system used by Riot creates a sort of flux around the game changing minor details, called meta, on a regular basis that can have a huge impact on gaming. “A champion you mastered can be useless in two months after some nerfs (making something less valuable than it had been originally) on it.” says Oğuzcan “Mr_Ogo” Kotan who is currently in Challenger League. Either you are an eSports player or have a potential to become one, it always depends upon knowing the variables in the game and making very few mistakes. In summary, in terms of goal setting *League of Legends* is very static: whatever the details, the aim is to destroy your enemy Nexus. However, the plays that are carried out and the compositions that players create are so dynamic that in each game, players have to make the right choices and combinations to be victorious each time.

⁹ See <http://tr.leagueoflegends.com/tr/news/esports/esports-editorial/2015-sampiyonluk-ligine-katilacak-takimlar-belli-oldu> and <http://5mid.com/lol/lol-turkiye-ligi-2016-kadrolari/>

It is also notable that players are willing to improve and dedicate themselves to become one of the bests. Mert “React”Gül for example, who has been awarded as the best mid-lane player in 2016 Summer season based upon the votes from *LoL* players, admitted that he practices nearly 8-10 hours per day to better his play and this time even increases after there are some updates announced. When I asked him if he still enjoys playing, he replied “It is tiresome but I am happy to be here. eSports is still a developing industry in Turkey and I am part of it.”

It must be noted that players like React usually have some background in gaming culture meaning they started playing video games from a young age. For instance he was playing *Dota* before he started playing *League of Legends*, Maddnes and Xhr have played first person shooter (FPS) games in competitive level. As an owner of Team Aurora, Asım Doğan Dirim comes from professional FIFA background. Even though strategically games may differ, players can come to same terms if it means to become one of the selected players among the league.

Taylor (2012) states that the multiplayer nature of eSports brings energy to the competitions, comparing the experience to watching a chess match between a chess mater and IBM’s Deep Blue supercomputer. Like this kind of chess match, digital gaming competition focuses on human vs. machine skills. *League of Legends* can also be played against computer in single-player mode. However, at some point players typically start seeking out meaningful, interpersonal challenges (Taylor, 2012). That dynamism and going out of your circle to improve your play becomes one of the very first steps into an eSports

career. What is more interesting with the first generation Turkish eSports players is that they could not imagine this will become a massive phenomenon, and they would start creating teams and participating in worldwide organizations playing *League of Legends*.

4.6. Isolated Gamer Stereotype

Whether you are a casual or a power gamer, once you start spending excessive time on computer games it is very likely for you to be criticized by society. The tone of some academic research echoes or reinforces this criticism, such as research related to the social isolation of First Person Shooter game players (Wright, Boria and Breidenbach 2002). Whether eSports players' are social or not is a very complex argument that cannot be cleared up with even multiple interviews, and the conclusion will vary from culture to culture. In some cultural contexts computer games are clearly and broadly integrated into everyday life and participation in such games is a very routine activity for the society (Chee, 2005).

The problem usually stems from a society's understanding of sociability and non-players' stereotype of gamers. In some ways, gamers' habits are similar to those in football and basketball leagues: teams play on regular basis, train to improve their execution of tactics in gaming houses just as professional athletes work out at their teams' facilities. That stereotypical stance to gaming culture is also derived from misconceptualization of games in society. We may need to draw a line between generations of gamers and other media consumers in Turkey as Jenkins did to academics studying fandom at this level, because just like first generation fan scholars remaining outside of fandom, parents may

prefer to remain outside of video game culture. Güler Köklü, the mother of a former professional *League of Legends* player Coşkun “Tyresse” Eren, admits that their generation knows nothing about these video games they just simply do not understand what it is all about (League of Legends Türkiye, 2014).

During my ethnographical research I have even met a heterosexual couple who first got to know each other while playing in ranking match. It is also very common for an outsider to ignore preexisting offline ties of gamers. This offline communication also serves as a prominent component in the enjoyment of the game (Taylor, 2006: 52). Another Turkish professional player Anıl “HolyPhoenix” Işık expresses: “When you become a pro player, you become more social. Lots of people get to meet you, want to talk to you and you click with some of them eventually. And there are a lot of people online who heard of me. Some of them are really great people...” (League of Legends Türkiye, 2014) Mert “React” Gül states “We usually stay in contact with other teams; we played football with mixed teams just last week.” This also shows that even they play in a competitive level, eSports players are also interested in spending time and socialize with other players, including outside the game platform.

