Checkmate of Leisure! Virtual Communities Regarding Chess[*]

Boş Zaman Şah-Matı! Satrançla İlgili Sanal Topluluklar

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The aim of this study is generally to understand the behavior, culture and attitudes of chess players with a netnographic approach. In order to have knowledge about chess players in a virtual community, netnography was used for data analysis and interpretation. In this regard, two forums and two Facebook groups on the internet related to chess are included for research. In the selection of virtual communities, the criteria for having the most members and comments are taken into account. As a result of examining the four chess virtual communities, the shares made are grouped under four main and eight subcategories. The four main categories are "Critical Paradigm", "Hedonism", "Serious Leisure Based Chess" and "Information Transfer and Publicity", and the eight subcategories are "Tournament and Championship", "Interaction", "Reward System", "Management", "Culture- and Art- Based Chess", "Events", "Practice and Implementation" and "Leisure Transformation". Finally, each emerging main category is divided into two subcategories. Each main and subcategory provides a general overview of the culture, behavior and attitudes of chess players. Thanks to the sharing, individuals are able to exchange ideas with each other in chess-related matters. They also help each other about to contribute chess, sharing perceived shortcomings and making suggestions on a variety of topics.

Keywords: Chess, Netnography, Virtual communities, Leisure, Marketing

Jel Codes: I31, L83, Z29

Bu çalışmanın amacı, netnografik bir yaklaşımla satranç oyuncularının genel olarak davranış, kültür ve tutumlarını anlayabilmektir. Sanal bir toplulukta satranç oyuncuları hakkında bilgi sahibi olmak amacıyla, veri analizi ve yorumlama için netnografi yöntemi kullanıldı. Bu bağlamda, araştırmaya satranç ile ilgili internette bulunan iki forum ve iki facebook grubu dahil edilmiştir. Sanal toplulukların seçiminde, en fazla üyesi ve yorumlarının olması kriterleri dikkate alınmıştır. Dört satranç sanal topluluğunun incelenmesi neticesinde, yapılan paylaşımlar dört ana ve sekiz alt kategori altında toplanmıştır. Ana kategoriler; "Eleştirel Paradigma", "Hedonizm", "Ciddi Boş Zaman Temelli Satranç" ve "Bilgi Transferi ve Duyurum" olarak adlandırılırken, Alt kategoriler; "Turnuva ve Şampiyona", "Etkileşim", "Ödül Sistemi", "Yönetim", "Kültür-Sanat Temelli Satranç", "Etkinlikler", "Pratik ve Uygulama" ve "Boş Zaman Form Değişimi" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, ortaya çıkan her bir ana kategori ikişer alt kategorilere ayrılmaktadır. Her bir ana ve alt kategori satranç oyuncularının kültür, davranış ve tutumları hakkında genel bir bilgi vermektedir. Yapılan paylaşımlar sayesinde, bireyler satranç ile ilgili konularda birbirleri ile fikir alışverişinde bulunma fırsatı yakalamaktadır. Ayrıca, satranca katkı sağlamak, algılanan eksiklikleri paylaşmak, çeşitli konularda önerilerde bulunarak yardımlaşmaktadırlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Satranç, Netnografi, Sanal topluluklar, Boş zaman, Pazarlama

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Internet technologies are gaining a broader reach day-by-day, and the technology is developing continuously. With the development and widespread use of the Internet and new communication technologies, the difficulties of time and space with regards to the sharing of information have been eliminated, and so the effective dissemination of all kinds of data, whether visual or auditory, has become easier and fasted (Çiftçi et al., 2017). Alongside the development of communication technologies, virtual communities are witnessing rapid growth, facilitating the sharing and exchange of similar interests and information (Yang, 2015). Virtual communities are online social networks that have common interests, goals or practices, and become increasingly popular for people who share information and experience (Bock et al., 2015). Such Internet-based social networks are considered not only as a media environment, but also as discursive areas in which individuals can form an active community among themselves and develop their identities (Dedeoglu & Ustundagli, 2011).

