Spectators' perceptions of esports tourism

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to identify how the concept of "eSports tourism", which combines the concepts of "eSports" and "tourism," is conceptualized through metaphors by participants of this form of tourism. To achieve this, a phenomenological research design was preferred as a qualitative research method. A total of 656 individuals (n=656; 594 males and 62 females) who had participated in eSports tourism at least once were reached. Participants from various gaming platforms and communities were asked to complete a semi-structured form containing the expression "eSports tourism is like... because...". The metaphors obtained were coded using MaxQDA 2020 software and categorized into six main themes. The findings reveal that eSports tourism is most commonly associated with the themes of "Technology" (29.3%) and "Entertainment" (26.2%). It was determined that the vast majority of participants were male (90.54%) and that they had typically participated in eSports tourism once (67.37%). The most preferred game types were found to be First Person Shooter (FPS) and Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA). It was concluded that eSports tourism, while based on technological infrastructure, offers an entertainment-oriented experience, and also carries cultural and social dimensions.

KEYWORDS

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports are an important socialization factor that fulfills many socially beneficial functions, supports social connections and creates activity patterns for people of different age groups to stay healthy and fit (Tomecka, 2017). Sports are an activity that has existed since the history of humanity and when we look at this history, it is seen that the first sports performed were generally for people to defend or attack in order to protect themselves. In later periods, sports (horse riding, skiing, sailing, sledging, etc.) were performed for transportation and transportation purposes. Later, as people were able to spare free time for themselves, individual sports and team sports began to become widespread (Bayraktar, 2003). We can see that changes have occurred in sports in parallel with the social changes experienced in our age.

The intellectual activity of sports, "eSports", which increasingly carries social meaning both locally and globally, is a relatively new phenomenon and has taken its place as one of the usual activities in the daily lives of especially the Y and Z generations (Tomecka, 2017; Menteş & Saygın, 2019). The activities carried out within the framework of eSports and the mobility of relocation within this scope prove that eSports can be considered a touristic activity (Erdoğan et al., 2018). When viewed from the perspective of sports tourism, eSports is seen to be important in the context of both the audience and the athletes. In addition, as we approach the present day, the importance of eSports is increasing in the context of the increasing demand for digitally played games and especially the contribution of the new generation of young people to sports tourism (Bulut et al., 2021).

eSports is a new sports branch that includes entertainment, attracts the attention of especially the new generation, prepares the ground for them to socialize, includes competitive elements and enables the use of new communication technologies. eSports does not have a centralized structure. The fact that people in different locations in the world can play games via the internet just by sitting at home makes eSports attractive. The same applies to companies interested in eSports. These companies are located in different parts of the world, provide employment opportunities in that country and have the opportunity to expand their borders without being dependent on a single place (Akgöl, 2019).

The aim of this research is to identify how the concept of "eSports tourism", which combines the concepts of "eSports" and "tourism," is conceptualized through metaphors by participants of this form of tourism.

1.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.1. eSports

"Sports" is a cultural activity area in which people voluntarily interact with other people in order to develop and train skills that have cultural significance and to compare themselves with other people in terms of these skills according to generally accepted rules and without intentionally harming anyone. As our value system changes, for example due to technological advancement, it should be expected that the activities we will accept as sports disciplines will also change (Wagner, 2006). Activities defined as sports have also come to their current positions through some changes and transformations. "Traditional sports" are sports that have come from the past to the present, have been lost or are being kept alive. "Modern sports" are sports that are specific to the west and feed on traditional sports (Karahüseyinoğlu, 2008). The emergence of eSports can be interpreted as a logical and irreversible result of the transition from industrial society to today's information and communication-based society (Wagner, 2006).

eSports is a direct competition between human players on digital platforms using various devices using appropriate video and computer games, within certain rules. In eSports, the comparison of sports performance is determined by the interaction of the targeted operation of input devices in direct response to the gameplay shown, as well as tactical mastery in general gameplay. The reference object for sports activities is video games, whose structure and mode of operation meet the requirements for determining sports performance, do not leave the success of the game largely to chance, and provide a repeatable game framework for comparing performance between players (ESBD, 2023). eSports, which has become more famous with its increasing popularity in society, has begun to become an entertaining activity (Rudolf et al., 2020).