4.7. Parental Concerns

eSports is a bit challenging for older generations to acknowledge as a way to make a living. Once fans realize their potential in the game, it is imminent for them to build up their team and start working strategically to climb up the ladders of Championship League. The players, as a team, have to reach Challenger Tier, which is the highest tier in the league system. A player can also play as solo and reach Challenger level too. The Challenger level players or teams can be spotted by entrepreneurs, and as a result they can be recruited

to the professional level. Once this turns out to be a profession, it is widely perceived that most players, who are nearly all young adults in their 20s, experience troubles to persuade their parents into it. Some players like React and Maddness can be considered as lucky ones because their parents gave their consent to pursue their desires to participate in the League. Mrs. Köklü who already admitted her disinterest in video gaming was among those who removed the console's power cable and hid it away so that her children would not play at all. As a response until he becomes a true professional, Coşkun "Tyresse" Eren admitted that he bought a spare plug to use once his mother leaves home (2014). It would be wrong to argue that this scene is different in the international platform, excluding South Korea, where eSports are highly popular and considered to be a mainstream for over a decade (Erzberger, 2016)



Fig. 5 The Turkish Team Supermassive Won the International Wildcard Invitation

The milestone for parents to accept their status usually coincide with parents seeing their success in tournaments, earning huge tournament prizes, seeing their children being able to travel internationally to represent Turkey (Figure

5). Understanding that professional gaming can be beneficial, parents become optimistic the choice their children have made.

During my interviews none of the participants want to talk about his salary, because they are not allowed by their contract to share such information. However, at esportsearnings.com, which is a community driven competitive gaming resource, we can see the highest incomes among eSports players internationally and across different games. Because of its relatively recent history, the first *League of Legends* players we can see in the list begin with the rank of #61: South Korea's Sang Hyeok Lee, a.k.a. "Faker".(Figure 6) While the first 56 seed is dominated by *Defence of the Ancients 2* players, in the first 100 we can only see two *League of Legends* players. At the moment, there is no Turkish player in the top 100 either. While the list covers only top 500 players, in terms of total prize money earned Anıl "Holyphoenix" Işık ranked the highest in Turkey with more than \$30.000 US dollars.

61.	 Faker	Lee, Sang Hyeok	\$554,086.98		<i>League of Legends</i>	\$554,086.98	100.00%
62.	 QO	Kim, Sunyeob	\$550,111.32		<i>Dota 2</i>	\$550,111.32	100.00%
63.	 BurNing	Xu, Zhilei	\$533,061.92		<i>Dota 2</i>	\$503,699.86	94.49%
64.	 Ohaiyo	Chong, Xin Khoo	\$532,936.76		<i>Dota 2</i>	\$532,936.76	100.00%
65.	 Febby	Kim, Yong Min	\$521,447.58		<i>Dota 2</i>	\$521,447.58	100.00%
66.	 Flash	Lee, Young Ho	\$506,928.18		<i>StarCraft: Brood War</i>	\$411,439.84	81.16%
67.	 MC	Jang, Min Chul	\$504,011.49		<i>StarCraft II</i>	\$503,931.22	99.98%
68.	 Moon	Jang, Jae Ho	\$482,560.97		<i>WarCraft III</i>	\$454,807.97	94.25%
69.	 Life	Lee, Seung Hyun	\$475,300.67		<i>StarCraft II</i>	\$475,300.67	100.00%
70.	 Bengi	Bae, Seong Ung	\$466,951.00		<i>League of Legends</i>	\$466,951.00	100.00%

Fig. 6 Highest Earnings among *LoL* Players

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

As discussed earlier the fans of any text are consumers and creators. Their activities as creators and critiques have accelerated with the rapid growth of the internet (Jenkins, 2010). The internet has not created only a media platform but composed a field to be explored penetrating into the private spheres and living spaces of the people. Recently social media have introduced new ways to communicate, share and like any content. This has also provided people to share what they are listening or watching and getting into discussions over the texts they have seen.

At this stage, I believe it is necessary to understand the difference between the casual audience and a fan. However, a line needs to be drawn between fans of different texts. Different fandoms can be associated with different kinds of discourses (Jenkins, 2006: 24). According to Daniel Cavicchi:

On the whole, it [the term “fan’] is used both descriptively and prescriptively to refer to diverse individuals and groups, including fanatics, spectators, groupies, enthusiasts, celebrity stalkers, collectors, consumers, members of subcultures, and entire audiences, and, depending on the context, to refer to complex relationships involving affinity, enthusiasm, identification, desire, obsession, possession, neurosis, hysteria, consumerism, political resistance, or a combination (1998: 39)

Cavicchi here defines fan in a very general context but Kristina Busse and Karren Hellekson state that fan cultures cannot be generalized, thus we cannot form a universal definition of the word:

It is impossible, and perhaps even dangerous, to speak of a single fandom, because fandoms revolving around the TV program *Due South* have rules different from those of fandoms revolving around the *Lord of the Rings*

books and movies, and fandoms that are centered around face –to-face meetings, exchange of round-robin style letters, or a generation of hard-copy fan fiction magazines (say, the experience described by Camille Bacon-Smith in *Enterprizing Women* [1992]) are each different from the kind of online fandom that is the primary focus here (2006: 6).