Zhang (2017) describes virtual communities as an area in which individuals can exchange opinions and share their feelings, values and concerns with one another. Similarly, Sri et al. (2017) states that interactions and communications between individuals with a common goal in virtual communities are possible thanks to technology. In this regard, virtual communities provide a unique environment with rich content in which individuals can share all kinds of information, experiences, interests, concerns and feelings in their areas of interest, regardless of status, location or time, and in which they can construct their identities and find themselves. On the basis of these definitions, the activities that take place in virtual communities can be considered as being related to leisure activities.

Tekin (2016) describes leisure time as the time that we are able to use in accordance with our own judgments and choices, based on common sense and personal benefit, the time beyond our existence, the time left over after completing what we are obliged to do, and after fulfilling our biological needs, and after satisfying our struggle to earn income. In this regard, all activities that take place in virtual communities can be considered leisure activities. Kozinets (2002) states that many different products and services, such as cinema, sports, music, cars, fast-food, toys, electronics, computers and peripheral units, software, coffee, etc. are discussed in virtual communities, and all of these products and services can be discussed as part of leisure-time activities.

According to another approach, leisure activities are divided into two categories: serious and casual (Stebbins, 1992). Serious leisure refers to the participation of a devoted hobbyist or specialized social volunteer with special skills and knowledge in leisure activities; while casual leisure refers to hedonistic activities that do not require special skills, that are relatively short-term and that are performed with the aim of having fun (Stebbins, 2007). The aim in this study is to examine virtual chess communities based on both leisure activity dimensions. A review of literature reveals that, although there have been many different studies of the game itself, to date there have been no studies examining chess in detail as a leisure activity using the netnography approach, rendering this study important in terms of its contribution to literature. A content analysis was carried out to gain an understanding of the cultures, behaviors and attitudes of individuals who are members of a virtual chess community, making use of the netnography approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Leisure

Leisure is the process by which an individual behaves independently, and so can be considered as is the time left over after an individual has fulfilled the duties s/he must accomplish (Hacıoğlu et al., 2015). These duties may be either formal or informal. For example, although the fact that a mother having to take care of her child is an informal duty, the time spent in fulfilling this duty cannot be considered leisure time. On the other hand, another mother may spend her leisure time playing with her child or participating in an entertaining event with her child.

While an individual may prefer to be alone during her/his leisure time, another may prefer to engage in activities as part of a community. By any means, leisure is a part of the life shaped in accordance with personal interests and the social environment (Bashir et al., 2014). Since personal interests are subjective and changeable, the nature of leisure changes from person to person, and an activity that is considered as leisure by one individual may be considered a duty by another. For example, a person trying to learn how to play chess and a teacher.

In general, the sum of leisure and the time spent at work represents the total time of human beings. Leisure is the period of time left over upon the completion of duties or work, or tasks that are not compulsory (Parker, 1995). With industrialization, the difference between leisure time and the time spent on work has become prominent. The more time spent at work, greater the need for leisure. Today, an individual with leisure time happily participates in activities of his/her own free will after the completion of work. Activities such as travel, sports, games and entertainment have become an industry due to the need for leisure (Aytaç, 2002).

Leisure activities can be categorized into two forms: physical leisure activities and social/entertainment leisure activities. Physical leisure-time activities, as can be understood from the title, include sporting activities and those requiring physical strength. Almost all individual and team sports, from exercise to football, fall under this category. Social/entertainment leisure activities, on the other hand, are those performed with the aim of socializing and having fun, known also as mental leisure (Bashir et al., 2014). Social and cultural events, such as participating in conversations, attending concerts, going to the theatre or cinema, or playing chess, are some of the examples that can be given in this category. Similarly, Internet forums, social network groups, and gaming and entertainment platforms can also be included in this category.

2.2. Leisure Based Chess

There have been many academic studies to date examining the benefits of playing chess as a worthy leisure-time activity and the cognitive processes of players far (Vollstädt-Klein et al., 2010). In chess, players make use of personality characteristics that support their creativity by overcoming obstacles, taking risks, motivating themselves, being persistent, immersing in thought, tolerance of unexpected situations and thinking outside the box (Sak, 2009). Chess is a game that requires you to focus not only on the move you will make, but also on the move your opponent will make (Bilalic et al., 2007). When chess is examined from the holistic and expansive perspective of leisure, it can be seen as an activity that entertains individuals and contributes to their personal development, while also relaxing them mentally and

psychologically (Argan, 2007).

