

Auteurs and authorities in Turkish video game industry

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Abstract

The study investigates the functioning of creative processes in the video game industry, which has emerged as one of the most prominent sectors in contemporary entertainment. It explores the applicability of the classical auteur theory to the video game medium and aims to examine how creative authority operates within company structures. To this end, in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 industry professionals from three Turkish video game companies of varying scales to collect insights from the participants regarding creativity and authority. The findings indicate that creative authority within the sector is largely exercised by institutional or managerial entities rather than by individual creators. Arguing that the classical individual-centric theory is insufficient, the study demonstrates an authority structure in the modern industry that prioritizes financial imperatives, such as market trends and budget concerns, over individual creativity, thereby constraining the latter. Accordingly, this study proposes a new conceptual framework, the auteur-ity theory, which merges “auteur” with “authority” to explain this tension and analyze how corporate hierarchies and market demands shape the creative processes. This study aims to contribute to game studies by providing a production-focused analysis.

Keywords

game studies, creativity, authority, industry, video games

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Türk oyun endüstrisinde yaratıcılar ve otoriteler

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Öz

Çalışma, günümüz eğlence sektörünün en öne çıkan sektörlerinden biri haline gelen video oyun endüstrisinde yaratıcı süreçlerin işleyişini incelemektedir. Klasik *auteur* teorisinin video oyun ortamına uygulanabilirliğini araştıran bu çalışma, şirket yapıları içinde yaratıcı otoritenin nasıl işlediğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, yaratıcılık ve otorite konusunda derinlemesine görüş almak üzere, farklı ölçeklerdeki üç Türk video oyun şirketinden toplam 15 sektör profesyoneli ile niteliksel görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bulgular, sektördeki yaratıcı süreçlerin büyük ölçüde bireysel yaratıcılardan ziyade kurumsal veya yönetimsel birimler tarafından yürütüldüğünü göstermektedir. Bireysel yaratıcılığı merkeze alan klasik teorisin yetersiz kaldığını savunan bu çalışma, pazar eğilimleri ve bütçe kaygıları gibi finansal çıkarlara öncelik veren bir yapıyı ortaya koymaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, “yaratıcı” (*auteur*) ile “otorite” (*authority*) kavramlarını birleştiren ve *auteur-ity theory* olarak adlandırılan yeni bir kavramsal çerçeve önermekte; bu yapının bireysel vizyonu kurumsal hiyerarşi ve pazar talepleri doğrultusunda nasıl kısıtladığını açıklamaktadır. Bu çalışma, oyun çalışmalarına üretim süreçleri odaklı bir analiz sunarak alana katkı sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler

oyun çalışmaları, yaratıcılık, otorite, endüstri, video oyunları

Atıf

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Introduction^{1 2}

This study aims to explore how creative processes, in other words the authorship in the video game industry work. In that regard, qualitative interviews with sector professionals from three different scaled Turkish video game companies were conducted. Thus, the study aims to explore the tension between individual creativity and institutional control in the modern video game industry. Even though games have historically been one of the fundamental cultural activities which serve educational and social functions ranging from ancient practices to board games (Falkener, 1892, p. 9; Huizinga, 1949; Murray, 1978, p. 57), the medium went a paradigm shift in the mid-twentieth century regarding its production dynamics which is the transition to digital gaming. Additionally, early digital milestones like *OXO* and *Spacewar!*, although, were primarily products of academic environments and individual efforts (Donovan, 2010; Monnens & Goldberg, 2015, p. 126), the following industrialization of the medium radically transformed these production dynamics with industrialized development targeting consumer.

In 1983, video game industry faced a catastrophic market collapse that put a stop to the industry's rapid growth and compelled a review of its methods. Market oversaturation was the primary cause of the crash, while there were other contributing reasons as well. Because of the lack of quality control and this quick influx, the market was overrun with poor-quality games, which catastrophically damaged customer confidence. However, following the 1983 market collapse, the industry entered a period of rapid expansion and corporate consolidation dominated by giants like Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft (Sheff, 1993, p. 23). While home console technology advanced to replicate and eventually surpass arcade experiences (Kent, 2001), the medium evolved through the 3D and HD eras to rival the visual fidelity of cinema. This convergence in production quality and complexity suggests that video games can also be analyzed through established cinematic frameworks like films.