In light of today's technological developments, eSports has developed further over the years and reached a serious audience. The new world form provided by technology and the new generation born into that world have contributed greatly to the growth of eSports. When the diversity in game platforms is combined with the online status, everyone who has a mobile device, console and computer in their hands has become a potential eSports player (Akgöl, 2019).

Like other sports, eSports games have variations in how they are played in-game. eSports are usually organized around specific game genres, such as multiplayer online battle arenas (e.g. League of Legends, Dota 2), first-person shooters (e.g. Counter-Strike: Global Offensive), real-time strategy games (e.g. Starcraft 2), card games (e.g. Hearthstone), or sports games (e.g. FIFA series). Although

such simulations of "traditional" sports are also played as eSports (e.g. FIFA and NHL games), eSports should generally not be perceived as "electronic" versions of "traditional" sports such as football, basketball, or track and field sports (Hamari & Sjöblöm, 2017).

eSports can be defined as a sport that emerged with digitalization, where a person/people on one side of the world can play electronic games (e-games) in a competitive environment and professionally, and meet with others on the other side of the world via the internet, requiring physical and mental effort (Erdoğan et al., 2018; Akgöl, 2019). eSports is a type of sport in which the inputs of players and teams and the output of the eSports system are provided through human-computer interfaces, and the basic aspects of sports are facilitated by electronic systems (Hamari & Sjöblöm, 2017). Table 1 presents a clear comparison between sports and eSports based on three conceptual dimensions.

Table 1. Conceptualizing the difference between sports and eSports

	What space does the athlete occupy?	What sporting equipment do the athletes primarily use?	'Where' do the outcome-defining events happen? (field of play)
eSports	The 'real world'	Human-computer interface (Human input: e.g. mouse, keyboard, EEG, microphone, motion sensors, weight sensors, acceleration sensors. Computer output: e.g. display devices, haptic feedback, audio devices.)	Within electronic systems
Sports	The 'real world'	Human-physical object interface or no sporting equipment required	In the 'real world'

Source: Hamari & Sjöblöm (2017)

According to Table 1, the activities that determine the outcome are coordinated, managed and operated by people in the "real world"; however, the system states that exist within the boundaries of the electronic system rather than the physical and practical conditions in which the player is located ultimately determine the outcome of the game. Given that the people playing occupy the "physical world", but the outcomes that determine the eSports events occur in the "virtual world", eSports athletes always need to use a human-computer interface that connects their bodies to the electronic system or interact in some other way (Hamari & Sjöblöm, 2017). According to the traditional understanding of sports, intellectual activities such as eSports are not considered sports due to the lack of the most important concept, physical activity. It is possible that these two worlds of sports, which are competing today, will merge into a single Virtual Reality Games World in the future. However, there are some conditions that connect sports to eSports. These are: competition, needs

related to the job market, lack of amateurism, systematicity and perfectionism, high viewership, significant financial rewards and doping (Tomecka, 2017).

eSports is also most commonly consumed by watching live broadcasts on the internet. Here, in addition to watching the event, spectators can also participate in social interaction in the environment, for example; through chat features. Since eSports is computer-mediated, viewing is never done without computer-mediated elements, as it requires watching from a computer output such as a video screen or monitor (Hamari & Sjöblöm, 2017). Participants in eSports events are categorized under four different headings (Dilek, 2019):

1. ***Regular Viewers (Participants):*** Watch (Amateur) championships and participate regularly.
2. ***Occasional Viewers (Participants):*** Watch (Amateur) championships and participate sometimes.
3. ***Regular Viewers:*** Watch professional and amateur competitive games regularly.
4. ***Occasional Viewers:*** Watch professional and amateur competitive games occasionally.