Chess can be considered as a projection or simulation of life, and can be said to play an important role in child development (Erhan et al., 2009). In this regard, chess is used as a tool in which messages regarding life are passed on. For example, "Think first, then play," which serves as a warning to players of chess, although this warning can also be considered a message for life. Another message is "pawns do not go backwards," while the rule "use time efficiently" teaches players how to make the right move at the right time. Other such warnings that can be applied to real life are: "Make plans", "See the next steps", "Evaluate the situation", "Comply with the rules" and "Do not be in a rush" (TSF & SDU Report, 2015).

As indicated by Çubukçu & Kahraman (2017), chess is an important game for the pre-school age group, who can start playing chess even before learning how to read and write. Educators have also attached importance to chess as a beneficial tool and a good use of leisure time. The Turkish Ministry of National Education has allowed the opening of chess classes in schools, and students in most schools are encouraged to play chess during their leisure time.

The training of chess players starts as early as pre-school period, and many educational institutions, from secondary education to higher education, even provide scholarships for chess players. Chess classes have become compulsory in most private schools, the numbers of which are increasing year-by-year. Furthermore, there are educational and sports clubs in which chess is played in almost every city. Playing chess in school can aid with concentration problems, attention deficit and can aid in the application of reasoning, especially in children (Erhan et al., 2009), while also having a positive effect on their personalities and characters.

Chess develops the ability of children to think clearly, and to make the right decisions and plans, while also booting creativity, focus, intuition and the ability to analyze and synthesize. Creativity and chess are acquired through training. Playing chess helps children become more efficient, but also increases their levels of learning, creative thinking and high-level cognitive development. When the development levels of individuals are discussed according to their skills, it can be said that chess is at the forefront in its ability to reveal the artistic characteristics, creativity, leadership and especially abstract ideas of students than other branches of sport. The inclusion of chess in education aids in the development of basic skills and reasoning among students. Chess can help individuals make use of their cognitive processes in a better and more controlled manner, to communicate with their environment, and thus, to develop their creative and thinking skills. Creativity is an indispensable part of human life that influences future of communities, and chess in particular affects individuals in terms of skills and intelligence, while also affecting them positively in the field of education. These effects are revealed as a projection of life, and affect also the creativity levels of players (TSF & SDU Report, 2015).

2.3. Serious and Casual Leisure-Based Chess

There have been many approaches to the categorization of leisure, with serious leisure and casual leisure being among the most commonly used descriptions in recent years (Stebbins, 1992). Serious leisure requires the access of participants to special information, skills and experience, but can be performed as an amateur, as a hobby or voluntarily. Moreover, serious leisure activities should be sufficiently important, interesting and satisfying. In contrast, casual

leisure activities require little or no special training, and are pleasurable and amusing, providing instantaneous inner benefits. Project-based leisure activities can be added to these two categories, referring to short-term, sufficiently sophisticated, creative and enterprising activities that are performed once or from time-to-time as part of leisure-time activities, even if only rarely (Stebbins, 2008).

Almost all activities, from sports to games, can be considered tools for leisure. The tools used for serious or casual leisure-time activities depend on the content of the activities. Chess, in particular, is one such tool, as serious leisure-based chess is reliant upon the skills and cognitive activity required for the game (Gould et al., 2011). The most important feature of chess is its ability to be used as a tool for both serious and casual leisure.

Having close bonds with real life, chess is not a superficial game, but is rather inspired by real life. It is a projection of the existing struggle that will always be experienced in life. Sometimes, regions are referred to as big chess boards; relationships are sometimes referred to as a game of chess, and certain actions are sometimes likened to moves in chess (TSF & SDU Report, 2015). Benjamin Franklin, the former US President, referring to this similarity, said, "Chess is a kind of life, and life is a kind of chess." It would be fair to say, therefore, that chess is a tool for casual leisure. In a study conducted in Pakistan (Bashir et al., 2014) that supports this view, the participants classified chess, drawing and playing with mobile phones in the same category in terms of leisure activities.