In that regard, this study aims to analyze the tension between individual creativity and corporate authorities. For this reason, the study adopts auteur theory, which positions the director as the singular artistic visionary in film production. As noted by Jim Hillier (1985), the concept elevates the film director to the status of an artist comparable to "great novelists, painters or poets" (p. 5). This framework is rooted in François Truffaut's critique of studio based "literary cinema," that he argued lacked originality compared to works where a genuine filmmaker produces a unique worldview (Truffaut, 1954). Within the video game industry, names like Shigeru Miyamoto, Hideo Kojima and Hidetaka Miyazaki fit this definition.

The key factor of video game auteurship is unique creative vision in which games function as an "expressive medium" (Demirbaş, 2022, p. 49). Similarly, just how film directors are distinguished by their specific visual styles, game auteurs establish a recognizable aesthetic signature through gameplay mechanics, narrative and environmental design in their games. As noted by Espen Aarseth (2004, p. 262), this influence must be significant enough that the game is associated with the individual creator rather than the development company or publisher. For instance,

¹ This article is based on the field research findings of the author's master's thesis entitled "Rethinking the Concepts of Auteur and Authority in Creative Actors in the Turkish Video Game Industry" prepared under the supervision of Assist. Prof. Selver Dikkol Akçay in the Department of Radio, Television and Cinema at Başkent University's Institute of Social Sciences.

² This research has been conducted with the "informed consent" of the participants and "ethical committee approval" in accordance with the decision dated 10.03.2025 and numbered 17162298.600-89 of the Social and Human Sciences and Arts Field Research Board of the Başkent University Academic Evaluation Coordination Office.

Hidetaka Miyazaki consistently use dark, gothic aesthetics in titles like *Dark Souls*, *Bloodborne* and *Elden Ring* which shows a distinct authorial signature that transcends standard genre conventions (Hosie, 2013, July 26).

Therefore, the main question of this study is to determine who the creative authority in video game development is and evaluate the applicability of classical auteur theory. While the narrative and design parallels between video game and cinema initially invite comparisons to film auteurs. Contemporary figures like Neil Druckmann or Cory Barlog show collaborative complexity of game production challenges the notion of singular individual control. Therefore, this study argues that the concept of auteur in video games is better understood at studio level rather than individual. To define the boundary between artistic expression and industrial craft within this framework, it is crucial to understand the current state of the global video game industry.

The current state of video game industry

While the early stages of game development were generally characterized by individuals or smaller teams with singular creative visions, the modern industry has evolved into an industry with high stakes blockbusters. Today, AAA (Triple-A) studios are “under pressure from all directions” as game budgets increase and margins tighten in a fierce battle for player attention (Plantec & Christofferson, 2025). Today, the production budgets of video games surpass the production costs of films. “Eyes popped when it was reported that Marvel’s *Spider-Man 2* cost around \$300 million, triple the budget of the first game” (Tassi, 2025, January 7). This financial growth places tremendous pressure on studios to minimize risk which often leads to corporate consolidation and the closure of underperforming subsidiaries. “Microsoft has closed a number of Bethesda studios, including *Redfall* maker Arkane Austin, *Hi-Fi Rush* and *The Evil Within* developer Tango Gameworks, and more in devastating cuts at Bethesda, IGN can confirm” (Yin-Poole, 2024, May 7). Under these conditions, creative autonomy is frequently suppressed by corporate hierarchies.

To understand the recent situation of the video game industry, it should be crucial to understand how video game development evolved. The early stages of video game development, especially between 1980s and 1990s, generally consisted of individuals or small teams who had strong creative vision. Thanks to this creative vision, early developers could lay the foundations of modern games today. Developers of this era can be seen as the true auteurs of the video game industry. Their games shaped the industry and introduced new gameplay mechanics throughout the time. However, after this period, video game development became industrialized. In other words, video games are now considered like blockbuster films or technological products instead of artworks and AAA games are developed under major teams, tight schedules and monetization targets. These targets eventually turned the video game development into easy profit products. “AAA studios, which were already facing intensifying competition within their segment of the market, are now under pressure from all directions. Their game budgets keep increasing, margins are tightening, and the fight for player attention has never been fiercer” (Plantec & Christofferson, 2025). This clearly shows how the industry has growth overtime. Jason Schreier (2024) documents a significant cultural shift in big studios in which finance departments have begun intervening in creative meetings, effectively turning financial suggestions into mandates (p. 207). This dynamic often prioritizes game models targeting financial success. There are great number of examples for this situation like *Anthem* from EA Games and *Suicide Squad: Kill the*

Justice League from Warner Bros. Games. Also, this shift can be resulted in gameplay mechanics like Ubisoft's repetitive open-world design, pay to win services targeting players' wallets like EA Games's in game stores in *EA FC* or industrialized production cycles like Activision's yearly release of *Call of Duty*. This dynamic can be seen in Games-as-a-Service (GaaS) model where ongoing monetization is prioritized over narrative coherence or singular artistic experiences (Weststar & Dubois, 2023, p. 980). In that regard, the tension between maintaining artistic integrity and meeting industrial profit demands has become the defining struggle of the industry. This transition from artwork to commercial product creates the necessity for a new theoretical lens to understand how creativity survives under such corporate systems.

