“Stand with me, brothers and sisters”

A quantitative content analysis of
League of Legends World Championships,
based on the theory of brand community

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Abstract

”Stand with me, brothers and sisters”

The purpose of this research was to see at which extent the game League of Legends, during the world championship, could be seen as a brand community.

I have used a quantitative content analysis where the variables that were measured consisted of the elements from the theory of brand community. The elements were (1) consciousness of kind, (2) rituals and traditions, (3) moral responsibility.

I used the following research issues:

• What physical evidence is there to support that the League of Legends scene is evolving?

• What qualitative, visual changes have been made over the years (in League of Legends world championship finals)?

• At what frequency does the elements of Brand Community, as an amount of mentions by the commentators, occur in League of Legends (E-sport, world championship finals)?

My findings suggest that the League of Legends E-sport scene is a brand community that is evolving; according to the set criteria’s for a brand community; and that the world championship can be seen as a brand fest, a gathering of a brand community.
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1. Introduction and Background

Electronic Sports, or **E-Sport**, as a phenomenon is relatively new and extremely young compared to other sports. League of Legends, a MOAB (Multiplayer Online BattleArena) game and the core of this essay, was released in 2009. In 2011 League of Legends had 11.5 million active players a month, the latest data from the creators of the game, Riot Games Inc., tells us that as of 2017 there are 81 million active players a month. This speaks for the game being intriguing itself; but since 2011 the world championship is hosted annually by the creators and the growth that this scene has underwent is massive (UnrankedSmurfs, 2018).

With this scene expanding at such a pace and the tournaments becoming bigger and bigger it's clear that a lot of people aren't just interested in playing the game. There is something more to it, and if we talk about League of Legends E-Sport, as through the theory of Brand Community, we can start to pick apart certain elements that would contribute to people feeling an emotional connection to the brand and the feeling of belonging in a community. These elements that a Brand Community is based on is: *consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility* (Muniz Jr, A & O’Guinn, T, 2001:412-432). These elements aren't something concrete that people can relate to, but rather an abstract action that a specific community can relate to, either consciously or subconsciously; and the elements are therefore very open for interpretation. By defining the elements as measurable variables we can see how it has changed over time, and if there is a connection between the increased popularity of the game and the variables that contribute to a brand community.

What is the underlying, subconscious work of one of the most popular games in the world?
1.1. Purpose and Research issues

The purpose of this essay is to research which form the theory of brand community takes on in the League of Legends world championships; and how it evolves, or not, through the years (2011-2017).

- What physical evidence is there to support that the League of Legends scene is evolving?
- What qualitative, visual changes have been made over the years (in League of Legends world championship finals)?
- At what frequency does the elements of Brand Community, as an amount of mentions by the commentators, occur in League of Legends (E-sport, world championship finals)?
2. Earlier research and Theories

The following theories are the foundation to analyze the material in this essay; and what will be used to explain the League of Legends commentating.

2.1. E-sport

As mentioned earlier, E-sport is a phenomenon that is relatively new and the term isn't necessarily well known outside the communities. “The extraordinary global growth of the computer games industry and gaming activities and cultures over the past decade are representative of the speed and character of social and cultural transformation in second modernity. Ongoing sociological investigation of super-abundant range of gaming activities is necessary if we are to understand an increasingly ‘mediatized’ (Thompson, 1995) social reality as it is becoming, as opposed to being blinded to this reality by former ways of thinking… The World Cyber Games (WCG) – a popular international competitive computer gaming competition which has been running since 2000 and continues to grow in popularity each year – is a gaming, computing, media and sports event all at once; familiar in its presentation format but unfamiliar in its content.” (Hutchins, 2008:852).

The League of Legends E-sport scene has become something really big over the years in a very short time period. The first world championship was held in 2011. Since then the world championship is hosted annually by the creators (Riot Games, Inc.) and the growth that this scene has underwent is massive.

For example the audience has gone from a peak of 210.000 viewers at the same time, during the 2011 championship, to a peak of 106.2 million viewers at the same time at the 2017 championship. The prize money has increased from 50.000 USD (2011) to 1.54 million USD (2017) for the winner of the world championship (Wikipedia, 2018).