In that sense, *League of Legends* fandom and eSports fandom can be argued in terms of their relevance to other fandom practices like movie, music or book. The key difference for game fandom and eSports fandom is the necessity of computer since it is the mandatory equipment for direct participation.

In one of the interviews with the player “Flyleaf” (personal communication, 10 May, 2016) he admitted that he uses word fan, fanatic and the Turkish word for fan: *hayran* in different formations. I will stick to using “hayran” because during the interviews other *League of Legends* players also made a similar distinction among these three words, a distinction that will be discussed below.

To Flyleaf, football offers a model for the distinction between these terms, saying: “I do not say “Fenerbahçe fan” for someone who supports the club and goes to every match they play on the stadium, he is a fanatic.” Flyleaf does not deem himself as a football fanatic, because the word has a negative impact to him. Congruently, football fanatics in Turkey have been known to bomb busses, (Ercanlar, 2015) to lead a resistance towards state oppression (Başaran, 2015) and unfortunately after a derby match (very important match for fanatics of the three major Turkish teams: Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray and Beşiktaş) we sometimes witness some fanatics’ death over arguments that emerge from disputes with the opposing team’s fanatics.

As we continued to discuss the difference of fan and the Turkish translation of the word, Flyleaf expressed that he applies the word “hayran” to the followers

of musicians like Tarkan or Sertap Erener but to him one can be a “fan” of *Lord of the Rings*. Here, as a gamer Flyleaf also shows his stance towards different practices of fandom in Turkey. In our interview, Flaren also mentioned something similar referring to “hayran” and “fan” dichotomy (personal communication, June 7, 2016):

I think a fan should be responsible for meaning-making or at least introducing his object of fandom to the people. “Serdar Ortaç Hayranları” (Serdar Ortaç Fans) for instance, what are they doing exactly except listening his songs and dancing with it? They are not active or united as far as I know. However, the first time I saw *The Lord of the Rings* I told my friends saying: “There is such a nice movie in the theatre, you must go and watch it.” I bought the other books of the series, and even purchased the actions figures of my favorite characters. You can buy Serdar Ortaç’s album to support him but I do not believe that all those people going to his concert are actually his “hayran”, because I attended several concerts during my first year in university just to have good time with my friends.

Here Flaren is remarking his understanding of “Serdar Ortaç Hayranları” in Turkey and considering them as passive comparing his own actions after he watched *The Lord of the Rings*. However, it must be noted that he affiliates himself with *The Lord of the Rings* fandom. To him, becoming a “hayran” of some group or a musician is something usually limited to personal level in Turkey. He glorifies being a fan for their engagement on the object of fandom, particularly fan’s effort to bring other into that fandom and to actively seek out more text related to that fandom’s canon.

However, the role of the object of fandom should not be ignored. Consider the musician Imogean Heap, who invited her fans to have an active participation on her next projects showing that fan creation can be encouraged (and even incorporated or appropriated) by the object of fandom himself/herself. Flaren also rejects the relation of events like concerts to fandom because he considers

such events, based on his experience, as a place for entertainment and not necessarily a declaration of one's active fan status.

5.1. How players initiated their engagement?

Before I started creating accounts on forums, I remember sharing game contents with friends to get their opinion. This content was sometimes an avatar, sometimes a modified, car but the essence was to connect with others through this medium and create an improved gaming experience, through shared advice. The venue for this interaction was internet cafés. It would be wrong to consider the internet café only as a place to play; on the contrary, to me it represents vanguard of participatory digital culture in Turkey. With the preliminary analysis of the collected data, I observed that internet cafés also took an active work to spread the word of *League of Legends* to young enthusiasts with internet café tournaments and prizes. How Oyunfor.Crew members started playing can be understood below:

Extract 3

[00.00:15] Interviewer: To give a general idea, could everyone please speak about his eSports background?

[00.00:23] Maddness: I started playing *League of Legends* after seeing one of my friends playing at an internet café. (2011)

[00.03:16] React: ... One day I went to visit my cousin. It was after the release of *League of Legends*. He asked me if I played *Dota*, and continued telling me that he found this nice game with better graphics. Back then, there were two servers: North-America and Europe. We were playing on the North America server during nights to have fun. After reaching level 30, our group was disbanded and I quit. From time to time, I went to internet cafés to get my errands done and I realized people were playing *League of Legends*, it became a huge hit! I decided to start playing again, climbed up to the higher ranks in TR ranking. In the meantime Riot Games set up their office, whole playing game concept became a professional occupation, a job.

Here they talk about how communities like internet cafés and friend groups gave way to their career in *LoL*. React and Gökhan's samples also indicate that *LoL*'s becoming a part of mass culture and a profitable area following Riot Games' undertakings for eSports. This also illustrates their stance towards the object of fandom "if something is popular, then it must be good." It was also observed that eSports players have a relatively long history on playing games. Maddness for instance was a former first person shooter gamer mainly playing *Counter Strike* and React was playing another MOBA type game before *League of Legends*.