When the SWOT analysis of eSports is examined, the following results are reached (Boyd, 2018):

- ***Strong:*** eSports attracts a huge audience and the number of viewers is increasing day by day. The eSports market has boomed in recent years with more and more viewers tuning in to watch their favorite games being played by some of the best gamers in the world. By 2025, there are expected to be over 318 million eSports enthusiasts worldwide, a significant increase from the 215.2 million in 2020. Additionally, some 322.7 million people are forecasted to be occasional viewers of eSports by 2025 (Statista, 2025). eSports is quite widespread because it is a global industry with universal appeal. There is a strong fan interaction. It also attracts the attention of both young viewers and content producers interested in this subject through technology.
- ***Weaknesses:*** Rapid growth also comes with limited infrastructure. Despite the large number of participants playing the game, there is no significant progress in establishing a development path or formal education. This leads to a lack of professional education among eSports athletes. Furthermore, the development of industry regulations regarding oversight is also slow. The main problems arising from this lack of infrastructure are related to travel, health and safety, and defined competition seasons. Furthermore, the lack

of any regulation regarding the ownership of the excessive amount of data produced by the industry leads to players not even being paid. Apart from these, while eSports is booming, there are still some hesitations about what eSports is. This is due to reasons such as lack of education, insufficient sponsorships, and lack of parental knowledge. Again, weaknesses include playing under a different name and cheating such as match-fixing.

- *Opportunities:* Building educational programs around the new status of players as role models and providing clarity on the consequences of unprofessional behavior is seen as a huge opportunity for the entire eSports ecosystem. Additionally, by creating development pathways and structured eSports programs in schools, participation will continue to increase. Having a broader participation base will increase the level of play and continue to improve the fan experience across eSports.

- *Threats:* There are also threats such as the formation of a segmented fan base, the possibility of games losing popularity, encouraging lazy health and fitness habits such as poor nutrition, sitting in a chair, and staring at a computer screen for hours.

There are six types of eSports that are valid today:

1. *MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena):* Here, there are teams of five people competing in two opponents. The aim of the game is to move on three different paths on the map and try to destroy energy sources.

2. *FPS (First Person Shooter):* Here, the player digitally sees the game environment through the eyes of the virtual character and tries to achieve success in the game with skills such as reflexes, quick decision-making and managing his team.

3. *RTS (Real Time Strategy):* In such games, the player establishes an army by managing the resources he has correctly and tries to defeat the opponent's armies.

4. *Fighter:* In this game type, the player chooses a fighter virtual character and fights with his opponents.

5. *Sports:* These game types express the form of traditional sports branches adapted to the virtual world.

6. *MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game):* These games are role-playing games and are played by connecting to any server.

Figure 1. eSports game categories
Source: Adapted from Devecioğlu (2019)

1.1.2. eSports Tourism

Events are an important source of motivation for tourism and are prominently featured in the development and marketing plans of most destinations. The importance and impact of planned events in terms of tourism have been documented and it has been determined that they add importance to the competitiveness of the destination (Getz, 2008). eSports tourism, which has been overlooked for a long time but has become mainstream today, is a popular version of event tourism (Dilek, 2019). Considering the developments in technology from the 2000s to the present and the share of tourism in this, internet-oriented tourism has become even more important and "eSports" has emerged as a phenomenon.

When the concepts of tourism and sports are examined within the framework of free time activities or leisure activities, it is seen that these two concepts are related to each other. Sports is an important activity in tourism activities, and it is an important element when evaluated in terms of those who participate in sports activities in tourism. eSports are games defined as a recreational activity. In this context, eSports can be defined as a leisure activity that attracts an increasing number of people to participate worldwide (Dilek, 2019). According to another definition, eSports tourism is defined as "the interaction between professional teams, spectators and tournament organizers participating in computer game tournaments organized offline in a physical location" (Aktuna, 2017). It is possible to define eSports tourism as a type of tourism based on the realization of electronic

