

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

The psychological and legal dimensions of cyber violence in the digital game perspective: The case of league of legends

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Abstract

With the developing technology, individuals have begun to work and carry out all kinds of transactions through digital platforms. In parallel, digital environments have also begun to meet individuals' entertainment needs, with games becoming digitized and gaming habits evolving in a different direction. This situation has brought with it both the benefits and the online risks of the digital world. Cyber violence, defined as any harmful behavior towards an individual or group through cyberspace, is one of these online risks.

As a preliminary study, this paper aims to examine the extent and methods of cyber violence experienced by male and female users in the online game League of Legends, which is one of the most popular online games in Turkey, and to analyze the psychological and legal aspects of cyber violence in digital games.

In this experimental, descriptive study with blended research methodology, both male and female users played the game alone and as a team at regular intervals for one month. Participants were asked to use their usernames and behavior in the game, indicating their gender. The reactions received by both participants when playing the game well or poorly were analyzed to examine cyber violence from legal and psychological perspectives.

As a preliminary result of the study, it was found that female participants received the most flirtatious offers and were subjected to verbal abuse and insults, even when playing the game well. Male participants, on the other hand, were subjected to verbal abuse and insults when playing the game both well and poorly.

When the participants played the game together, it was found that female participants were subjected to cyber violence the most. This violence is most commonly expressed in the form of verbal abuse and insults. It is believed that examining cyber violence in digital games from legal and psychological perspectives will raise awareness about cyber violence.

Keywords: Cyber violence, digital game, law, psychology

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology, daily activities of individuals have increasingly shifted towards digital platforms. In today's virtual world, the benefits and drawbacks of digital platforms actively involved in interaction have come to the forefront.

Digital games have become a popular form of entertainment and social interaction in recent years. With the progress of technology, the gaming landscape has undergone significant changes, giving rise to new formats such as online multiplayer games. One of the marketing methods of online digital games is their ability to facilitate socialization. Players often engage in conversations and discussions about various topics outside of the game without even realizing it. This allows players to establish lasting bonds and connections with each other, which is defined as a source of motivation for the game (Bartle, 1996). In addition to providing a foundation for entertainment and socialization, digital games sometimes bring with them certain negative aspects due to the virtual world they create. Cyberbullying has increasingly become a pressing issue in digital games.

Digital games provide a platform where players interact with each other in a virtual environment. In this context, digital games create a conducive environment for cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as the repeated use of information and communication technologies by an individual or a group with the intention of harming others (Belsey, 2007).

Individuals who are primarily affected by cyberbullying actions in digital game platforms are confronted with the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of being subjected to online attacks. Cyberbullying actions can lead to various issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in the victims.

The proliferation of cyberbullying in digital games necessitates the development of awareness, prevention, and intervention strategies. In this context, legal regulations that form the structure of society are also of paramount importance

in preventing cyberbullying. Although the Turkish Penal Code does not explicitly regulate cyberbullying as a distinct crime, some cyberbullying actions are explicitly defined as crimes. The types of cyberbullying encountered on digital game platforms often involve acts of insult and threats. Within this framework, the provisions of the Turkish Penal Code regarding insult and threat crimes and crimes against public peace and order can be applied to the perpetrated cyberbullying actions. However, the issue of proving the commission of these actions in practice is undeniable, as digital games provide an element of anonymity.

League of Legends (LoL), which has gained a significant presence in the cyber world, stands out as a competitive online multiplayer game with millions of players (Brühlmann et al., 2020). However, the intense competition and the environment of anonymity in this game often lead to it becoming a platform where cyberbullying is frequently experienced (Jeges et al., 2021). Attacks between players, such as harassment, insults, threats, or the disclosure of personal information, can have serious consequences for both the victims and the gaming experience (Bertran & Chamarro, 2016).