This migration from other games to *LoL* is a movement and a process of becoming more interactive audience who operates alongside the media. The game has dominated majority of the channels from YouTube to Twitch, virtual forums to internet cafés and even universities. During my talk to a non-professional player, "Flaren" (personal communication, 7 June, 2016) who explained how he came across with *LoL*:

I was studying in American Studies Department in 9 Eylül Üniversitesi in my second year I heard about university delegate position. We were meeting up at restaurants and cafes with other players along with my friend Volkan who is regional coordinator right now. It was a collective initiative.

The word "collective" is very important here, because Flaren talks about promoting this fandom to other people through a collective work via organizing *League of Legends* related in their campus, introducing the game to the people, broadcasting his tips and tricks on champions through Twitch, which is an online platform popular among gamers to broadcast game plays. Pierre Levy discusses this "collective intelligence" or what he terms "the cosmopedia" to define this production and promotion in fandoms:

The members of a thinking community search, inscribe, connect, consult, explore. . . . Not only does the cosmopedia make available to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development. . . . Unanswered questions will create tension within cosmopedic place, indicating regions where invention and innovation are required. (1997: 217)

Jenkins (2006) considers online fan communities as one of the most fully realized versions of the cosmopedia because of their ability to produce, debate and exchange meanings.

Scholars have been trying to come up with new ways to define more active and productive fandom in Web 2.0. On my ethnographical research on the game I interviewed several individuals who could be described as “prosumer” (a combination word for producer and consumer aspect of fandom) fans. As it can be understood from the term itself; productive consumers are representing the recent nature of fandom. This new fandom is encompassing all the participatory culture and fans with specific interests on games, movies and other media texts. Players can broadcast their play while informing starters with their strategies and how to do’s of the game and on the other hand promote their fandom through social networks and forums.

As content makers, gamers’ tactics and methods to reproduce the game are a bit different than the way movie fans perform theirs. While movie fans may create fan fiction works based on their knowledge of the object of fandom, gamers create performances which can be unique in from one game to the other but they have to do so within the limits of the game. This is one of the reasons why professional *League of Legends* players try to master as many champions as possible so that their compositions act like an orchestra.

At this point, I will borrow the term *techne* which etymologically derived from Greek, and use it to mean “craft” or “craftsmanship”. Boellstorff uses *techne*, to study the virtual human and the creation that players bring to *Second Life*. In *League of Legends* crafting techniques and crafting useful items as quickly as possible are very significant components to win. There are even some eSports players who came to the fore thanks to their crafting abilities, working like *technicians* in the game. Hong “Madlife” Ming- Gi is a South Korean *League of Legends* player in a support role for the team CJ Entus. He is known for excellent skill-shots and his ability to pull off complex and difficult plays. Some champions like Thresh or Blitzcrank have skills to pull opponents next to them and these abilities are called “hook shots.” Hook shots are very difficult because it is not possible to land by clicking on a champion which is all that is required to apply other skills. On the contrary, players have to position themselves correctly, practice their timing and pay attention to the hook shots path since it will pull the first unit or champion it grabs. As a professional, Madlife’s nickname has left a mark on the game and became a term to explain difficult skill shots. Today when Thresh or Blitzcrank player successfully lands a hook, other players’ call it “Madlife” to celebrate. As a technician, who has mastered these skills Hong Ming- Gi inspired a lot of people in *League of Legends*. In one of the interviews “Losser”, another unprofessional *LoL* player admitted (personal communication, April 24, 2016) that: “There are thousands of player videos in Youtube showing you how skillful they are. I still watch them to learn something about their techniques”. Here Losser makes it clear that Youtube is a source of observing other players’ performances, and keen players keep their eye on other professionals to practice their tactics.

During the gaming house interview, Maddness and React also admitted that when they are going to face a serious opponent, they examine the videos of those teams to see the champions they can play.

Choi “inSec” In-Seok is another South Korean player known for his Lee Sin.¹⁰ In Season 3 he became famous for his play with the champion using his skills to outnumber the enemy team on numerous occasions. These performances in a short time have been shared with community and have inspired other players to participate in the reproduction process. That is how anonymous fan contributions generated guides for *League of Legends* players at beginner level.¹¹ There are now, dozens of people known for their play mechanics and all these content is running through Twitch, YouTube or *League of Legends* forums.

In one of the interviews Flaren called these famous players as avant-gardes of *League of Legends*: “One may like football, but after seeing what Messi and Ronaldo can do, it enjoys the people [even more].” Players, professional or not, show their admiration and enjoyment in watching others play. It is possible to say that their engagement with the game also allows them to develop a specific taste based on their role.

Not all the reproductions have an identifiable author. Fans are not expected to reveal their identities for the cause of reproduction. The main reason behind the participatory culture was to share your content. I experienced something similar one of my games in Bronze League. I picked up Ezreal, an attack damage carry champion known for high damage quality for the late game.