sports activities in a specified country and destination in the form of tournaments, the participation of players, spectators, relevant institutions and organizations in these tournaments, and the use of various touristic activities such as eating, drinking, accommodation and entertainment (Bayram, 2018). eSports events constitute an important point of attraction for the tourism sector as a growing market (Dilek, 2019).
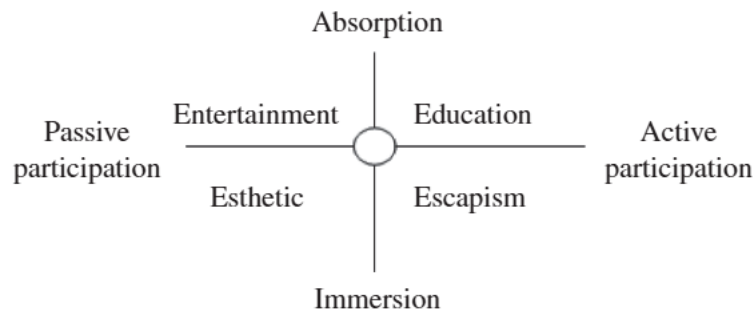

Figure 2. The four dimensions of an experience
Source: Pine & Gilmore (1999)

This theoretical formulation of the 4Es provides a critical lens through which to explore tourism related to eSports events. We can classify experiences into four broad categories based on where they fall on the spectrum of the two dimensions. Experiences that most people think of as entertainment, such as watching television or attending a concert, are experiences in which customers participate more passively than actively; their engagement with the event is likely to be more absorption than immersion. Educational events, such as attending a lecture or taking a ski lesson, often involve more active participation, but tourists are still outside the event rather than immersion. Escape experiences may teach as well as educational events or entertain as entertainment, but they involve greater immersion on the part of the tourist. Taking part in a play, playing in an orchestra, or going down a canyon requires both active participation and immersion. However, if you minimize the active participation of the tourist, the escapist event becomes a fourth type of experience, namely aesthetics. Here, customers or participants are immersed in an activity or environment, but they have little or no influence over it; just like a tourist who only sees a canyon from the edge or a visitor to an art gallery (Funk et al., 2018). According to Figure 2; it is defined as playing computer games competitively (escape), participating in eSports events (aesthetic), learning eSports applications (educational) and watching eSports (entertainment). The "escape" experience area refers to active participation in the eSports event and making it more immersive. It requires the destination to offer special resources such as fishing, ski climbing, mountain biking, recreational vehicle accommodations, camping and playing golf for participation in the activity (Jurowski, 2009).

Aesthetic experience can be defined as a special state of mind that is qualitatively different from everyday experiences (Marković, 2012). Educational experiences are experiences that fall into the active assimilation quadrant. In such experiences, participants actively assimilate experiences as a mental state (Funk et al., 2018). It has been determined that the motivations of tourism participants are closely related to eSports events. This is because the driving forces of travel are the need to escape from daily routines and the workplace, as well as social needs such as meeting other people and experiencing something unique or unusual (Šimková & Holzner, 2014). Features of eSports events, such as allowing friends to play together or make new friends, can create an intention to visit in individuals within the scope of event tourism (Dülgaroğlu, 2023). In this respect, eSports is one of the motivational factors that direct participation in tourism activities based on experience-based activities such as playing or watching games. As in traditional sports organizations, eSports organizations can be the main source of motivation for thousands of people to travel (Dilek, 2019).

eSports events, like other events, create a travel motivation in and of themselves and make it necessary to associate these events with tourism (Yıldırım & Tamer, 2022). Organized eSports events and the broadcasting of these events on Twitch can increase the desire of individuals to travel to the places where the organizations are organized and live these experiences (Dülgaroğlu, 2023). It is suggested that the destination environment also affects the formation and change of the destination visitor image and the utilitarian destination features perceived by tourists (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Therefore, it is suggested that there is a positive relationship between the individual's identity and travel intention. It can be said that the eSports activities that individuals find worth traveling for are the activities performed on the eSports games they like (Dülgaroğlu, 2023).