This article focuses on the psychological and legal dimensions of cyberbullying using League of Legends as an example. When players are exposed to cyberbullying, they may experience various psychological effects. Fear, stress, shame, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, depression, and anxiety are among the common outcomes of cyberbullying. Additionally, cases of cyberbullying that occur in digital games like League of Legends are an important subject concerning legal responsibility and criminal sanctions. Issues such as aggression between players, actions carried out intending to harm the game, and how such behaviors should be addressed within the legal framework will be examined in this article.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Cyber Violence

Cyber violence refers to aggressive and harmful behaviors that occur in environments using the internet and digital communication tools (Paat et al., 2019). Such acts of violence often take advantage of internet characteristics such as anonymity, remote communication, and widespread accessibility (Chugh & Guggisberg, 2022). Cyber violence can occur between individuals or by one person against another and can manifest in various forms (Zhu et al., 2023). The proliferation of internet usage and the increased use of technological devices in today's world have brought about various issues, one of which is cyber violence. Cyber violence is defined as "the malicious use of one or more information technology tools, sending inappropriate content such as text, messages, emails, images, etc., with ill intent, harassing individuals or groups in a virtual environment" (Van-Ouytsel et al., 2017). In addition to these definitions, acts such as the dissemination of humiliating, insulting emails and messages, obtaining identity and account information or facilitating access to this information, mocking individuals in the virtual environment, spreading false information, making rude, offensive, threatening comments and allowing their dissemination, computer hacking, monitoring/observing a person's phone or computer, creating an account under a false/fake name to scare or threaten someone, and sending sexually explicit messages or images are also considered as forms of cyber violence (Kričkić et al., 2017).

It is observed that there is no universal definition of cyber violence, and it can evolve in parallel with technological advancements, leading to variations in the definitions provided (Betts, 2016).

One form of cyber violence is threats and harassment, which entail sending or disseminating aggressive messages directed at an individual. These aggressive expressions may encompass threats, profanity, insults, or discriminatory, racist, or homophobic language. Such behaviors can tarnish an individual's

reputation, exert psychological pressure, and undermine their sense of personal security (Niki et al., 2022).

Incitement to suicide represents an extremely perilous form of cyber violence (John et al., 2018). It involves encouraging an individual to commit suicide or disseminating harmful content related to suicide. Incitement to suicide can lead to severe consequences for individuals contemplating suicide, jeopardizing their lives. The dissemination of such content can impact the mental health of affected individuals and yield serious outcomes. Another form of cyber violence is the violation of personal information and privacy. This pertains to breaching an individual's privacy and disclosing their personal information. Actions such as the unauthorized sharing of private photos or videos, theft of personal data, or exploitation of privacy can damage an individual's reputation, lead to psychological issues, and pose security risks. The violation of personal information and privacy can leave lasting effects on victims, negatively affecting their lives.

Cyberbullying is another significant form of cyber violence, encompassing a range of behaviors directed persistently at an individual, such as aggression, humiliation, exclusion, or manipulation. Cyberbullying typically occurs in online environments and can damage a victim's reputation, cause psychological trauma, and, in some cases, lead to suicide. It is a widespread issue, especially among children, adolescents, and other vulnerable groups.

Cyberstalking and tracking are also forms of cyber violence, entailing the monitoring, tracking, and intrusion into an individual's online activities. Internet and digital platforms provide a readily accessible medium for the tracking and collection of personal information. Cyberstalking undermines an individual's sense of security and can create a feeling of privacy invasion. Such behaviors can impact the victim's daily life and cause psychological distress.

These examples represent just a few manifestations of cyber violence. Cyber violence can manifest in various other forms in online

environments and is subject to continuous change. It can have severe impacts on its victims, leading to physical, psychological, and social harm. Consequently, preventing cyber violence, raising awareness, and implementing effective measures are of paramount importance.

2.2. Cyber Violence Environments

Cyber violence denotes aggressive and detrimental behaviors occurring in various online settings. These behaviors often manifest themselves in forms such as severe verbal harassment, threats, humiliation, profanity, hate speech, privacy invasion, and manipulation (Strasburger, 1999). Cyber violence can take place in the following environments:

Social Media Platforms: Popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are common arenas for cyber violence. Here, individuals, owing to the cloak of anonymity, may exhibit aggressive and hostile behaviors. Actions such as threats, harassment, humiliation, and hate speech can negatively impact users' psychological and emotional well-being.

Online Games: Online gaming environments are rife with cyberbullying. In-game chat serves as a means of communication among players, making it susceptible to profanity, insults, harassment, and other aggressive behaviors. The competitive nature of gameplay and the factor of anonymity can contribute to the proliferation of cyber violence (Mishna et al., 2019).

Messaging Applications: Messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Snapchat are also platforms where cyber violence occurs. Acts of aggression, harassment, and threats in personal or group chats can have psychological repercussions on victims.