¹⁰ Bruce Lee like champion in the game

¹¹ See <http://www.mobafire.com/league-of-legends/build/6-8-lee-sin-to-your-inner-insec-4011>

However, I did not know which items to pick for him so asked my team members for an advice. Our mid-lane replied “go for blue build”. Not knowing what it actually was, I googled the term and found that there is actually a game term for “Blue Ezreal”. As it can be understood from its name, it is a type of Ezreal build in which players only pick up blue items from the shopping market to give substantial damage to the opponent. The more interesting thing is there is no background information about how they found this. In Riot’s tips for new players section there is no information about it. These abnormal builds and guides can become a mainstream among the players.

Since Turkey’s background in online gaming is new compared to South Korea, it would be unfair to expect them to match such globally dominant performances in game play. However, *League of Legends* fans in Turkey are observed to be harsh in their critiques of eSports players. Nikolaj “Achuu” Ellesgaard, Danish AD Carry in Supermassive eSports, were criticized for his bad performance in the league, resulting in fans naming him as “Achuu Çöp”¹² The more interesting thing is Achuu answered those fans welcoming the nickname they gave him and changed his user name to “Achuu Çöp” for 2016 season.¹³ Flaren’s girlfriend, B, proposed that this nickname came about was because of Supermassive’s inability to play as a team and meta. It was already mentioned that team play is absolute must for the teams participating in the professional area. Meta however, is very irritating for some players like Flaren:

You start working on a champion, list for the items you can pick, try to figure in which part of the game they are getting stronger. Then Riot Games releases another patch and you see everything with that champion has been

¹² This can be translated loosely as Achuu is useless

¹³ See <http://lolespor.com/iwc/2016/iwci2016final/players/achuu-%C3%A7%C3%B6p>

nerfed [weakened]. It is still good, but there are better champions in the pool. Since you are trying to increase your ranking you are kind of forced to play with those.

B, playing as support, also says:

Everybody has favorite champions in this game. In the professional area, they call them signature champions. Ruvelius in Beşiktaş OHM for instance, is known for his aggressive Draven, but we have not seen him play it in the professional arena for over almost a year because it is not in the meta.

What Flaren and B are stressing here can be also associated with the consumers' compliance with the rules determined by authorities. Strategies as defined by de Certeau are developed by authorities Riot Games in this case to define the proper in game context and, strategies that anticipate how players are going to play.

It has been noted that the game itself is not enough to develop tactics for consumers to poach into the territory of the strong proposed by authorities. For instance, thinking about a TV series like *Game of Thrones*, the strategy here is to make profit through advertisements in the allocated time slots. Viewers can go outside of TV via internet, and they can download the show illegally. Although pirating is known to be illegal, it is widely practiced around the world. The problem here for the gamer is that, it is not possible for him to look for an alternative medium to fulfill his desire to play. Since the computer and a working internet connection remains as the only means to run the game, the developer keeps all copy rights, thereby limiting the consumers chance to develop tactics for applications in-game.

There are several interventions that the developer can stage that end up changing game play on the users' end. In each update of *LoL*, Riot Games present new strategies regulating certain champions by buffing (empowering)

and nerfing (weakening) them. React and Maddness admits that “those champions with higher win rates are prone to be nerfed, on the other hand those with lower pick rates are buffed to make players pick them.”

Tactics, on the other hand can be understood as individual actions included in everyday activities. My aim here is not to argue the practicality of de Certeau’s theories in a game like *League of Legends* as it was stated above, but it must be noted that, as in real life, power relations exist in the gaming culture. In my conversation with React, I asked him if he would pick his favorite champion in a professional match (personal communication, June 20, 2016). He replied: “If I am going to pick my favorite champions who are not strong in the current meta, I have to make sure it is going to be an easy match, otherwise in a very competitive area like an international tournament the whole team, coach and supporters would criticize me for my pick”. It is not wrong to assume that, compared to nonprofessional players, professional are affected more strongly from updates on meta updates. Having an allegiance to a certain group, React deems himself responsible for his actions and leaving his personal taste aside, he would prefer to comply with the meta champions.

The case seems different for non-professional area; Pyromancer and Flyleaf accepted that they do not enjoy the game playing only with meta champions, since they are “looking for diversity in the play” as they addressed. These opinions from numerous players illustrate the question of autonomy of eSports players. While professional deem themselves more responsible because of their devotion and engagement, non-professional ones can act freely regardless of updates on the game because the consequences of these choices do not reflect badly on a team’s professional standings.