While profitability is essential for sustainability in the industry, the status of contemporary industry increasingly favors market control over creative balance which eventually results in constraints like meeting trends, rejections and even premature releases like *Mass Effect: Andromeda*. This dynamic signifies a shift from artwork to industrial craftsmanship. To investigate this tension, this study adopts a qualitative approach centered on the Turkish video game industry. The data collection process involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 industry professionals from three differently scaled companies. This method was chosen to gather nuanced insights into how participants experience and perceive creative authority and corporate structures. The resulting interview data was subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to individual creativity and institutional constraints. This methodology allows for a deep examination of the production processes that define the sector. The following Methodology section will detail the structure of the study.

Methodology

As mentioned previously, classical auteur theory remains insufficient for exploring the complex development processes of the modern video game industry, particularly where corporate hierarchies in AAA and AA production often replace creative visions. Given the subjective and multifaceted nature of creativity, authorship and power dynamics in the industry, a qualitative research design is best suited to uncover the nuanced perspectives of industry professionals. As John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell (2009) explains, qualitative inquiry is designed to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to social problems (p. 1). To test the applicability of auteurship within this context, qualitative interviews were conducted with professionals from the Turkish video game industry. These interviews provide empirical insight into how developers perceive the current state of the industry which substantiate the study's central claim that creative vision is shaped or constrained by structural authorities. Consequently, this study aims to introduce a new theoretical framework which advances traditional auteur theory by adapting it to the collaborative and corporatized nature of game development.

The video game industry has transcended purely entertainment to become a "large social and cultural fabric of society, impacting relationships, culture, fashion, and how we spend our time" (Hussain, 2025, April 26). For this reason, analyzing the industry's internal dynamics is as crucial as studying the games themselves. While much academic discourse focuses on games' impacts on players, this study addresses the need to examine the industry as both an artistic and industrial entity. Aligning with Dean Bowman's argument, video games must be approached as "cultural objects within a cultural studies framework, and approaching the material reality of the industry via a production studies approach" (Bowman, 2020, p. 22). In that regard, this study, is one of

the few studies that have been conducted on the creativity part of the video game industry. By doing so, the study also emphasizes the importance of video games as an artwork since theory adapts a film theory which is based on creativity. Nevertheless, an important qualification must be considered. Especially after the expanding of the video game industry, video game development period, which was once based on creativity heavily, has turned into products pursuing economic gain because of the big corporations.

All the companies which were interviewed for the study are of different scales and provide great insights. The analysis of these interviews addresses key research questions of how creative decisions are made in video game development, how effective individual vision is and how organizational structures shape the development process. The findings were evaluated in comparison with the classical auteur theory and the study, therefore, suggests the need for a new theory to understand the complex relationship in video game development.

The research universe comprises professionals actively working within the Turkish video game industry. The sample of fifteen participants was selected from various departments, including game design, art, technical art (game engine), sound design, narrative design, community management, marketing, human resources, production and management. Participants were identified through the researcher's personal contacts and professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn). This diverse sample includes professionals working within the same companies as well as those operating from different cities and countries. This diversity allows for a framework which underpins the research, to comparatively examine the authority structures, creativity and decision-making processes. This research has been conducted with the "informed consent" of the participants and "ethical committee approval" in accordance with the decision dated 10.03.2025 and numbered 17162298.600-89 of the Social and Human Sciences and Arts Field Research Board of the Başkent University Academic Evaluation Coordination Office. To maintain confidentiality, participants are anonymized and referred as P1 through P15 in the analysis. Consequently, this sample group aims to provide not only individual perspectives but also a comprehensive overview of the creative production structures within Turkey's rapidly growing video game industry.