Events, including eSports matches, are watched worldwide today and reach large audiences (Çetin & Coşkuner, 2021). The duration of stay of visitors participating in tournaments organized for eSports can be up to ten days in a destination. Therefore, when this situation is evaluated in terms of both those who actively do sports and those who come to watch, it becomes an important tourist source for the relevant destination (Bulut et al., 2021). In this context, eSports games stand out as a suitable alternative option in terms of making the destination known, attracting tourists and thus increasing its image (Gül et al., 2017). Hosting eSports events requires meeting certain standards such as infrastructure (such as stadium), technology (such as computers, consoles, cables, large-scale monitors) and facilities (such as broadcasting license). In addition, as a result of the mobility towards the relevant destination, accommodation, food and beverage, travel and transportation services are also active and are constantly developing. As a result, eSports organizations play a vital role in

hosting eSports events because they take on the responsibilities of improving infrastructure and facilities and attracting tourists to reach the standard of hosting eSports events (Çetin & Coşkuner, 2021). Investors who closely follow the developments in eSports have not been idle and have been influenced by the developments and have made investments in eSports-themed accommodation establishments. One of these is the first eSports hotel in Asia, "iHotel", which opened in Taiwan in 2017. The common areas of this hotel, which has a very modern decor, have a dark theme and all have hardwood floors. There is a game area right inside the lobby where two teams of six players can compete against each other. Each room in the hotel has first-lass game machines.

Figure 3. World's first eSports gaming hotel (iHotel)

Later, in 2020, the "E-Zone Cyberspace" accommodation business, which addresses the theme of eSports, was opened in Japan, consisting of nine floors. The first and third floors of the hotel are equipped with various computers and game cages. Guests staying here can play video games with their friends and even host eSports competitions. The fourth and eighth floors of the hotel have guest rooms with computers that contain all the games.

Figure 4. First hotel in Japan dedicated to eSports (e-Zone Cyberspace)

1.1.3. Related Research

Dülgaroğlu (2023) predicts that eSports events will be among the new trends in tourism. In this context, he aimed to express his opinion on the effects of eSports events on the tourism sector through a systematic literature review. As a result of the study, it was concluded that eSports activities may have positive effects on the tourism sector.

Leon et al. (2022) aimed to recognize the potential of eSports as an alternative to diversifying tourism activities in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. In the study, an online survey was applied to 384 participants who participated in eSports events for six months. At the end of the study, it was determined that the participants had a high potential to revisit the city in the future and that eSports was a satisfactory experience to integrate into the city's tourism opportunities.

Thompson et al. (2022) stated that they claimed that eSports has the potential to transform into a new tourism sub-sector in their study. This scope aimed to determine which online and experiential factors would influence eSports players and viewers to participate in physical events. The study determined that antecedents such as team loyalty, personal harmony and event image would encourage participation. In addition, the importance of friendship and social interactive experiences in events was emphasized. Finally, it was determined that community socialization played an important role in intentions to participate in eSports events.

Yıldırım & Tamer (2022) to examine the opinions of eSports viewers on attending eSports events. The survey technique was used in the study and a survey was administered to 397 viewers.

As a result of the research; it was determined that the majority of the participants intended to attend eSports events and had a high opportunity to visit other touristic places in the destination.

Zhang et al. (2022) aimed to discover why eSports tourists have impulsive behaviors in the eSports tourism process. In the study, based on arousal theory, a model of the mechanisms affecting the impulsive behavior was created in order to investigate how physical and psychological environmental stimuli affect tourists' impulsive behavior from an environmental psychology perspective. 562 participants from China participated in the study via an online survey. According to the study; it was concluded that the information system success model affects arousal in terms of system quality and human stimuli, tourists' motivation for eSports tourism, group honor concerns and identities in the Chinese context also positively affect arousal, and arousal has a mediating effect between environmental stimuli (except for information quality) and impulsive behavior. The study innovatively suggests that physical and psychological elements of environmental stimuli can significantly affect arousal levels and thus affect impulsive behavior in eSports tourism. In addition, suggestions are presented in the conclusion section for organizers of eSports tournaments, such as adjusting environmental stimuli to achieve optimal arousal levels.