Forums and Discussion Sites: Internet forums, discussion platforms, and blog spaces provide outlets for individuals to share their opinions. Nevertheless, these platforms are common breeding grounds for cyber violence. Anonymity often leads to the proliferation of aggression, hate speech, profanity, and hostile written content and comments.

Online Relationship Platforms: Friendship websites, dating apps, and online matchmaking platforms can also be venues where cyber violence is observed. Threats, harassment, privacy breaches, and manipulative behaviors can affect victims in such environments.

Internet Communities and Groups: Internet communities, focusing on shared interests and bringing people together, can also serve as platforms for cyber violence. Ideological differences, discrimination, hate speech, and aggression may lead to instances of cyber violence (Yılmaz & Demir, 2020).

These environments represent exemplary areas where cyber violence can occur. It is essential to remember that cyber violence can take place on numerous other platforms in the online world. Therefore, creating awareness and implementing effective measures are of paramount importance for the prevention and mitigation of cyber violence and its consequences.

2.3. Psychological Dimension of Cyber Violence

The psychological effects of cyber violence include emotional distress, anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem and self-worth, social isolation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Galende et al., 2020). Victims of cyber violence may experience emotional distress due to constant threats, humiliation, and aggressive expressions (Jaureguizar et al., 2023). This can manifest as low self-esteem, a sense of shame, and a constant feeling of unease. Additionally, continuous exposure to attacks can trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression (Rousseu et al., 2021). The impact of cyber violence can damage the confidence of victims and make them feel worthless. This can lead to social isolation, as victims may avoid forming relationships with others and feel excluded (Blair & Lee, 2013).

Lastly, individuals subjected to constant stress may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which can include nightmares, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and a constant state of alertness (Piolanti & Foran, 2022). These effects reflect the difficulties and psychological suffering that victims experience, emphasizing the importance of support, counseling, and

psychological assistance. When these effects come together, victims of cyber violence can face significant psychological challenges. Conditions like emotional distress, anxiety, and depression can impact their daily lives, decrease their work and school performance, and negatively affect their overall quality of life.

Loss of self-esteem and self-worth can undermine their belief in themselves and hinder their ability to realize their full potential. Social isolation weakens their social relationships, leaving them without social support and experiencing feelings of loneliness (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Post-traumatic stress disorder can lead to symptoms like constant recollection of past events, nightmares, insomnia, fear, and hyper-vigilance.

These effects negatively impact the psychological well-being of victims, highlighting the importance of support systems, professional help, and awareness campaigns to help victims cope with these challenges. Given the serious consequences of the psychological effects of cyber violence, it is essential for both victims to help themselves and for society to increase awareness and education (Kowalski et al., 2012).

When examining the psychological effects of cyber violence in a list format, they can be analyzed as follows:

Fear and Stress: Victims of cyber violence may experience fear and stress when subjected to attacks. These attacks can take various forms, such as threatening messages, insults, false accusations, exposure of personal information, or behaviors like continuous tracking and harassment by aggressors. Such attacks generate intense anxiety and fear in victims. Victims feel insecure and vulnerable. The anonymity of cyber attacks, the ability of aggressors to conceal their identities, and the reduced risk of real-world encounters can further exacerbate victims' concerns (Ramikie & Ressler, 2018).

Fear and stress affect victims' sense of security. Cyber violence makes it challenging for victims to cope with the fear of being targeted in the digital realm or in real life. This may lead to restricting one's daily activities, impacting social relationships, and even reducing overall quality

of life. Furthermore, continuous exposure to attacks places victims under constant stress. Attacks negatively affect the mental and emotional health of victims, resulting in common reactions like sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, irritability, restlessness, and constant anxiety (Kushman & Byrne, 2017).

Persistent high stress levels can have a detrimental impact on victims' quality of life and may even lead to serious mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. The psychological effects of cyber violence can vary among individuals, but fear and stress are generally dominant experiences (Wilson et al., 2021).

Loss of Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence: Victims of cyber violence may experience a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence following attacks. Aggressors may use demeaning, derogatory, and insulting messages to target victims. Such attacks can make victims feel worthless, inadequate, or unsuccessful (Abtahi, 2022).

Self-esteem represents an individual's sense of value and respect for oneself. Victims of cyber violence may feel devalued and humiliated as a result of the attacks (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Aggressor's rhetoric can significantly damage the self-esteem of victims. Victims may perceive themselves as inadequate or flawed due to the impact of the attacks and even lose faith in themselves (Brown & Marshall, 2019).

Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities, values, and potential. Victims of cyber violence may lose their self-confidence following the attacks. Continuous criticism, humiliation, or negative comments by aggressors can undermine victims' belief in their abilities and worth. Victims may perceive themselves as failures, inept, or unworthy of acceptance (Johnson & Smith, 2020).

Depression and Anxiety: Cyber violence can lead to the emergence of serious mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, in victims (Garber et al., 2016). Victims may lose emotional balance and experience psychological degradation and threats when continually subjected to attacks (Mundy et al., 2021).

Continuous exposure to attacks leads victims to feel insecure and vulnerable. This results in persistent anxiety and high-stress levels. Victims fear future attacks and feel constantly threatened. Due to this constant stress, depression symptoms may manifest (Gage et al., 2013).

The psychological effects of cyber violence may make victims feel worthless, inadequate, or guilty. Aggressors' degrading and humiliating messages damage victims' self-esteem. Victims may lose their self-confidence and experience depressive feelings as a result of the attacks (Dean, 2016).

Anxiety is associated with constantly feeling threatened and anticipating future attacks. Victims of cyber violence may experience constant anxiety and fear. The desire to avoid exposure to attacks or encounters with aggressors can increase anxiety and lead to avoidance of social interactions. Victims may constantly worry about coping with future attacks or similar situations (Nechita et al., 2018).

Depression and anxiety can negatively impact victims' overall quality of life and functionality. Symptoms such as lack of motivation, energy depletion, concentration difficulties, sleep problems, and social withdrawal are common in depression and anxiety (Thompson et al., 2019). This can have adverse effects on victims' work, school, or social relationships (Miller et al., 2018).

2.4. The Legal Aspect of Cyber Violence

With the advancement of technology, interpersonal interactions in the virtual space have increased, leading to the emergence of cyber violence as a form of violence alongside its positive aspects.

Legal rules that maintain societal order are evolving and changing in parallel with the development of technology. One significant development in the realm of cybercrimes is the European Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention. The Convention was signed on November 23, 2001, and came into force on July 1, 2004. Turkey became a party to the Convention as of January 1, 2015. The European Convention on Cybercrime

is the first international treaty in the field of combating cybercrimes.

The Convention addresses crimes related to the confidentiality, integrity, and accessibility of computer data or systems (unauthorized access, illegal interception, data interference, system interference, misuse of devices), computer-related offenses (computer-related forgery, computer-related fraud), content-related crimes (crimes related to child pornography), and offenses related to copyright and related rights. The Convention includes provisions on both substantive criminal law and criminal procedural law, as well as provisions on mutual assistance. With Turkey's accession to the Convention, amendments were made to the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237 to regulate crimes committed with or against computer systems. Within this framework, crimes committed with or against computer systems are regulated in the "crimes in the field of informatics" and "crimes against the privacy of private life and the secrecy of private life" sections.

Article 20 of the Turkish Constitution states: "Everyone has the right to demand respect for their private and family life. The privacy of private life and family life cannot be violated. (Repealed third sentence: 3/10/2001-4709/5 art.) (...) Everyone has the right to protect personal data about themselves. This right includes being informed about personal data related to oneself, accessing this data, requesting their correction or deletion, and learning whether they are being used for their intended purposes. Personal data can only be processed in cases stipulated by law or with the explicit consent of the person. The principles and procedures regarding the protection of personal data are regulated by law."

Within the scope of these rights protected by the Constitution, the acquisition and use of an individual's private photos and conversations through information technology are unlawful. Furthermore, under Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, international agreements to which Turkey is a party are binding.

The concept of cyber violence, being a broad

and not clearly defined term that encompasses a wide range of behaviors, makes it difficult to create a specific legal definition and code that can adapt to advancing technology. There is no specific crime type in the Turkish Penal Code defined as “cyber violence.” However, there are many provisions in the Turkish Penal Code that can be applied to cyber violence behaviors. Crimes such as incitement to suicide (Article 84), harassment (Article 96), threats (Article 106), discrimination (Article 122), disturbing the peace and tranquility of individuals (Article 123), defamation or insults (Article 125), violation of the privacy of private life by monitoring, interfering with communication, and ridiculing the content, and violation of the confidentiality of communication (Article 132), sexual harassment, unlawful disclosure or acquisition of data are examples of specific crime types that can be applied to cyber violence cases. In addition, with an amendment published in the Official Gazette on May 27, 2022, persistent cyberstalking has been regulated as a crime under Article 123A of the Turkish Penal Code. The article stipulates that persistent actions that cause serious discomfort to a person by physically tracking or attempting to establish contact through communication and communication tools, information systems, or third parties, resulting in a person or their close ones feeling unsafe, will be subject to penalties. This regulation is an important step in preventing one of the forms of cyber violence, persistent stalking.