Lastly, the video game industry has established itself as a dominant global force. In the United States alone, 61% of the population plays video games for at least one hour weekly (The Entertainment Software Association, 2024). While this commonness suggests a vast global ecosystem, practical constraints necessitate specific research boundaries. Therefore, this study focuses exclusively on PC and console game development, deliberately excluding the mobile gaming sector. This distinction is particularly relevant in the Turkish context, where the number mobile game companies surpass PC and console studios excluding smaller independent developers. Despite this mobile dominance, Turkish video game industry is rapidly growing. Highlighting this trajectory, Çetin Tüker, Erdal Yılmaz and Kürşat Çağıltay demonstrate the size of the industry. "Currently, nearly a thousand professionals work in this industry in Turkey [...] this growth is hopeful, given the fact that there were only ten professionals twenty years ago and around a hundred professionals just ten years ago" (Tüker et al., 2015, p. 574). This momentum has accelerated significantly over the last decade. According to Gaming in Türkiye's 2023 annual industry report, Turkish video game industry reached a market size of approximately \$695 million. 54% of this income is from mobile games while 25% is from PC games and 21% is from consoles. However, the scale of the industry is still small when it is compared to global companies. As of

2023, there are approximately five hundred game development companies and indie developers whom are operating in Turkey and estimated employer numbers are two thousand five hundred to three thousand (Gaming in Türkiye, 2023). In that regard, the data of the study is specific to the Turkish video game industry and the findings are contextually limited to the region. The study acknowledges that results may vary in different global markets.

Findings

To provide demographic data of the participants, the total number of industry professionals who accepted to participate in the study is fifteen. While thirteen of them are male, two of them are female. Even though the study does not treat gender as a determining analytical factor since the aim of the study does not seek a gender related topic, the gender distribution in the industry catches the eye. Also, the data shows that participants in the study come from different educational backgrounds. However, all of them have at least one type of university degree ranging from associate degree to master's which shows that Turkish video game industry professionals have high educational backgrounds with possible interdisciplinary paths since seven of the participants have unrelated educational backgrounds with video game development. For this reason, it can be interpreted that interdisciplinary paths are popular among Turkish video game professionals. These various academic profiles of the participants suit with the multidisciplinary structure of video game development. Even though participants were asked about their monthly income, thirteen out of fifteen did not want to share their monthly income because of both company policies and not wanting to share. However, even though employees have different kinds of motives for working in video game industry, they are all satisfied with working in this industry. As Ergin Bulut (2021) argues, this precarity is not simply a result of job scarcity. Instead, it is powerful and shapes developer identities precisely because it is entrenched in love. This precarity is strongly upheld by the developers' own ideological attachment to the abstract promises of play and the appealing image of glamorous employment. This relationship, which is the individual's creative passion for working in this industry, shows a different understanding of contemporary corporatized industry. In other words, employee's passion in game development can mask the structural and financial constraints which are imposed by the corporate authority.

The relationship between video games and creativity

This part of the analysis aims to define the role of creativity within the contemporary industry. Participants overwhelmingly identified creativity as a fundamental element which is not merely for artistic expression. Instead, creativity is necessary for problem solving and player engagement. P10 emphasizes that "video games require creative drive [...] to find solutions to problems." On the other hand, P12 states "creativity comes to the fore because people can interact with the product." This argument aligns with Yung-hsun Cheng's (2025) argument that designers enhance player engagement specifically by stimulating imagination (p. 11). Creative control is essential for both the developers and players since it is the key for uniqueness and interactivity which is the main feature that distinguishes video games from other media.

However, a critical distinction was made by P2. The participant reveals the first friction point between artistic vision, in other words auteur, and commercial necessity, in other words authority. He offered a tripartite categorization of game production:

I divide games into three different categories [...] 1. Games that entertain players (Standard Creativity), 2. Games that make money (Economic Creativity), 3. Innovative/artistic games/experiences. [...] If the goal is to make money, a different approach is needed. Creative efforts are required to engage the player in the game in the most optimal way and encourage them to spend money. At this point, economic knowledge, market knowledge, player psychology, and the ability to gamify these elements are absolutely necessary (P2).

P2's categorization separates the economic creativity from artistic innovation which suggest that the role of auteur is often subsumed by market imperatives. This structural constraint is most visible in large scale companies. P3 and P9, who are working in a major company, stated:

Yes, there is creativity in indie games, but there isn't much creativity in big games like ours. The company owner has a vision, and you are hired to realize that vision. In my position, we are expected to do what has been decided (P3). / It's generally more noticeable in the indie scene. Because in video games, you can break away from real life and become a completely different person. In situations like this, you need creativity to write your own story in games. I think creativity is also necessary for the game development process (P9).