Aktuna & Şimşek (2021) aimed to reveal the relationship between the pandemic and eSports in their study. As a result of the study, it was predicted that eSports tournaments to be held in Turkey would make positive contributions to the image of the country, increase the variety of touristic products of our country, and thus tourism activities could be spread throughout the year.

Bulut et al. (2021) aimed to evaluate eSports within the scope of sports tourism in their study. The study was examined with document analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods. As a result of the study; it was stated that athletes and spectators participating in eSports tournaments were evaluated as tourists in the destination they were in and that these tournaments contributed positively to the image of the countries.

Çetin & Coşkuner (2021) aimed to examine and introduce the concept of eSports, which has recently emerged as a new tourism trend, through technology and computers, which are the output of the 21st century. As a result of the study, it was suggested that various organizations could be organized in our big cities to attract eSports tourists and thus gain a competitive advantage against other countries. It was also predicted that the country's income could increase in this way. Moreover, Pirci & Dalgıç (2021) aimed to reveal the relationship between eSports and tourism by obtaining the opinions of 33 organizers and 32 eSports participants in their study. The data obtained in the research

was evaluated with the descriptive analysis method. As a result of the evaluation, it was determined that eSports events would increase tourism activities. They also suggested that various supports should be provided to eSports among their suggestions.

Ferri et al. (2020) aimed to analyze the touristic impact of an eSports event, the "Iberian Cup 2019". The sample of the study was 390 participants who participated in the cup held in Barcelona and a survey was applied to analyze sports events. As a result of the research, it was determined that the participants were satisfied with the event and were motivated to visit again. It was also determined that participants who engaged in physical activity at the events made more positive evaluations than tourists who did not. Kim et al. (2020) aimed to examine the eSports industry by analyzing the existing literature, sector and destination reports, and current information on eSports. As a result of the study, it was determined that the growth of eSports and related events is important for the development of the destination, and the economic impact of eSports is also important for a destination.

In his study, Dilek (2019) examined the relationship between eSports and tourism by examining eSports events within the tourism paradigm. At the end of the study, it was determined that eSports events are a growing market and constitute an important attraction point for the tourism sector. Aktuna (2017) conducted a study in order to evaluate eSports tourism as a new concept and to reveal the potential of eSports tourism. As a result of the study, it was concluded that eSports tourism should be examined as a new title.

Agius (2015) investigates how the eSports industry operates, the similarities it shares with the tourism industry, and the evaluation of eSports events as a niche tourist attraction. The study used survey and interview methods. As a result of the study, it was observed that interest in eSports events has increased, these events will most likely continue to attract attention, there is an increase in the number of visitors, and tourists have a high potential to visit other places of interest in a country hosting an eSports event. In addition, the results show that eSports can be seen as a niche tourism attraction and that with the great interest shown in this sector, it can become a very profitable sector for tourism industries.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design and Participants

In this study, metaphor analysis—a qualitative research technique—was used to examine participants' perceptions of the concept of tourism. The aim of phenomenological research is to

describe the world experienced by the participants in order to discover the common meanings underlying the given phenomenon. In phenomenology, it is emphasized that there is a connection between the people who experience the phenomenon and the phenomenon, and the starting point of phenomenology is the phenomena themselves (Kocabıyık, 2015). The phenomenological design focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding (Ekici & Akdeniz, 2018). The participants of this study were people who had participated in eSports tourism events at least once (n=656; 594 males and 62 females).

2.2. Instruments and Procedures

Within the scope of the research, people who had participated in eSports tourism events at least once were asked to fill out a semi-structured form that included the statement "eSports tourism is like ………. because ………" The form, which was shared on platforms such as Steam Communities and Google Forms, was actively shared between 25.07.2022 and 25.07.2024, and a total of 984 participations were detected. Of the 984 forms (excluding those that were missing/erroneous), 656 were considered valid and examined within the scope of the study. Regarding the data collection process of the research, permission was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University of the Republic of Turkey with the decision dated 20.07.2022, 10th session and numbered 10.02.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data obtained with the MaxQDA 2020 program was coded and divided into various themes. Expert opinion was consulted during the validity and reliability testing phase. The obtained data was shared with two experts and they were asked to include the metaphors in conceptual categories so that no metaphor was left out. The reliability rate calculated with the formula of Miles & Huberman (1994) "Reliability = Consensus/Consensus + Disagreement x 100" was 98%. The obtained rate shows that the research is reliable in terms of consistency.