What I realized during my interviews was that none of the participants, neither eSports players nor non-professionals, use the word “fan” to define their devotion to the game. While for Maddness and React they are “e-sporcu” (eSports player) to Flaren and most of the other non-pros they are “oyuncu” (gamer). Even though they did not mention any negative connotations attached to word fan during the interviews, they prefer to call themselves as eSports player or gamer. At this level of course it can be argued if a person could be both fan and eSports player? Even though *League of Legends* is defining part of their identity, they are still sons to their families, student to their teachers’, some as I explained in Chapter 2 may argue that they are not true fans because playing became their profession. And they also do not prefer to call themselves as fan too.

At this point it is useful to clarify that scholars are also experiencing this transition for fandom and there are ongoing debates for what to call them. Jenkins explains:

Some call such people “loyals,” stressing the value of consumer commitment in an era of channel zapping; some are calling them “media-actives,” suggesting that they are much more likely to demand the right to participate within the media franchise than previous generation; some are calling them “prosumers,” suggesting that as consumers produce and circulate media, they are blurring the line between amateur and professional; some are calling them “inspirational consumers” or “connectors” or “influencers,” suggesting that some people play a more active role than others in shaping media flows and creating new values. (cited in Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007: 358)

Here Jenkins underlines that TV fans have been going through an evolution, and a similar evolution can be charted in eSports. It can also be argued that eSports players circulate media, through fan pages, YouTube videos and

Twitching. On the one hand they are consumers who dedicate their time to improving their skills and tactics as a team: on the other hand, they are producers; who take an active role in creating content in the game play. In such context, it seems viable for Turkish audience and eSports players to define themselves on their own terms. Because in the end, fandom should be all about actions, your engagement or what you produce for what you like to do. Right now, eSports culture in Turkey appears to be a hybrid culture of fanaticism and prosumer culture as players like React and Maddnes express their allegiance to their teams. We can consider this grouping and teaming as also social side of eSports.

Jenkins also relates the erasure of the term fan and absence of fan stereotypes together. To him “as fandom becomes part of the normal way that creative industries operate, then fandom may cease to function as a meaningful category of cultural analysis” (364). Going back to my first statement, participating on eSports related events can be potentially considered as another way of saying “I am a game fan” because of the reasons stated by Jenkins. Secondly, the arguments on whether eSports players’ not being a fan is also not a valid contradiction. Because this is typical to saying one cannot be an academic and a fan as well. Games like *League of Legends* are there to be interpreted by players, but eSports players are on top of this reproduction chain as they are all over Youtube, Facebook and other social media platforms. This has resulted in eSports players becoming an object of fandom just like it can be seen in football fanatics who have this deep connection and admiration to their favorite players.

5.2 Gender and eSports: Where the Women Are

In this discussion of the identity and habits of fans, gender and performance also deserve special mention. Henry Jenkins himself admits that in TV shows like *Big Bang Theory* most of the fan activity revolves around the male characters. (Jenkins, 2012: xvi) He makes a reference to Bernadette and Amy and their disinterest in science fiction even though both are female scientists. Still in some episodes even female characters make some references to gaming and even participate; Amy does so in order to win Sheldon's attention and in season 2, Penny becomes addicted to *Age of Conan*, a fantasy themed MMORPG, and in this case it is Leonard who demonstrates a stereotypical that links gamers' motivation to the pure escapism. T.L Taylor addresses: "Women and girls who play computer games are, if not visible, typically seen as oddballs and anomalies." (2006: 93) Contrary to the popular belief a survey conducted by SuperData research reveals that in US, women play more PC games than men. In mobile games according to Stephanie Llamas this number rises up to 58% (cited in Chalk, 2014).

Women's general use of technology has been examined by various scholars. Patricia Pizer relates this to the social structure and the sense of community in the games (Laber, 2001: 1). Taylor links this to "identity exploration indicating because of the nature of the game users may construct identities that may or may not be associated with their offline persona, showing that players may inhabit characters that are quite opposite to their natural thinking (2006: 95).

The arguments above are valid for massive online worlds where the user can choose from multiple options and experience this amicable environment. As it

is argued above, a casual gamer can certainly reconstruct an identity in the context of a virtual community. However, it must be noted that in *League of Legends* there are specific champions and roles, thus you cannot reconstruct an identity as freely as in MMO games, one of reasons for that is even if you try to reconstruct a profile the progress you have made is not going to be saved as in MMOs or MMORPGs.

Riot Games infographic released on 2012 shows that 90% of LoL players are male. In Turkey, some eSports organizations have successfully established female eSports teams. However, rather than mixing teams with the male players, female players have been observed to form their separate teams (Oğuzhanoglu, 2013). Currently the only sample in professional gaming is Maria “Remilia” Creveling who is playing as a support for a Northern American league in a Challenger team called Renegades.

Although women represent a considerable share in game culture, their representation in eSports culture in Turkey is relatively small. During my virtual ethnographical study in the name unfortunately I have only met a single woman playing *League of Legends*: B. is Flaren’s girlfriend as it was explained before in an earlier section and Flaren (personal communication, 7 June, 2016) admitted that he sometimes plays ranking games with her. He too, believes that it could be possible for women to organize their own league in the game.