These two statements provide empirical evidence for the study's framework. In AAA contexts, individual developers lose creative agency to a hierarchical vision dictated by the owner or executive board. In other words, the auteur turned into the institutional authority itself instead of the individual creator. On the other hand, creative freedom is not absolute even at the executive level. P15, who is company founder and the only game director in the company states:

There is very limited creativity. You might say, "I'm making the game I imagined," but it won't sell. In order for the game to sell, you have to give players what they want. Yes, creativity is necessary, but you are not completely free. You are not as free as a painter (P15).

This comparison to a painter shows the divergence from traditional artistic fields. Unlike the solitary freedom of a painter, a game director tied with Mark Banks' statement. He argues that the creative cultural worker exists at the "very axis point of political struggle" between the forces of art and commerce. As the specific embodiment of this art-commerce relation, it is the creative worker who must evidently balance the desire for "disinterested, creative self-expression" against the "necessity of accumulation" (Banks, 2007, p. 8). P15's admission that financial viability override imagination validates the study's premise that the market demands acts as an external authority which influence the internal creative decisions of companies. The main reason behind this motive is because bigger scaled video game companies generally tend to develop games that can profit instead of trying new things which require creativity. "For instance, because of the success of titles like *Fortnite* and *Overwatch*, there have been many similar games released or announced trying to piggyback off of the acclaim and hype of those titles" (Eckert, 2024, July 7). Recently, especially after the budget of the video games has become bigger, com-

panies have tendency to take their steps carefully since they do not want to make a financial loss. The tension between artistic intent and financial necessity, as P15 describes, is not unique to the Turkish context. Brendan Keogh suggests a similar dynamic in the Australian industry. “Other gamemakers, especially those who saw their gamemaking as a small part of a broader cross-disciplinary creative practice, saw the struggles of making money nonchalantly as part and parcel of doing cultural work” (Keogh, 2019, p. 126). As P15’s experience shows, in corporate settings, this struggle often leads studios to prioritize market trends over passion projects in order to profit. This risk aversion explains industry’s reliance on annually releases of global best-seller titles like *Call of Duty*, *EA FC*, or *NBA 2K* instead of original ideas. This tendency aligns with the structural control. As Aphra Kerr suggests in her book this type of authority as “Concentrating on the console and PC segments, these companies exerted strict control over in-house (sometimes called first party) and external (third party) developers and the quantity and quality of content released” (Kerr, 2017, p. 44). In that regard, developers have to make a choice between developing games that they are passionate about to fulfill self-satisfaction or developing games which are appealing to the majority.

In contrast, independent developers have greater creative freedom than companies since they must try original ideas and mechanics. However, their independence is not absolute. As John Robert Vanderhoef II (2016) argues, “marketing remains a difficult issue, as does discoverability and visibility in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace where there is infinite shelf space but limited eye space” (p. 229). Thus, while corporate studios are often constrained by internal hierarchies which seek risk free formulas, indie developers are constrained by external authority which is the market. In both scenarios, the premise of the study, which is auteurship is rare in contemporary industry, validates.

Opinions on creativity and the gaming industry in the context of experience

To deepen the discussion on the relationship between creativity and game development, participants were asked about their opinions on creativity in the industry within departments and personal opinions. Their responses provide a map of how creativity is perceived and practiced across different layers of the sector. Initially, participants were asked whether the industry requires creativity. Responses were generally divided into two perspectives. The first group strongly believes that creativity is an absolute requirement.

Yes, it does. It requires creativity in two ways: both in terms of workflow and in terms of what you give to the players (P10). / Yes, it is necessary. It is necessary both to solve the problems encountered and for the general game design, for example, the structure and design of the tasks within the game, etc. (P11). / It is incredibly necessary (P12).

For these participants, creativity is not limited to artistic expression. It is also a tool for problem-solving and workflow efficiency, especially during “crunch” periods. Amanda C. Cote and Brandon Harris (2021) define crunch as a period of extended working hours intended to speed up lagging projects, noting that companies often require “protracted periods of unpaid overtime” (p. 161). In this context, participants view creativity as a vital mechanism for intensive schedules. The second group, on the other hand, argued that while creativity is important, it is not a strict requirement depending on the context.

It is not a requirement, but it is necessary (P8). / So generally speaking, yes (P9). / Both yes and no. It depends on the universe you create. I'm talking about the art side of things. If you were to make a game set in the real world, the design of the rooms and spaces where you place objects would have to be consistent. Do you want the player to walk down an empty corridor? What should that corridor be filled with? These are the kinds of details you need to consider. Of course, there are games that don't have that, but design is always important. Because you need to offer something to people who don't understand the game or know its background, and all of that goes through design, of course (P3).