Chess is also a sporting branch (Sharples, 2015). Being a professional chess player requires skills as well as professional training. The ELO rating is an international indicator of the success and performance of a chess players compared to her/his opponents. Players work intensively to increase their ELO rating, and so chess can thus be considered as a serious leisure activity tool. Stebbins (2001) evaluated chess alongside such games as bridge and poker, while Gould et al. (2011) tested and confirmed the SLIM (Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure) scale in a study conducted involving 348 chess players.

For a player, chess is a tool for a serious leisure activity, and requires special knowledge and skills if one is to make a career out of it to develop professionally, whereas chess played only for entertainment, such as between a child and his/her mother, or an individual playing as part of a virtual community, can be considered a casual leisure activity.

3. METHOD

In this study, a netnography method was used for the analysis and interpretation of data to gain information on individuals who are members of a virtual chess community, with the aim being to understand their behaviors, attitudes and cultures. Netnography can be defined as a special ethnographic research method adapted to the possibilities specific to various computer-mediated social interactions (Kozinets, 2012: 39). A netnography approach can provide a more detailed perspective of the relationship between the needs, desires, choices and symbolic meanings of consumers and the virtual environment (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography differs from other methods such as focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, data mining and content mining, in that it is participatory as well as being natural, influential, content-based and observatory (Kozinets, 2012: 39).

Netnography incorporates a series of techniques that adapt anthropological researches into the world of the Internet (Kozinets, 2010a) and is an ethnographic movement that allows individuals to examine their behaviors on the Internet (Chao, 2015: 13); in other words, netnography refers to a field studies that are applied on the Internet. Netnography takes place in a virtual environment, and is removed from traditional ethnography in this regard, and allows almost all documents to be copied (Kozinets, 2002: 63). As a method, netnography is quicker, simpler and cheaper than traditional ethnography. Similar to ethnography, netnography provides a perspective of the cultural status of members of virtual communities and how they engage in their activities (Kozinets, 2006: 281-282), focusing on the cultural and symbolic understandings of knowledge (Chao, 2015: 13).

Reid & Duffy (2018: 5) indicate that netnography is applied in such areas as marketing and consumer research to understand the common online behaviors, conversations, languages, sense-making and symbolic repertories of different consumer groups. As a research method, netnography is also related to the nature and development of Internet-based media platforms in which users make considerable contributions to the creation of content (Rocca et al., 2014: 691).

Netnography examines not only the words in social interactions, but also the forum components, communicative features, language, history, meaning and type of interaction, and examines fonts, spaces, symbols, texts, pictures, photographs and videos (Kozinets, 2010b: 4). According to Kozinets (2010b), there are six elements to be examined in netnographic researches: (1) Research planning, (2) Introduction, (3) Data collection, (4) Interpretation, (5) Ensuring ethical standards and (6) Research presentation.

There are two important stages in data collection using the netnography method (Kozinets, 2002: 63): (1) the data obtained from the posts shared by the members of the virtual community through computer-mediated communications, which is directly copied by researchers; and (2) the data garnered from the observations of researchers about virtual communities and their members, and the things written by researchers about their interactions and the content. In addition, Kozinets (2002) refers to five fundamental criteria to be taken into account when garnering data from the Internet. (1) matching the community with the research question; (2) having a high density of sharing; (3) including many messages; (4) having a rich content of data; and (5) the existence of rich interactions among the members of the community.

To begin with, an online community was first determined in accordance with the research objectives within the scope of the research. Then, the pages of virtual communities related to chess were sought on the Internet using the Google research tool, using the search terms "chess forum" and "virtual chess communities". Among the results revealed, only the most recent and the most active websites with the highest number of members and comments were taken into account. Websites with no recent posts, and with membership numbers below 2000 people and with fewer than 7000 messages were excluded. Since it would take too much time to examine all of the websites meeting the criteria, the pages of two forums and two Facebook groups related to chess on the Internet were examined within the scope of the study. Although the information provided on the relevant websites is open to the public, information on the members was not used. In this research, the data collection process took place between the February and April 2018.