This states that E-Sport like any other sport isn't just hobby and for amateurs, but a serious career option. With this scene expanding at such a pace and the tournaments becoming bigger and bigger it's interesting to see how the commentating has evolved with it and what it is today. After all, anyone can watch a game, but the commentators are there for the audience to entertain, analyze, inform and tell us what is happening.
E-Sport will henceforth be defined as a competitive computer game, standing out from amateur play since the professionals can make a living out of it. The players will be compared to athletes in each respective sport, with respect and recognition within the given community.

2.2. League of Legends

League of Legends has a few different game modes but the one that is played during the world championship is the one where there are two teams that consist out of five players each. The game has, as of December 2017, a total of 139 different champions/characters. The teams take turns in a draft to pick and ban champions; this is called the “pick and ban-phase”. The goal is to try to counter your opponent while setting together a team composition of champions that synergize with each other. Then the actual game starts, the game can end in either two ways, the first occurs if one team surrenders. The second way is by one team destroying the other teams “Nexus” (core of the base); to do so, the teams have to manipulate resources around the map and turn gold income into items that you can purchase in a shop in each respective base. Items enhances the champions and can give yourself and your team advantages. The players use their individual skill and the skills as a unit to try to defeat their opponents.

What naturally comes along with professional athletes and professional sports teams is advertising and sponsorships which leads us onto commercializing. It’s an important aspect to take note of when analyzing the success and reasons for growth within the E-Sport scene.

2.3. Commercializing and Brand community

Commercializing can be defined in a number of different ways but here there are two different perspectives to take note of, the political economic perspective and the culture studies perspective (Berglez, 2009:48). The economic standpoint takes consumer society as a given fact and that everything is or can be turned into an economical exchange or profit. Commercializing is seen as a marketing economic action or a practice (Berglez, 2009:48-49). There is some criticism towards this idea called “the school of Frankfurt pessimism” which declares that this viewpoint on commercializing would lead to a shallow society with a
population following the stream and moving in one direction, and the content being without any quality depth. This would in turn give great power to the big corporations/producers (Berglez, 2009:56-57).

On the other hand the cultural studies perspective talks for the opposite, and the potential upsides of mainstream. Cultural studies roots its interests in popular culture such as music taste, fashion choices among other things; and sees commercializing as a possibility for identity creation, social interaction and common interests (Berglez, 2009:57-58).

We can apply these definitions on the commentating of League of Legends E-Sport to get a wider understanding of the process and development that has happened over these past years. It's interesting to note the similarities between cultural studies commercializing and brand community. A brand community is defined as a community in the modern consumer society, centered around a brand's products or services. “A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand… Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility.” (Muniz, Jr & O'Guinn. 2001:412). Muniz and O’Guinn compares brand community to being essentially the same thing as consumption communities; communities with common interests gathering around the product such as a farmers market or a Harley Davidson brand fest. The difference they state, is the non-geographical element; while consumption communities emphasizes the act of purchasing, brand communities lay there focus on the common interest in the product/brand and that this does not demand a physical gathering (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:414). The three core and crucial elements that makes up brand communities are as mentioned earlier, consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility.

The most important element is consciousness of kind, it's described as the feeling of “ness” and “Members feel that they “sort of know each other” at some level, even if they have never met.” (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:418). The connection between members is more important than the connection to the brand, this is described as a triangular social constellation; where the link between the members is more important than the brand itself (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:418).

“Rituals and traditions represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community.” (Muniz, Jr &
O’Guinn. 2001:421). Muniz and O’Guinn gives an example of this from their own research where people who drove a Saab would greet another Saab, either by waving or flashing the lights (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:422); but this could also be interpreted as a certain type of speech or use of vocabulary, that I believe to find in the League of Legends E-sport.

Third we have *moral responsibility*, which is defined as “a sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community. This sense of moral responsibility is what produces collective action and contributes to group cohesion… Moral systems can be subtle, and are highly contextualized.” (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:424).

### 2.4. Building Brand Community

James H. McAlexander, John W. Schouten and Harold F. Koeing have researched the concept of brand community using an ethnographical method. They see a brand community from a customer-experiential perspective as a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated. Crucial relationships include those between the customer and the brand, between the customer and the firm, between the customer and the product in use, and among fellow customers (McAlexander, Schouten & Koeing, 2002:38). These researchers extends Muniz and O’Guinns’s view of a brand community; the triangular relationship between a brand and customers, where the connection between customers is just as strong, or even more so, as the relationship between the brand and the customer. The extension here puts a “focal customer” in the center, with a relationship to multiple branches that include the brand, the product, other customers and the marketer (McAlexander, Schouten & Koeing, 2002:39).