According to their answers, there are some scenarios which do not require that much creativity since the way to do it is already defined. In other words, P3's insight shows that in projects based on realism, creativity is exercised within strict boundaries which are defined by design integrity illustrating a constrained form of authorship.

Also, one participant stated a totally different idea from other participants. P2 states that "I no longer think it is necessary to "make games". But it is necessary to make good games". This statement reveals the current state of the modern gaming industry. Especially after the widespread usage of free game engines and the rise of the popularity of indie games and digitalization of the market, every day a huge number of video games are released. In this competitive environment, as Peter Zackariasson, Martin Walfisz and Timothy L. Wilson (2006) note, "institutionalized creativity and leadership development" (p. 74) become critical variables for growth and success. Consequently, most video games fail to receive much attention or great sale numbers due to lack of creativity which corresponds with P2's statement.

When asked whether their specific departments required creativity, most participants responded positively. However, P3 highlighted the restrictions of game development based on reality.

Of course, yes. You cannot build a graphics engine without creativity (P12). / For the narrative part, yes (P14). / The company I work for requires minimal creativity. Since it is based on historical realism, we have to adapt things that are real. At the end of the day, the universe you create has a reference. That's why, unfortunately, situations like "Oh my God, my chakras are open, I'm designing" don't happen very often. But when you look at the big picture, of course it requires creativity (P3).

Even though P3's colleagues within his department who stated positively for this question, P3 reported differently. This situation clearly shows that employees in the industry think differently about creativity, both individually and industry-wise. However, a crucial insight for the study's framework comes from P15, company founder and game director, who distinguishes between creativity and vision. He stated that "My job does not require creativity. My job requires vision. I always have to make data-driven decisions. Of course, it requires creativity, but it is not a position where I can constantly listen to my heart." P15's role embodies the clash between auteur and authority. The participant has the power to create but constrains himself in order to make

data-driven decisions. This validates the study's argument that financial interests often dominate the artistic impulses to survive in the industry.

Furthermore, when asked about their opinions on how creative they can be in their departments, they reveal significant limitations and it was observed that some of the answers contradict their answers to the previous question.

I would say 60 to 40 or 80 to 20. I would say Pareto (P4). / We don't have much freedom, so we can't be as creative as concept artists. Because we have a certain job to do (P5). / I can't give you an exact percentage, but I would say around 60% (P11).

These participants stated that their creativity is limited to some extent even though they stated their departments require creativity for the previous question. The possible reason for this is that they are given certain limits for the projects that they work on. For this reason, even though they can be creative, they cannot go beyond certain limits. This clearly shows the presence of hierarchy in the company. Therefore, even though they believe that their departments require creativity, their creativity is still limited by executives, which is consistent with the main argument of the study.

For the final question of this part of the interview, participants were asked whether there is a department which does not require creativity in the industry or not. All of the participants believe that all departments other than administrative, technical, and financial are related to creativity.

If we exclude administrative departments, I don't think there is such a department (P10). / These are actually the departments that every company needs. We can say accounting, human resources, and finance departments (P13). / Human resources, community support, community management, or office support do not need to be creative (P8).

According to these answers, departments which are directly related to game development require creativity. However, other departments like finance and human resources do not require creativity. Even though these kinds of departments do not come to mind first while talking about the video game industry, companies still need these kinds of departments which is clear evidence for video game companies' corporate structures since the importance of these departments distinguishes the contemporary studio from the auteur developer. These units in companies function as backbone of the corporate structure which ensure that creativity remains within economic and legal bounds that hierarchy defines.

Company structures

This section analyzes the company dynamics in order to understand how company structures shape the creative processes. In that way, the aim is to reveal the corporate authority within the Turkish video game industry by examining how supervision, feedback and decision-making processes work.

Firstly, participants were asked to identify the chain of command in their companies. The overall of the responses indicates that there is a standardized hierarchical structure across all, where

creative processes are consistently supervised and monitored by department leads, directors or producers.

Artist lead. The lead reports to the top boss. Each department has its own lead. They are in charge (P3). / Our team leader and boss (P4). / Game Director (P14). / Producers working at the company (P2).

On the other hand, from the perspective of managers, a central authority is obvious.

There is no clear answer because we have so many simultaneous projects, but I generally follow all projects. My partner and I usually follow them together (P1). / Myself. I'm the team leader now. I'm the head of the Sound team (P10). / Myself (P15). / We have a board of directors. I am one of its members. We evaluate the work of the board members within the board (P13).