What astonished me in his comment was, I did not ask whether he considers it necessary to put women in a separate league. But this is how we conceive sports in every other aspect; football, basketball, volleyball women, etc. women play in separate leagues. In other eSports areas like Counter Strike: Global Offensive the men and women play in separate leagues as well. In

League of Legends Turkish players I have interviewed explained that the league is not represented as “only male” league. Oyunfor.Crew team players comments worth to be mentioned at this point:

Extract 4

[00.35:15] Interviewer: Do women have any attempt to participate in eSports, can we talk about an active women league in Turkey?

[00.35:17] Gökhan Maddness Uçar: Not now but there are a lot of woman enthusiasts. Riot Games can make rearrangements for them, but I do not think at this point they will.

[00.35:31] Mert React Gül: Is not it sexist when you say women’s league?

[00.35:40] Umut Xhr Akıncı: I can understand why there are separate leagues for women in basketball, football and tennis. However, eSports is not about physics, it is about your devotion, wits. That does not require them to participate in separate leagues. It makes sense in basketball though, I cannot think of a woman who is matching out Kobe Bryant for 1 on 1 but that does not the case in eSports.

While Maddness expressed his negativism on the prospects for a women’s league, he is actually pointing out that it will not be among Riot Game’s priorities. Hollist (2015) also argues that Riot Games exponential growth became possible with them bringing game developer and the league owner together. All the events, league expenses, advertisement and distribution of the game have been financed by Riot Games.

In 2014, former *Super Smash Bros. Melee* player Lilian Chen moderated a discussion about women in eSports, she continued: “It is fairly obvious in American society at least that men are more often encouraged to pursue hobbies in gaming, coding, and other interests that are typically labeled as masculine (Gera, 2014). During my conversation with B, I asked her if she considered a career in professional area. She replied:

The first account I created had something feminine in it and in time other players kept asking me if I was a girl or not...Setting a-side all the trash talk going around the chat, I also had to deal with those people who turned

the online playing environment into a dating website. As a result, I created another account which has no feminine association.

B goes on to explain that she had to conceal her identity while playing, because of inconsiderate players who made it harder for her to stay connected. According to her, in lower levels like Bronze players are always going hard on each other, especially if they are going to lose the game because of the mistakes made by a player. She continues: “I do not find them mature enough to play.” However she also implied that as players increase their ranks, the treatment of other players to each other are also different than lower levels. This makes sense especially if we consider the amount of time those higher level gamers spend on their accounts knowing that bad language will not be tolerated by Riot Games.

I continued our interview with her on Umur’s comments about female players in *League of Legends* and how he treated them equally. Consider the following quote in which B talks about (personal communication, July 22, 2016) the professional eSports career for a woman:

I do not have a lot of female players around to make our own team. Gender mixed teams are also problematic, at least for me. After it became obvious that I was going to leave home to study in İzmir, my parents did not even let me to register for a co-ed dormitory. What Umur said is very egalitarian, still if women in Turkey are going to make eSports part of their life, some of them need to do this by gaining their parents’ consent.

Here B introduces a potential cultural issue that female players may experience through gaming in the eSports culture. We do not know the number of female players registered to *League of Legends* nor their average or median skill levels. But B also shows her concerns, actually her family’s concerns about playing in a male-dominated team. “It is debatable if Riot Games or team

owners could secure me a separate apartment” she laughs. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer from Riot Games’ side to clarify why their investments are targeting the male culture. We must note that gender and eSports is not only critical in Turkey, in other developed countries like U.S are also experiencing similar issues on eSports.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to familiarize the reader about eSports fandom in Turkey by focusing on history of *League of Legends* and how fans may apply their code-switching techniques while playing. The main findings of this research have been formed by previous theoretical frame works consisting of the concepts of Certeau, Jenkins and Levy. The ethnographical frame work adopted the practices introduced by T.L Taylor and Tom Boellstorff.

In the first chapter, I drew the frame work of the fan participation giving numerous examples from Turkish and European culture. I made a simple introduction to eSports and provided a list of alternative eSports areas for the future researchs.

The second chapter of the research deals with the literature review, aiming to introduce how fan studies perceived in the work of the prominent scholars. eSports culture mentioned in detail and different scholars ethnographical methods have been displayed to present the method used in this research. Briefly, Turkey is relatively new to the eSports culture, which reflects the group allegiance of the sports in a digital environment, and it is possible for the other games to come to the fore in future. Moreover, the history of the play theory by Caillois and game play of *League of Legends* were mentioned at this chapter.

The third chapter is dedicated to the methodology I have used to finish my research. As suggested, in the research a hybrid method of virtual ethnography and ethnography was used to collect meaningful data about the gaming culture

of *LoL*. I shared some anecdotes about Oyunfor.Crew's gaming house visit and intended to familiarize the reader with the initiation of the game. I believe, this sample will be useful for researchers in future for their studies.