2.5. Cyber Violence in Digital Games

In acts of cyber violence within digital games, particularly under the framework of the Turkish Penal Code, offenses such as defamation, threats, and disturbing the peace and tranquility of individuals often come into play. These types of offenses are well-suited for application in the virtual realm. However, in digital games, players are often anonymous, and the difficulty of identifying the perpetrator of cyber violence due to a lack of evidence presents a significant challenge.

Detecting cyber violence behavior through traditional complaint and criminal investigation methods is generally challenging. This is because

data and evidence in information technologies may not be easily controlled. The issue of evidence becomes apparent at this point. It is of great importance for evidence that data is in the possession of the data controller and can be easily destroyed.

In this context, the use of more advanced technologies in this field, worked on by digital forensics experts, is under discussion as a necessity.

In addition to criminal law, various legal institutions may come into play in terms of private law before and after being subjected to cyber violence.

The Turkish Civil Code No. 4721 includes numerous provisions for the protection of personal rights. The law allows a person whose personal rights have been violated to request the prevention of the violation of personal rights, termination of the ongoing attack, and determination of the unlawfulness of the attack's effects, even if it has ended. Therefore, any use or sharing of personal data without consent is unlawful as long as there is no legal justification. The publication of information or documents from an individual's confidential or private space on social media without their consent is an attack on an individual's personal rights and private life.

Tools like in-game chats, tweets, blog posts, and forum discussions on digital gaming platforms, as well as Facebook posts, provide avenues through which individuals can be subjected to degrading, hurtful, and hostile content, consisting of written, visual, and auditory elements. Moreover, individuals can also have their emotional well-being violated by content that contains explicit or sexually harassing elements (Kaya, 2015). Furthermore, these actions fall within the scope of the Turkish Penal Code as constituting the offense of sexual harassment.

In such actions, the term “e-communication bullying” is used to describe acts where individuals insult, demean, and inflict primarily psychological harm on others through social media platforms (Süslü B., 2016).

As part of the efforts to combat cyber violence, an investigation can be initiated by filing a criminal complaint against the individual responsible for the cyber violence. In terms of private law, it is also possible to initiate legal proceedings to prevent the attack, bring the attack to an end, and establish the unlawfulness of the attack. Additionally, apart from these avenues, if a victim experiences emotional distress, pain, and suffering as a result of the cyberbullying acts they have been subjected to, they can seek moral damages to alleviate the harm. If there has been a financial loss due to these actions, the victim can also seek financial compensation.

3. METHODOLOGY

This experimental, descriptive research was conducted by grouping observed negative reactions of players towards the (gender) indexed players (experimental set-up) during the game according to a type of reaction. To create a setup with players of indexed (gender) identity to observe reactions towards them in the online gaming environment, two users of both genders, played the game individually and in teams at regular intervals for a duration of one month. The games were played on weekends, the days with the highest activity on the gaming platform. Participants were asked to use gender-specific usernames and behaviors while indicating their gender. The username for the male participant was set as “xxDarkinAlix,” and for the female participant, it was “Magical Hande.” These names do not represent the real names of the participants. Researchers observed the games by observing the rooms in which the participants played. During this process, reactions to participants’ good and bad gaming performances were examined, and cyber violence was analyzed from legal and psychological perspectives. In the research, observers played a total of 7 games, with 3 games played together by a male and a female observer, and 4 games played separately. The unit of observation in the study is the 70 individuals present in the examined games.

A blended (qualitative and quantitative) research methodology was used to describe the results.

Cyber violence behaviors occurring within the game were observed (and grouped thematically

as), and the exposure of participants with usernames corresponding to different genders to cyber violence behaviors was examined. Additionally, types of cyber violence occurring in the text-based chat section of the gaming platform were investigated (as thematic coding of free text by 2 independent raters). Results were presented quantitatively (89) by type of cyber violence. Some limitations of the research stem from the chosen method and the selected game. The demographic information of the players does not constitute the focus of the research because the game does not provide access to such information, and making inferences from this data is not possible. However, the players were selected by researchers from both genders and their usernames and played characters were determined accordingly. All players register for the game using nicknames.

4. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The observers included in the research were selected from individuals aged 18 and above, specifically university students. These participants are individuals who have been playing League of Legends (LoL) for an extended period and are knowledgeable about the game. Due to the generally anonymous nature of playing the game with pseudonymous identities, the age and gender of other users examined within the game cannot be determined.

5. FINDINGS

In the research process, participants were subjected to cyberbullying, whether they played the game well or poorly. One notable detail during the research was the female participant receiving additional flirtatious offers compared to the male participant. (e.g., requests for acquaintance, etc.)

Participants experienced cyberbullying from opponents when they performed well and from teammates when they performed poorly. Cyberbullying within the game primarily manifested itself in the form of profanity, insults, and threats. In addition, participants who did not respond to the cyberbullying they faced within the game were subjected to even more cyberbullying.

Under the category of insults, participants experienced the individual detrimental effects of cyberbullying more intensely, particularly through profanity and content targeting their family values.

Image 1. Cyber violence experienced by female participants in the game



As seen in Image-1, the female participant faced cyberbullying from the opposing player when consistently defeating them. Following the participant being subjected to severe profanity, the opponent’s response to the question “Whom are you talking to, by the way?” with “to you” indicates the extent to which cyberbullying was applied heavily within the game.

Image 2. Another instance of cyber violence behavior faced by the female participant



When the female participant defeated another opponent within the game, she was once again subjected to verbal abuse from the opposing player. It has been observed that the teammate with the nickname “Mustafa Utku” directed the statement “Senna is enjoying being fucked, you son of a bitch” towards the female participant. It was revealed that when playing the game alongside the male participant, the female participant experienced less cyber violence. However, this situation still led to the continuation of the impact of cyber violence.

Image 3. Example of cyber violence experienced by male participant



As observed in Image-3, during the game, when the male participant played well, it was noted that a player with the nickname “3mlrcc” from the opposing team made offensive remarks towards the male participant, stating ‘zigg really I will f**** your mo****.’ The player continued to systematically curse at the male participant, especially targeting family values and using derogatory language towards the mother figure

Image 4. An example of cyber violence involving threats and insults faced by the male participant



As seen in Image-4, the opponent using the nickname ‘holyquinn’ made a statement ‘I’ll kill your sl*** mot****’ in reaction to the good game performance of the male participant using the nickname ‘xxDarkinAlix.’ This statement includes insults to the participant’s mother and threats directed towards their close ones.

Image 5. Cyber Violence Cascade



Image 6. Cyber Violence Cascade

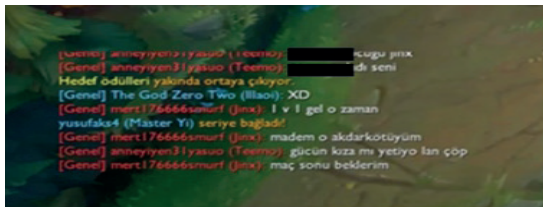
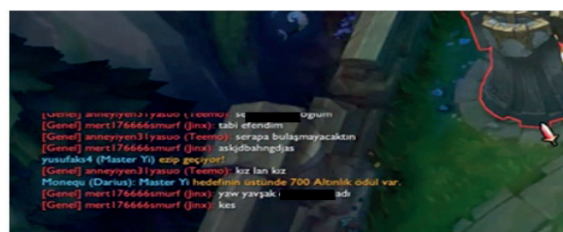
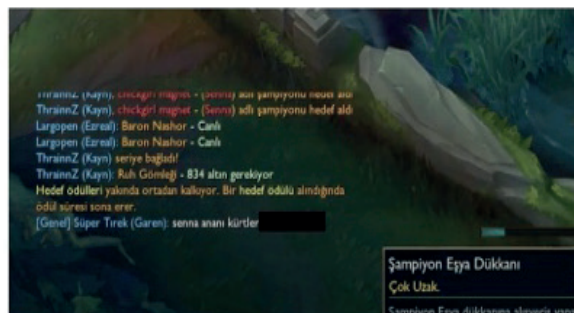


Image 7. Cyber Violence Cascade



As seen in Image-5, Image-6, and Image-7, a user named 'yasuo' engaged in profanity towards another player who identified their gender as a female in the game, due to a move made by another player. The user with the username '***yasuo' continued the cascade by using derogatory language to protect the individual. Another user, 'mert17', also responded with profanity towards the user '*** Yasuo.' This situation highlights the cycle of violence.