These responses demonstrate that a chain of command exists regardless of company size. In that regard, it is obvious that authorship is not an individual act but a managed process which is supervised by higher authorities. For this reason, even though the participants previously stated that they have a flat relationship within the departments like art, sound or engine, the final decisions are made by the directors of the companies which eventually might lead to a lack of creativity in companies since they are only responsible for the tasks or directives that are given to them.

Participants were also asked about the tone of feedback. Participants overwhelmingly reported positive experiences which contradicts the global industry's historical reputation for toxicity. To give an example, one of the industry giants, Rockstar Games, has been accused for firing employees for attempting to organize a union in November, 2025, even though the company alleged "distributing and discussing confidential information in a public forum" (Chalk, 2025, November 14). In that regard, it can be stated that Turkish video game industry offers a better working environment for their employees. Managers also confirmed this approach.

I try to stay positive. I try to shoot down people in a polite and courteous manner. I always try to give a logical explanation (P1). / I try to maintain as stable a tone of voice as possible. Especially when giving negative feedback, I try to maintain as clear and stable a tone of voice as possible (P13). / It depends on the situation. If it is something really bad that disturbs other people's peace of mind, then the feedback will be harsher, otherwise it will be milder (P15).

According companies try to maintain a friendly and safe working environment in order to maintain the development as smoothly as possible without any problems. However, it is necessary to pay attention to P15's statement since he is the only one who states slightly differently than other executives. Even though his statement is harsher than others, his statement is in the interest of other employees. For this reason, it can be interpreted from executives' responses that Turkish video game industry has quite friendly and safe working environments no matter the scale of the company which also supports by the statements of employees.

The next part of the interview demonstrates a critical finding for the study's framework which is the dichotomy between the perceived horizontal structure and the actual vertical hierarchical structure. Many employees stated that they maintain a horizontal structure within the departments.

We have team leaders and a hierarchical structure on paper, but we still manage to act as if we have a horizontal structure among ourselves (P6). / My department has a horizontal structure, but other departments may have a hierarchical structure (P8). / Generally horizontal. Even if we have leads, they don't look down on us (P9). / We maintain a hierarchical structure officially, but internally we have a horizontal structure (P11).

According to their answers, a working environment, where people can exchange their ideas, give feedback to their peers and common problem solving through creative ways, can be considered quite positive because this type of departmental structure opens organic and better creative dynamics even if there are leads and seniors in the departments. However, other participants stated the necessity of a hierarchy within the company structure.

We are trying to establish a hierarchical structure (P14). / We worked on making it horizontal for a long time, but the company's crowdedness does not allow for this. Some people are in decision-making and information flow positions as leads. But there is a horizontal structure within the teams. Overall, we have a hierarchical structure (P10).

In that regard, it can be interpreted that Turkish video game companies use a conventional corporate model like any other company. In this type of corporate model, the authorities of the companies are typically the decision makers. These decisions pass downward through the chains of command. Additionally, this type of hierarchy is generally responsible for business strategies, budget and final approval without including the production departments. In that regard, it is important to evaluate the manager's responses separately for this question since their answers give better insight for the company structure.

I try to give the art director as much space as possible. But ultimately, I am the one who has the power to say yes or no. Basically, there is a hierarchical structure, but we try to maintain a horizontal relationship. After all, there has to be a hierarchy because it is a company (P1). / Due to the number of people, we inevitably have a hierarchical structure, but it is not a rigid one (P13). / Actually, it's somewhere in between. Yes, there is a hierarchical structure, but it's not that rigid or strict (P15).

Even though all of the executives stated that they try to maintain a soft hierarchical structure within their companies, they are the final decision makers at the end of the day. As P1 stated, hierarchy is required since video game companies maintain a corporate structure. For this reason, it is quite unlikely to maintain a horizontal structure due to different reasons like employee numbers, financial goals or workflow. Eventually, executive responses supports that the authority holds the final decision over the auteur which reinforces the study's central argument.

The most significant evidence of a chain of command dynamic appears in how a new project process works. Participants were asked whether they contribute to the starting stages, in other words project selection, or tasks are assigned to them. The majority of responses point to the top-down structure.

Usually, it is presented to us directly, but meetings are held and then it is presented to us (P3). / It varies depending on the job, but generally the team leaders hold a meeting and then present it to us (P4). / Usually, a meeting is held among team leaders, and then it is presented to us (P5). / After a decision was made, they told me what we were going to do. These kinds of decisions are usually made by the leads (P6). / After a decision was made, they told me, “We’re going to do this” (P7). / The meetings are held on a weekly basis, or perhaps even every two or three days (P8). / First, a general idea is put forward, and then our ideas are taken into account during subsequent meetings (P9). / Nothing comes directly from above. Instead, we discuss and decide based on ideas that come to our game director’s mind (P10). / There are meeting requests, and we can attend meetings if necessary, depending on the situation (P11). / Once the project has been defined to a certain level, we discuss it and draw up our roadmap (P12).