The data collection and data analysis were carried out in five steps within the scope of research: (1) Finding the most active virtual communities, appropriate for the scope of research; (2) Becoming a member of the existing virtual communities to allow them to be examined in detail; (3) Examining the posts shared by the members related to the subject; (4) Categorizing the examined data under certain categories and sub-categories; and (5) Interpreting the reveled categories and sub-categories.

4. FINDINGS

After examining the four chosen virtual communities with the highest number of members and the comments related to chess on the Internet, the shared posts were gathered under four main categories and eight sub-categories. The main categories, defined following a content analysis were "Critical Paradigm", "Hedonism", "Serious Leisure Based Chess" and "Information Transfer and Publicity", while the sub-categories were "Tournament and Championship", "Interaction", "Reward System", "Management", "Culture- and Art-Based Chess", "Events", "Practice and Implementation" and "Leisure Transformation".

4.1. Critical Paradigm

The members share critical perspectives on particular subjects, and make various recommendations and pass on information through their virtual communities. This category is examined under two sub-categories: Reward System and Management, in accordance with the shared posts.

Reward System

When this sub-category is examined from within the framework of Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory, the achievement of work and duty can be considered a function of a highly-rewarded behavior. In other words, if an individual believes that s/he will achieve their organizational goal as long as s/he puts in the effort (expectation), establishes a beneficial relationship between that organizational goal and his/her own goal, and believes that his/her own goal is worth the effort, the motivation of that individual will be high (Cited in Küçüközkan, 2015: 107). Accordingly, based on the posts shared by the individuals in a virtual chess community, it is apparent that these individuals find the reward, which can be considered a motivational resource, to be insufficient. The community members display a critical attitude in the posts they share with regards to the rewards earned from chess tournaments or championships. For example:

> *"You should first prioritize the young players from your own country. Why do you save the biggest part of the pie for foreign players? Isn't there something wrong with that? Wouldn't it be fair for local players to get the biggest share of the pie? Foreign players get TRY 3,000 whereas local players get TRY 300. Look at that difference! With that kind of difference, you would discourage players in your own country from entering tournaments. In this case, it wouldn't be fair for you to expect the development of chess in your country …"*

Management

It is also apparent that the members of virtual communities take a critical view of organizations or arbiters related to chess, as well as to the reward system. As in all sports events, it is essential

to draw attention to the density of posts made regarding the management of chess, and it is possible to say that posts related to organizations and arbiters are predominant. Some of these posts are as follows:

"Unless an organizer knows how to organize, it will be the arbiters doing it. Then, the organizer will have to watch what's happening without a clue of what's going on. In other words, I don't want to make a wrong simile, but in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

"We encounter all kinds of situations in our tournaments. However, arbiters and organizers take refuge in the raw meaning of the rules in an attempt to cut corners. Arbiters immediately confirm all kinds of draws without question (since they do not have the power to question in terms of knowledge or experience). Since they will be responsible or they fear that they will be in trouble when they descend into details or truths, they think that they will get out of the situation by simply implementing the raw or superficial meaning of the rules written in the instructions."

"It is within the power of the local authorities to increase the rewards for local players. If local authorities are unable to think anything other than, "What should we do to attract more foreign players?", our insistence will be in vain. We had open tournaments attended by 14 foreign masters and one local master in the initial ranking. Such a composition proves that we cannot make a good statement of loss and gains. This composition does not benefit us."

4.2. Hedonism

Experiences with regards to hedonic products are usually related to entertainment or art (Argan, 2007: 83). In other words, hedonic products or services provide amusement or entertainment to individuals, and help them become happy as well as being experimental (Russel et al., 2017: 40). Most casual leisure based approaches involve taking pleasure from events. Individuals participate in many events to gain pleasure from them (Stebbins, 1992), and posts in the examined virtual communities can be evaluated under this category. It is obvious that individuals who are members of the virtual communities examined within the scope of this research give prominence to the hedonism dimension they perceive from chess by sharing posts containing entertaining videos about chess, videos of speed games and magazine news, by organizing questionnaires on chess-themed subjects, by sharing photographs and by hosting prize competitions. This category can be discussed within two sub-categories; Culture- and Art-Based Chess and Events.