Image 8. Racist/discriminatory approach towards the female participant



As seen in Image-8, due to the poor game performance of the female participant, a teammate using the nickname 'Süper Tirek' made racist remarks, saying 'Senna did Kurds f*** your mother.' This profanity is both an

attack on the female participant and a specific ethnic group.

Image 9. In-game censored discourse and racist/discriminatory nickname usage



As seen in Image-9, the statement "look at the f*** place" made by the player using the nickname 'KürtTerbiyecisi4' (KurdishSlayer4) was censored by the game system. In this context, it was observed that certain profanity and insult expressions frequently used by the in-game artificial intelligence were automatically censored. At this point, researchers could not determine the exact meaning of the expression, but it is presumed to be a sexist profanity. In the same visual, it was identified that the player using profanity in their nickname included derogatory references to a specific ethnicity.

Image 10. Flirty approach towards female participant in the game



As observed in Image-10, the player using the nickname 'mother ea***1yasuo' persistently asked questions aimed at determining the age of the participant based on the participant's nickname 'Sihirli Hande.' Some of the questions were like "How old are you?" and "Can we be in a relationship?" followed by making persistent attempts to engage in conversation and eventually proposing to meet. In the interview with the female participant, it was noted that she felt uncomfortable due to the behavior she experienced based on her gender and expressed that she had been subjected to multiple friendship proposals on digital gaming platforms in general.

Table 1. General act of in-game cyber violence

Cyber Violence Types	Number of Applications of the Relevant Type
Swearing	53
Threatening	3
Racist Approach	3
Flirtatious Approach	5
Insult	13
Provocation	3
Swearing Towards Gameplay	4
In-Game Censored Swearing	7

In the examined games, there were a total of 35 players, and in the acts of cyberbullying conducted in the chat section, a total of 53 instances of profanity, 13 instances of insults, 3 instances of racist/discriminatory approaches, 3 instances of threat statements, 7 phrases automatically censored by the gaming platform, 4 in-game complaints containing profanity, 1 flirtatious approach, and 3 instances of profanity aimed at provoking the opposing player were identified

6. DISCUSSION

The evolution of digital games has gained momentum in individuals' lives, paralleling the advancement of new media technologies. Games played for various reasons such as socialization, learning, and leisure have undergone a profound transformation in line with the process of digitization. This transformation is not only observed in the format of games but also in the style of gameplay. The progress of technology is a significant factor that has economically propelled digital games, turning them into an influential global industry. These games have evolved beyond being mere entertainment tools, becoming a sector with significant economic potential. However, with this growth, one of the encountered challenges is the rise of cyberbullying. The expansion of the internet has broadened the player network of digital games. In this context, games with high player counts, such as League of Legends (LoL), with 70 million

players worldwide, have become environments where cyberbullying is frequently observed. The expansion of the player network has increased in-game communication and interaction but unfortunately has also brought along negative behaviors (Martin, 2011).

The playing habits of players within the research group in the game League of Legends can vary over time or depending on the attitudes of teammates. However, there is a general framework of gameplay practices that emerges from the beginning of the game. Players need to be in constant communication from champion selection onwards because success in the game, being a team game, relies on making correct decisions together as a team. Players usually prefer to choose the regions and champions they are best at. Therefore, when multiple players in the same team want the same thing, sometimes insults and profanity can emerge. (Hinduja, 2016)

However, it has been observed that the practice of trying to suppress such negative expressions in an uncivilized manner without attempting to resolve issues through discussion is now an unacceptable behavior. Using threatening expressions and profanity, such as stating an intention to intentionally feed the opponent, is a situation not tolerated by both players and game developers. A significant factor in this situation is the increased visibility of female players. The gaming community has become increasingly less accepting of gender discrimination and negative behaviors. Additionally, the category labeled "swearing during gameplay" in the existing table (Table-1) is evaluated in the context of players expressing frustration with the characteristics of the characters they play and their individual failures within the game. Therefore, it has been concluded that not every swear word expressed in the game can be considered within the scope of cyberbullying. After all, cyberbullying involves violent behaviors carried out through digital platforms against the well-being of an individual or a group.