Their ethnographical study of a brand fest suggest that: “Brand fests, in essence, provide for geotemporal distillations of a brand community that afford normally dispersed member entities the opportunity for high-context interaction. These conditions prevail for all the types of customer centric relationships that make up a brand community”. They present findings that both support and extend Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) brand community work, especially with respect to their central issues of consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility. But they then expand on the dynamics of geography, social context, temporality, and interlocking communities. (McAlexander, Schouten & Koeing, 2002:41-42).
McAlexander et al explain how they experienced a brand community emerge where the owners Jeep’s that were “quite diverse” came together: “All the characteristics of brand community discussed by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) soon manifested themselves: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. They state that as community members, marketers also contribute to the process of community building by creating the context in which owner interaction occurs. For example, participants shared their driving experiences through ritual storytelling. A conclusion is that marketers may also take an active role in establishing the shared rituals, traditions, and meanings that foster consciousness of kind. (McAlexander, Schouten & Koeing, 2002:42).

2.4.1. About storytelling, tribalism and brand community

Consumption communities thinks of consumption as the key to fellowship; customers or members feel a connection or sense of belonging since they share the same “consumption-values” and habits, which could result in friendship. On the other hand you have brand communities that are non-geographically bond. Mossberg & Johansen (2006) claims that brand communities are mainly created around a brand that has a strong image and an extensive history behind it. The community members have an understanding for the brand and feelings for it, something that gives them belonging with other users and members. They also point out that a lot of qualities found in storytelling are also found within a brand community in which the belonging with the other members, the experiences, the identity and everything that can be mediated about the main product, the service and/or the brand is what creates relevance for the customer. A brand community speaks to multiple of the member’s emotions through one or more forums where members interact with one another. Therefore, a story can be mediated in a positive way through a brand community, and it can be seen as a means of mediate information that influence the customer. A story can attract listeners and viewers regardless of for example gender, age, education and profession. Mossberg & Johansen says: “It is clear if we look at so-called “’massively multiplayer online games’”, for example EverQuest and War Craft. The games are stories and the participants are dedicated in a virtual role-play regardless if they are 40-year old highly educated female or male engineers, or girls and boys in midschool. Here exists a community where the participants communicate with one another, regardless of geographical boundaries, and where there is a common interest, namely a story or game.” (Authors translation; Mossberg & Johansen, 2006:25-26).
Badrinarayana, Sierra & Taute, (2014:853) also points out that online consumption communities, involving millions of online consumers, have been created around massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs). Within these communities, players who share interest in MMORPGs convene, interact, and collaborate with fellow players and achieve game-related outcomes. Badrinarayana et al research suggest that MMORPG communities transcend more facile forms of online or brand communities and demonstrate characteristics that can most aptly be construed as “brand tribalism in the anthropological sense.” (Badrinarayana, Sierra & Taute, 2014:853).

2.5. DreamHack, gamers and the commercializing of a brand community

Bergmark and Olausson researched the subculture of gamers and conducted 13 qualitative interviews with different parties at the big event DreamHack in Sweden (2015). They talk about E-Sport as a billion dollar industry in constant growth and a worldwide phenomena. Although they use E-Sport in a much wider term (including all forms of computer and console gaming), their research stands much relevant for this essay. They take on three different issues: What defines gamers as a subculture?, What makes it that DreamHack can be identified as a brand community?, Where does the gamers of DreamHack stand on the commercializing of events?

They define subculture as a group of people with common interests and values. Brand community is here generally defined as a community gathered around a brand. Their findings suggest that DreamHack can be seen as a brand community on the foundation that the respondents see DreamHack as part of their identity; and they gather around the brand itself (DreamHack). This is further empowered by factors such as the members feeling of obligated respect amongst one another, recurring traditions and the awareness of the members. They also state that this specific brand community differs from the more common term, in that the gathering revolves more around the common interests rather than the brand.

Their findings about attitude towards commercializing shows that the majority of the respondents felt positive about it. The respondents considered sponsors to make a positive
contribution to DreamHack and they showed awareness of the sponsor's contribution of a whole when it came to the expansion of the events (Bergmark and Olausson, 2015:1-59).

If we look at the League of Legends world championship as a brand within League of Legends as a whole, these findings stand highly relevant; as we can apply the theories of brand community.