Culture- and Art-Based Chess

As the level of interest of an individual in a product, event or game increases, in other words, when s/he achieves a high level of involvement, the individual will be more sensitive to the product, and may research the product, event or game (Yetim, 2014: 15; Yetim & Argan, 2018). From this perspective, it is obvious that individuals who are members of the virtual chess community have a high level of involvement towards the relevant branch, and associate chess with such pastimes as film, music, etc. Culture- and art-based experimental approaches play an important role in recreation (Argan, 2007). While experiences in culture- and art-based recreational activities reveal more hedonistic tendencies such as entertainment, escape and

aesthetics, undergoing training indicates a serious leisure approach. The posts shared as part of cultural and artistic experiences draw attention to the fact that they are training and learning based, while also revealing a hedonistic approach. For example:

> *"I didn't know there was going to be a musical about chess. I wanted to share this with chess-lovers who are unaware of this musical, just like me."*

> *"One Night in Bangkok is a song that has come to the forefront since it was sung by Mike Tyson in the final scene of the second film in the famous Hangover series of films, shot in Bangkok. By coincidence, I came across this musical called Chess when researching this song after hearing the word 'chess' a couple of times. I realized we had the same taste …"*

Events

Events, which are important for leisure experiences, play a determining role in virtual communities. The popularity of an event may be based on its attractiveness, its creativity, its entertainment value or its participatory nature (Tokay Argan, 2013; Tokay Argan &Yuncu, 2016). Members of the virtual chess communities examined within the scope of the research organize various events to make the forum or Facebook group look more entertaining and vibrant, and these can include chess competitions with prizes, chess practice and entertainment camps, chess moves in different situations and questionnaires on various subjects related to chess. Examples of the posts falling under this category include:

> *"Time's up for the 3rd chess question about chess, and rewards will be given to the winners. You can find the details and winners below the question page in the update section."*

> *"Dear Chess Community, are you satisfied with the practices implemented by the TSF management so far? After filling in our questionnaire, you are kindly invited to make any recommendations and opinions in the comments section that you wish to be taken into account. Thanks."*

> *"The 2nd Chess Quiz begins. The first player to get the highest score will be given a book on chess from … Published by us."*

4.3. Serious Leisure-Based Chess

According to Stebbins (1992), serious leisure activities refer to participation in long-term activities that require special skills, knowledge and experience. Moreover, individuals indicate that they participate in serious leisure activities in order to contribute to their professional development, to have a career, to obtain concrete and continuous benefits, and to take part in only physical activities. From this perspective, chess can be considered a serious leisure activity, and individuals who are members of virtual chess communities aim not only to spend leisure time in such an environment, but also to contribute to their professional development. This category is examined from the perspective of the two sub-categories of Practice and Implementation and Leisure Transformation.

Practice and Implementation

Devoted members of the virtual chess community engage with the forum or group not only to exchange information, but also to develop their skills in chess, and even to take their skills to

another level, and to this end, they practice chess with each other. One of the most important indicators of serious leisure is the way individuals strive to improve themselves in the events or branches in which they participate. In this sense, it is natural for professional development to be integrated with chess as a leisure activity. Below are some examples of the posts made by chess-lovers that can be evaluated under this sub-category:

> *"Hi! I would like to improve myself through chess. If there is anyone who would like play, I would like to play chess and comment about this game with that person."*

> *"I would like to improve myself. Is there anyone who would like to play chess with me? I am not very good, but ..."*

> *"I'll start the first game ... I play white, and the first person to respond will be my opponent. As our moves increase, I will also add PGN (portable game notation) (I have learned how to do this). I am starting ... (if the things I have written do not work, they can be deleted ... the aim here is to create a different atmosphere and bind the members of the forum together, and maybe organize tournaments on the forum in the future ...)"*

> *"This question comes to the mind: why does a player want to play chess with a person from an older age group, even though s/he can play with a player from his/her own age group? Yes, a player may be better than his/her own age group at a local level, and so might want to play with a person from an older age group. S/he looks for a player from an older age group. S/he might look for a player even from a much older higher age group. In general, the goal is to play chess to a better quality, challenging oneself to contribute to one's development."*