The forth chapter has focused on Riot Games strategy, mainly the methods to adapt their game to the Turkish audience. In that sense, the chapter also built up the infrastructure on how *League of Legends* became a part social sphere such as internet cafés and even universities which provide a basis for the social side of gaming and group allegiance among the players.

The final chapter of the research reflects the findings of this study. In this chapter, my first object was to reflect how eSports players define themselves. Their attachment and engagement to the text range from an emotional to an aesthetic level. The participants are quite knowledgeable in regards to their object of fandom yet there is a visible deviation based upon their level of engagement. The practice of code switching, which enabled other media fans to pass the limits of their text, cannot be applicable into game playing eSports culture yet samples of textual poaching such as Cosplay have been observed.

The participants in the research made similar distinctions on fan, fanatic and word "hayran" (Turkish word for fan) yet named their attachment to the game as "gamer" or "eSports player". This suggests that even though participants have profound information on fandom they prefer not to categorize themselves as contemporary media fans. This of course, does not mean that they do not devote themselves to the game however, fandom is also about self-identification.

The findings show that as a collective group before they become eSports players, their connections first formed as small communities in internet cafés

and university clubs. In time, they start sharing, reproducing re-creating and participating at bigger events and it has given some the chance to become professional eSports player. Even though their self-examination does not render them as fans to themselves, it was also explained that contemporary academics like Jenkins are also witnessing the erasure of the term “fan” as it becomes part of the normal life. The role of the fan has not been changing drastically yet the adjective is constantly being updated, and nuanced, now including influencer, connector, multiplier. eSports player in numerous ways create value, inspire consumers, create, remix and modify existing media (game) available to them.

Fandom has a very long history, but fan studies as a field is relatively fresh and waiting a exploration as new mediums are being introduced to the audience. Every new medium will have a potential to create its community around them. The general stance towards fans by academia is not negative as it used to be especially to early 1990s. Those looking for information on how they perceived must take a look at Lewis’ (1992) *The Adoring Audience*. In my own terms, based on my research I tried to reflect my observations around eSports fandom by talking to players, a professional team and discussing with team owners.

Even though Jenkins did not coin the term “aca-fan” I believe such researches will encourage more academics to welcome the world and inspire them to go online and look into culture surrounding games. I am a casual gamer and this background was helpful for me to make meaningful conversations with the other players and fans I studied.

Fandom has becoming mainstream as Jenkins explained and companies like Riot Games has proven video game culture and fandom have a huge potential to

bring people together. The number of the people, growing in video game culture now a lot more in Turkey than it was on previous years. eSports culture in Turkey has barely pointed its full potential, gamers, professional eSports players, prosumers and multipliers are much more visible in Turkey right now and they have potential to do more. Hopefully, this study will be brought to light for further studies on eSports culture in Turkey to understand the gamer and culture relationship better.

6.1 Limitations of the study

In this section, I would like to touch upon some restrictions I have experienced during the writing of this thesis. In terms of my methodology, the one of the biggest limitation was, the necessity of me observing while participating. If this study was to be repeated with different participants or another researcher, findings and his/her analysis may be different.

Some information like age, gender have been provided by participants directly, as it is not possible for a researcher to double-check their accuracy. I was only able to do a focus group interview with Oyunfor.Crew: the other participants were interviewed through Skype, through *League of Legends* game platform, or over the phone.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Work

Gaming culture and fandom have not fully matured in Turkey; participatory culture evolving around them will attract more scholars in the future. I want to conclude my research suggesting some alternative research areas for future studies.

Women in eSports is very debatable not only in Turkey but in other countries as well. It can be understood that Oyunfor.Crew team members welcome the

existence of female eSports player in Turkish League; however, as the game developers Riot Games have yet to seen taking an effective role to invite women to professional gaming area. The male dominance in gaming and lack of female participants should be explored in detail to see if there are any other professional or non-professional games where we can observe female dominance.

During the interviews, some participants also mentioned that they are watching streamer houses often. In game culture, streamer is someone who broadcast his/her play performance to the audience through Twitch. Thus, streamer house is a place just like gaming houses but streamers do not show any allegiance to a team usually referred as “vagabonds” by the informants. The former *LoL* player, Ferit “Wristcutter” Karakaya is also among the streamer group called the Vault of Gamers. Streamers are criticized for their use of bad language by some players yet they are also popular among the youth. Their popularization and marginalization render this practice as a fruitful one to look closer.

It was observed in the research that some gamers and even the professional ones prefer not to affiliate themselves with the word “fan”. The larger research with fan groups may also be helpful to come up with a well-accepted term to define Turkish fans and their practices. As Flaren pointed out that there is a confusion to describe their attachment to the object of fandom. A research focused to this semantic problem could be very helpful in future to define Turkish fandom.

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