While some experienced employees reported more inclusion in discussion stages, executives are still the final decision-makers. Also, the managers’ answers of this process reveal financial concerns often prioritizes over creative brainstorming.

When we have a new project, we follow certain steps. First, we assess whether we have the feasibility to carry out the project. Then we look at the financial status and situation of the market. Once we have answered these questions, we move on to the detailed design stage. At the end of the day, if there are still things that don’t make sense to us, the whole team gets together and we brainstorm (P13). / Both situations can occur (P15).

According to their answers, it is clear that employees are directly given the defined projects even if they make small suggestions without affecting the base of the projects no matter what the scale of the company is. Also, P13’s statement is particularly vital for the study’s framework. It explicitly outlines a process where “financial status” and “market situation” are evaluated before the brainstorming and idea developing. This proves that creative process is subordinate to the company authorities. In that way, they prioritize viability over artistic vision because of financial interests which supports the main argument of the study.

Conclusion

While classical auteur theory highlights individuals from the industry like Hideo Kojima, Shigeru Miyamoto or Hidetaka Miyazaki, the application of the theory to a broader industry is still problematic due to the collaborative and corporate nature of the contemporary development. The traditional focus of the theory which emphasizes a singular artist conflict with the reality of modern structures of studios, where hierarchical structures have the ultimate decision-making pow-

er. To address this theoretical gap, this study proposes auteur-ity theory which is a conceptual framework that merges auteur with authority in order to explain the tension between creative processes and hierarchical control.

The fundamental premise of the theory is that as video game production became industrialized after technological developments and the rise of production budgets, individual creativity is restricted by authorities which are driven by financial interests. The empirical data collected from the Turkish video game industry which is a rapidly growing validates this argument across different company scales. Even though participants frequently stated their working environments as horizontal, manager responses, the current state of the industry and the study's analysis reveals a distinct vertical structure. The final creative authority resides with the executive management, in other words the authority, prioritizing market trends and financial interest over creativity and artistic innovation. This dynamic is particularly evident in the beginning of a new project phase in which feasibility studies and market analysis often shape the creative processes.

Especially in AAA and AA companies, this situation results in a top-down authorial structure to control big budgets and secure investments. Furthermore, this authority is influenced externally by different factors like publishers and market demands which eventually lead to risk-free strategies such as GaaS models, annual releases and replication of formulas that succeed previously instead of original ideas. In other words, the study reveals that the dominance of authority fundamentally transforms the definition of creativity in game development. The industry demands a shift from artistic expression to industrial craftsmanship. The value of creative ideas is measured by its capacity to generate profit and sustain player engagement with monetization models. For this reason, the notion of game developer as an artist is replaced by a data-driven professional aligning their vision with market trends and budget constraints which can be seen in manager participants' responses.

On the other hand, this tension between creativity and authority gains additional complexity within the context of growing markets like Türkiye. While global big studios face pressure from high production costs, studios in developing markets operate under even stricter survival instincts due to limited resources and economic precarity as P13 and P15 stated. The findings indicate that even though they work in a rapidly growing industry, Turkish professionals often adhere to risk free strategies which are dictated by managers for financial sustainability. However, popular global hubs where experimental projects might find alternative funding whilst Turkish video game industry heavily reliable on guaranteed returns.

Within this analytical scope, it is important to note that this study is limited to the Turkish video game industry. Even though the Turkish industry is rapidly growing and offers different studio scales, it cannot fully reflect the dynamics of global hubs of the industry like North America or Japan. Therefore, the applicability of the auteur-ity theory should be tested in different cultural and economic contexts in order to verify its applicability. Future researches could also benefit from longitudinal studies or analyses which involves professionals who have transitioned from corporate studios to independent studios like Hideo Kojima or Guillaume Broche. Ultimately, academic inquiry must extend beyond the analysis of games as finished products to the production cycles and industry as a whole as the industry continues to be a dominant participant of the entertainment industry. In that regard, auteur-ity theory aims to contribute this shift by providing a lens to

understand how hierarchies shape the creativity and define the modern medium. By addressing the relationship between the creative individuals and the authorities, video games can be better analyzed not just as commodities but as complex cultural texts.

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