According to the findings identified in the research, it has been observed that players most frequently engage in profanity and insults

towards their teammates and the opposing team. Additionally, these expressions often revolve around family values and the mother figure. Players have even used severe profanity towards the producer of the game under investigation. In addition to insults and profanity, certain users were identified with racist terms in their nicknames, and expressions of profanity and derogation towards a specific race were also observed.

Within the game, the female participant has been subjected to cyberbullying more than the male participant. Particularly, expressions reflecting a sexist perspective towards the female participant have been observed in the game. These expressions include profanity, insults, and flirtatious approaches. In contrast, it was observed that players who were uncomfortable with expressions directed towards the female participant and defended her against other players also engaged in cyberbullying containing insults and profanity towards other players. At this point, it was observed that cyberbullying actions continued in a cascade, and players took preventive action against cyberbullying with cyberbullying. When examined psychologically, these behaviors stem from the fact that aggression can be easily applied not only physically but also in digital environments, as the player does not face a physical reaction and can express themselves more comfortably within the game. Additionally, although the participants are adult university students, they have expressed that the cyberbullying they experience disturbs them psychologically. Based on this, it is highly dangerous for children, especially within vulnerable groups, to be exposed to cyberbullying actions that can have similar or even more destructive effects while playing this game.

Legally, it is possible to consider expressions of insult as a violation of personality rights. However, it cannot be said that the material elements of the crime of insult regulated within the scope of, for example, the Turkish Penal Code are accepted for every offensive expression and profanity. Indeed, some offensive expressions and profanities may not align with the

definition of the crime of insult. Additionally, cyberbullying actions carried out through digital games that include the element of anonymity create a significant problem in terms of proving the violation and the commission of the crime from a legal perspective. In this context, players can easily carry out violent actions through digital platforms due to the lack of deterrence corresponding to their actions in the physical world.

As observed in the research, especially the free and easily downloadable nature of the game facilitates its accessibility to players of all kinds. While this easy access makes it possible for the game to reach players of all kinds, it also creates a suitable environment for the applicability of cyberbullying. The rapidly growing popularity of digital games and their easy accessibility have expanded player networks, thereby providing a fertile ground for the spread of cyberbullying. Especially in games with a high number of players, intra-team conflicts and negative behaviors can be more common.

The general tendency of players to want to choose the regions where they excel and their preferred champions can lead to various preference disputes and conflicts that can result in cyberbullying. With the widespread availability of free games, the player base accessing these games has increased, bringing together players with different skills and experience levels in the same gaming environment. This situation has increased the potential for conflict and tension, contributing to the emergence of cyberbullying. In conclusion, the free and easily accessible nature of games that appeal to broad audiences can be an effective factor in the spread of cyberbullying. The potential for disagreements and conflicts among players to become triggers for cyberbullying underscores the responsibility of the digital gaming industry to address these issues and promote respectful communication among players.

7. CONCLUSION

As a result, the research conducted on the League of Legends (LoL) game revealed that the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying exhibited by players were swearing, insults, and derogatory remarks. Behaviors related to cyberbullying, such as the continuation of these actions in the physical environment or behaviors leading to suicide, were not detected. In terms of gender, the rate and form of cyberbullying varied. In this context, it was observed that female participants received the most flirtatious offers within the game. Additionally, acts of cyberbullying within the game included actions that led to the exclusion of participants from the game.

Acts of cyberbullying experienced in digital games, particularly given the anonymity in which they occur, pose a danger, especially for young individuals with an age range between 13 and 25. Cyberbullying in digital games is facilitated by the anonymity, as well as spatial and temporal differences, making the perpetration of violent actions easier. Cyberbullying in digital games can lead to anxiety, stress, and a decrease in self-esteem, which are not less destructive than physical violence.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

In light of all this data, to address this global issue, increasing the number of conscious users who can use digital platforms wisely and effectively, are aware of what they need to do to protect their data shared on platforms, and support the implementation of legal regulations and sanctions will contribute to ensuring data security or minimizing the problems when applied. Besides media literacy, the necessity of introducing digital literacy for personal data in the digital environment and raising awareness and consciousness through education from an early age emerge as important concepts. Information on what should and should not be done to protect personal data on different platforms, general knowledge about data security, and education should be provided through collaboration with the private sector, non-governmental organizations, print and visual media, universities, and schools at

all levels. Personal data breaches can have significant material and spiritual effects on individuals and, at times, can be used as a means to inflict psychological traumas by serving as a tool for violent acts.

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