3. RESULTS

The majority of the participants in the study were male (90.54%), and the majority of them participated in eSports tourism once (67.37%). It was also determined that the preferred eSports genres of the participants were First Person Shooter (FPS) (52.74) and Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (37.49%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants

	Variables	n	%
Gender	Male	594	90,54
	Female	62	9,45
Number of participations in eSports tourism	1 time	442	67,37
	2 times	181	27,59
	3 or more times	33	5,03
Preferred eSports type	FPS	346	52,74
	RTS	13	1,98
	Fighter	4	0,6
	Sports	43	6,55
	MMORPG	4	0,6
	MOBA	246	37,49

Note. *FPS (First Person Shooter); RTS (Real Time Strategy); MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game); MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena)*

A total of 656 metaphors were presented to evaluate the perceptions of eSports spectators towards the concept of "eSports Tourism". These metaphors were classified into six themes as "Economic, Art, Nature, Culture, Entertainment and Technology" (Table 3). The distribution of the obtained metaphors according to themes is given in Figure 5.

Table 3. Metaphors expressed by eSports spectators regarding the concept of "eSports Tourism"

| Metaphor Theme	Number of Metaphors	Example Metaphor
Economic	29	**P342:** *"eSports tourism is like inflation because it has a constantly increasing value."*
Art	57	**P112:** *"eSports tourism is like an instrument because each competitor combines their own skills with others to create a symphony."*
Nature	87	**P27:** *"eSports tourism is like a forest because there is so much to discover."*
Culture	119	**P612:** *"eSports tourism is like a mythological epic because there is a heroic story in every step."*
Entertainment	172	**P221:** *"eSports tourism is like a science fiction movie because new worlds are created."*
Technology	192	**P501:** *"eSports tourism is like a live broadcast in a virtual world because every event is instant and live."*
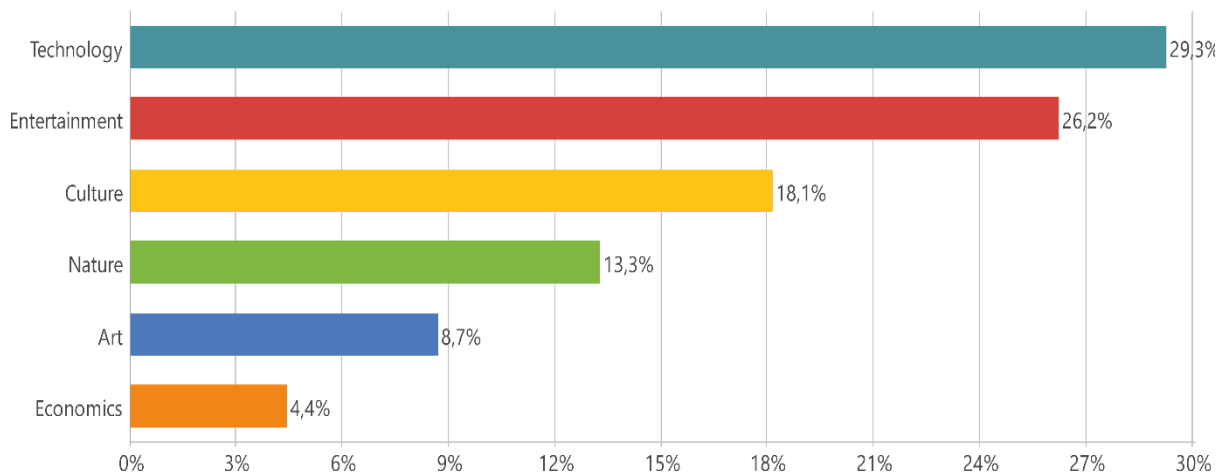
Figure 5. Distribution of Themes
Source: Created by the authors from research data

It is seen that the theme with the most code is the "technology" theme with 29.3%, followed by the "entertainment" theme with 26.2%. It was determined that the theme with the least code is the "economic" theme with 4.4%.