Leisure Transformation

When looking at the current status of technology, it is possible to speak of transformations that have taken place in leisure activities in parallel to the advances in this regard. For example, technology now makes it possible to play sports electronically as leisure activities. Today, reflections of technology on leisure are shaped on the basis of virtual reality (Weiss et al., 2003), augmented reality (Yovcheva et al., 2012) and mix reality (Sveistrup et al., 2003). In addition, other applications in the electronic and virtual environments lead to transformations. Thanks to the advances in such technologies, the personal experiences of individuals are taken to higher levels. Argan et al. (2006: 2) claim that the support granted by sponsors to electronic sports organizations that take place with the participation of international players, which can amount to millions of dollars, is testament to the potential development of this sports branch. From this perspective, certain transformations may occur in chess, which is considered a leisure activity. Beyond the general understanding of chess, individuals are now able to play chess online without having to face their opponents. In this way, individuals can both socialize and have fun when playing chess, without having to be in a fixed location. Some of the examples that can be considered under this sub-category are as follows:

> *"We are now in a transition period. There are both e-mail and WEBSERVER sections in all tournaments, excluding the World Championship Finale. However, ICCF plans to fully switch into WEBSERVER in the long-term."*

> *"Although correspondence chess is played under the ICCF, there are two serious clubs on the Internet to start with. Since it is free to join these clubs, they are ideal for the gaining of experience in correspondence chess."*

> *"When attending tournaments, if you have a rating, it would be appropriate for you to apply to a group rated 200 points higher than your own rating. The reason for this is that there are no problems in correspondence chess, such as remembering wrong variants, when playing chess in a traditional manner, playing very bad moves (chess blindness) or zeitnot. Your only enemy is to write wrong moves for your opponent or to align and analyze the position on the board in an incorrect manner."*

4.4. Information Transfer and Publicity

One of the fundamental elements determining the concepts of event, experience, and hedonism is the target audience meeting of events and occasions. The ability to announce events to the target audience using an appropriate strategy and a suitable form of publicity depends on the creativity of the message. In this regard, the achievement of a leisure activity will be shaped by information transfer and publicity. In this category, it can be seen that individuals in chess communities exchange information with one another, and share various announcements about subjects that they consider important for correspondence. This category is divided into two sub-categories: Tournament and Championship and Interaction.

Tournament and Championship

In this sub-category, individuals inform one another about chess tournaments or championships, and some of the posts shared by the members of virtual chess communities under this sub-category are as follows:

> *"Hi, a 10+0 tournament will take place with the participation of Turkish chess players on the website .... at 9:30 pm on 29 July. Anyone who would like to attend would be more than welcome."*

> *"Join the Chess League Championship to be organized among universities by …, one of the most prestigious chess websites in Turkey, with your school team. You will have fun, and the members of the winning team will earn a 1-year gold membership ..."*

> *"The 8th round of the FIDE Berlin Candidates was completed in 2018. The results of the 8th round, temporary ranking and the matching for the 9th round are given below."*

Interaction

One of the most important benefits to individuals from social media and the Internet is ensuring interaction (Sri et al., 2017). Unlike in the traditional nature of sports, the most important difference with virtual communities is the interaction of individuals. Unlike the individual and introverted nature of chess, interactions in virtual communities may reveal one of the most important differences. It is apparent that the members of virtual communities interact with one another on subjects related to chess, especially educational recommendations, etc. Some of the posts that can be considered under this sub-category are as follows:

"This is a nice book about the beauties of chess and to make better sense of it. It is one of the best books for learning chess from the perspective of masters. I am thankful that this book has been translated into Turkish, and I hope it will receive the appreciation it deserves."

"To those who say 'Chess is my hobby, my field of occupation and my indispensable part' I sincerely recommend they take a look at this book and read through some of its pages. I hope that they can benefit from this book, as if it is a school textbook."

"We are developing a question pool about the history and culture of chess. Those with interesting questions who would like to share them with us can send us messages via our website or send us private messages."