4. DISCUSSION

The spread of digitalization along with the developments in technology has seriously affected the games and sports sector. The emergence of the concept of eSports as games have become more competitive and professional steps have led to the emergence of the concept of eSports (Akgöl, 2019). eSports is professional and competitive video gaming that has grown very rapidly with multiplayer video game competitions, fans coming to stadiums to watch live events, and millions of people following them on streaming platforms (Kösen et al., 2023). Like organized sports organizations, eSports organizations can also be the primary source of motivation for thousands of people to organize touristic trips in line with their own followers. Moreover, when the relevant statistics are examined, it is possible to say that this development has great potential. Considering this situation, it is considered a necessity in terms of developing tourism literature to examine the mobility created within the scope of eSports as a tourism paradigm and to further develop research on eSports tourism (Erdoğan et al., 2018). eSports tourism, which is considered as a current type of tourism, is a concept that needs to be examined in detail. eSports tourism is especially important in terms of diversifying tourism, extending the season, and ensuring regional equality. eSports tourism can be seen as a combination of both sports tourism and congress tourism due to its structure. Therefore, it stands out as an alternative tourism type that can contribute to tourism as much as these two types of tourism, or perhaps even more. In this context, research on those who participate in this

type of tourism or intend to participate will also make great contributions to the development of this type of tourism (Bayram, 2018).

Within the scope of the research, it was tried to reveal the dynamics of eSports tourism, which is a new type of tourism, by examining how eSports tourism is perceived by the participants. In the light of the findings obtained; it is seen that eSports tourism offers a structure blended with technology, entertainment and culture and stands out as an innovative type of tourism. The metaphors created by the participants reveal that eSports tourism is not only a digital activity, but also a phenomenon with aesthetic, cultural and social meanings. In particular, it was determined that the themes of "technology" and "entertainment" were the most prominent in the participants' perceptions of eSports tourism. This shows that eSports events offer technological innovations and an entertaining experience to the participants. In addition, it is revealed that eSports tourism carries meanings related to culture, art and nature.

The fact that the majority of the individuals participating in the study were male and their participation in eSports tourism was generally limited to one time shows that regular participation in this area is not yet sufficiently established. The fact that the most preferred game types are competitive First Person Shooter and Multiplayer Online Battle Arena games shows that this type of tourism is closely related to popular game types.

eSports tourism, a rapidly growing field shaped by the influence of modern technology and digitalization, is considered not only an entertainment platform but also a tool for economic and cultural change. Organizing such events at an international level increases the awareness of local destinations and also increases touristic mobility. For example; in cities where eSports events are organized, participants benefit from services such as accommodation, food and beverage, and transportation, which significantly increases tourism revenues. At the same time, strengthening the cultural and social dimensions of these events contributes to the enrichment of destinations not only economically but also culturally.

In order for eSports tourism to grow sustainably, infrastructure and technological investments must first be increased. In addition, it is important to increase educational activities and organize awareness campaigns so that eSports tourism can reach wider audiences. While developing eSports education programs for young people increases human resources in this area, awareness-raising activities for families will strengthen the perception that eSports is not only a means of entertainment but also a career opportunity. In addition, eSports tourism can contribute to tourism remaining

vibrant throughout the year by reducing seasonal dependency. Especially eSports events to be organized in the winter months or off-season periods can enable destinations to attract tourists throughout the year.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, eSports tourism has great potential as an innovative and rapidly growing branch of modern tourism. By taking advantage of the opportunities offered by technology, this area can make significant contributions both economically and culturally. In order to develop eSports tourism more effectively, it is necessary to focus on infrastructure investments, educational programs and innovative technologies. These approaches can transform eSports tourism from being just a means of entertainment to an internationally recognized tourism alternative.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

FUNDING

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