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Virtual communities have been maintaining their existence on the Internet for almost half a century, and posts shared by the members of virtual communities in almost all areas, from art to health and sports, have been the subject of many researches. Decisions to join a virtual community are motivated by the perceived feelings of belonging and togetherness (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). As in many sports branches, the aim of this netnographic study into virtual communities, which are commonly formed around the subject of chess, is to evaluate the factors related to the leisure experience, information and posts. In a netnographic study conducted to this end, it is apparent that certain main and sub-themes come to the forefront on the basis of the posts shared by virtual communities.

After examining the virtual communities with the highest number of members and comments related to chess on the Internet, four main categories and eight sub-categories were identified, with the main categories being *"Critical Paradigm"*, *"Hedonism"*, *"Serious Leisure Based Chess"* and *"Information Transfer and Publicity"*. The Critical Paradigm approach is shaped within the scope of existing management practices and reward systems within these chess communities. The recommendations and comments made by the community members related to the organization and reward systems in competitions constitute the basic posts of the community. The fundamental approach here can be characterized as a belief in the sense of justice and the desire to reach better levels. The posts shared within the scope of the critical paradigm are seen to be based on the receipt of social support. Another result of this research, which parallels the findings of a study of virtual communities by Ridings & Gefen (2004), can be evaluated as social support.

As a sub-category, hedonism is associated with the cultural and artistic experience and activity. In the study by Ridings & Gefen (2004), the finding obtained under the category of recreation is associated with entertainment and pleasure, and in line with this, the main theme of hedonism in this study is associated with the pleasures obtained from cultural and artistic experiences and events. In today's post-modern world, it can be said that all products and services are based on pleasure, and the same can be said to be true in the posts shared by the chess community.

Serious leisure-based chess includes practices and applications, which have been made in this regard, and leisure transformation. The serious leisure approach discussed by Stebbins (1992) is closely associated with the chess community. In many studies, chess is considered to be a

serious leisure activity due to its competitive nature, which is open to learning. It is essential to learn and transfer new information and techniques, as well as spending leisure time, in many virtual communities related to chess, and this represents serious leisure. Another important sub-category is leisure transformation. As indicated by Borgmann (1992), it would seem that the effects of technology on leisure are not new according to the notion of device paradigm (Cited in Arai & Pedlar, 2003) and these effects will continue in the future. Today, the widespread use of virtual reality (Yalon-Chamovitz & Weiss, 2008), augmented reality (Yovcheva et al., 2012) and mix reality (Sveistrup et al., 2003) applications, particularly in leisure activities, as well as electronic and mobile leisure (Kaya & Argan, 2015) reveals how fast the transformation has occurred. These technologies have become integrated into many traditional recreational activities, and within this structure, the period that we are currently in represents Siberia, and it would be fair to assume that these tendencies will increase in the future.

Information transfer and publicity, which is the final main theme, is explained by the sub-categories of Tournament and Championship and Interaction. This theme, which can be linked to the exchange of information, reveals itself as a main category in many virtual communities (e.g. Ridings & Gefen, 2004). The main intention here is to obtain new information, to learn and to rely on the facts of a discipline about a subject. In this sense, virtual communities are can be considered also as interest communities. Sharing information on special tournaments and championships specific to chess with members, and disseminating information are all forms of information transfer, and this is the underlying reason behind the foundation of most virtual communities. The Internet and social media have made a huge impact on leisure, and similar interest areas in virtual communities play an important role in creating social identity. In this regard, the Theory of Social Identity (Tajfel, 1978) presents itself within the interactions of members. People who have become members of chess communities have attained an identity in some way, although this finding does not apply only to chess communities, as it would be fair to say that socialization and identity creation can be found in almost all virtual communities.

6. LIMITATION AND FUTURE STUDIES

This research is one of the limited number of studies into virtual chess communities, and like any scientific study, it has limitations, although its findings are significant. Above all, the qualitative nature of the present study brings limitations. As each virtual community has its own characteristics, it is not possible to generalize the findings obtained from chess communities to other communities. The implementation of the present study on a limited number of virtual communities in Turkey can be suggested as another limitation, and the inclusion of chess communities in different countries and cultures in future studies may provide more general results. In addition, the time periods during which the data was collected can be considered as another limitation. It would be beneficial to examine different virtual communities (e.g., sports, mountaineering, chess, art, etc.) so as to underline the differences and similarities between different virtual communities with regards to leisure.

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