2.6. From game to e-sport - which factors influence a game to develop into an e-sport?

Fält and Norén have researched what makes a game become an E-sport with focus on three core elements of E-sport: Technology, marketing and culture. The information was gathered at DreamHack winter 2011 and includes informants of various roles such as professional players, commentators and game developers. The study aimed to determine what makes a game become an E-sport by examining common patterns in the responses from interviews with different parties and different aspects. How is that not every game becomes an E-sport, what are the crucial factors?

They conclude that financials is a big factor but not crucial, sponsors with marketing resources can help speed up the pace at which a game becomes an E-sport. But they also found that smaller companies and the players themselves could found a tournament and then attract larger companies and investors. The bigger the tournament, and the larger the prize pool, the more appealing it will be for the audience. The players also preferred sponsors, so they could focus on playing and participating in tournaments, making a career out of it. They also conclude that the game can't have elements of randomness, the game needs to be competitive, with skill deciding who wins.

The result of the study shows that technology, marketing and culture co-operate, remove one element and the theory collapses (Fält and Norén, 2011:1-50).

It's interesting to see how League of Legends have worked about some of these elements to evolve into what it is today; to go from a smaller tournament to million dollar prize world championship.
3. Research method and material

To research the League of Legends E-sport scene I have broken it down to three parts, two secondary and one main. Here I will first explain the two secondary parts and then go through the chosen method and material for the main part.

3.1. The Secondary parts

The first part consists of data and information that I will collect from different websites, facts about prize pool, the size of the audience; and other facts where we can see change over the years. This will also include other elements of entertainment and such, that have been brought forth for the community.

The second secondary part will consist of a qualitative description of what I have observed, visually, during the League of Legends world championship finals, years 2011 to 2017. The material that I have looked at here is described further down in the text; it’s the same material and delimitations as for the main part.

3.2. The Main Method

Studying League of Legends E-sport, I will use a quantitative content analysis method based on the theory of Brand Community. There are certain elements that define Brand Community and establishing at which frequency these element occurs; will perhaps give a deeper understanding of the development that League of Legends E-sport has underwent; and how the scene can be seen as more than just a game.

3.2.1. The method in general

A quantitative content analysis is the common method when approaching a large quantity of data or information that you want to make more easily perspicuous for research (Nilsson, 2010:119). Through specified schemes with criteria’s, established by the research issues, you
turn a content into measurable data, where you either measure the frequency or the volume of the content, or both (Nilsson, 2010:123).

The method itself revolves around certain foundation which Nilsson (2010) states to be: objectivity, systematics, quantity and a manifest content. Objectivity is crucial for the replicability; through a well defined scheme, any researcher should achieve the same results. The analytical approach needs to be defined clearly, systematic; the relevant content has to be measured in a reliable way. The variables in an analyze-scheme needs to be quantifiable, measured in terms of frequency or volume. “Coding of data involves converting observations and responses into scales or measurements. Descriptions of peoples ‘occupations might be converted into occupational class categories, or peoples ‘description of their familiarity with the Internet might be classed as ‘High’, ‘Medium’or ‘Low’ for example.” (Gorard, 2003:29). To limit the possibility of implied or hidden messages, the analyze has to be bound to what can be clearly read out of any observer: a manifest content (Nilsson, 2010:122).

A quantitative method requires a lot of preparatory work, and is marked by the research process following a chronological set of steps; (1) defining the research issue, (2) defining the sample, (3) defining the variables and the values of the variables, (4) constructing a code-scheme, (5) encoding, (6) validating and analyzing the data (Nilsson, 2010:127).

3.2.2. Defining the research issue

The research issues can be divided depending on different characteristics, it can either be descriptive or explanatory; the two approaches can also be combined. The descriptive approach can aim to describe a certain theme or event, but can also be used to describe a comparison, either over time or between two (or more) elements/phenomenon. An explanatory approach uses variables as either dependent or independent; where the variables are either explained by certain conditions (dependent) or what effects does that variables carry (independent) (Nilsson, 2010:128). The research issue for this essay is to measure the elements of Brand Community in League of Legends E-sport, which results in both a descriptive and an explanatory approach. Descriptive in the way that I will be looking for certain elements in the material, and explanatory in the way that these elements can be used to explain League of Legends as more than a game.
3.2.3. Material/Defining the sample

When defining the sample you have to make certain delimitations, which can differ depending on the what is to be researched. There is usually a very large quantity of data that can be analyzed that needs to be delimited to something more precise, for example if you want to analyze a newspaper: is it possible to look at every edition ever made? You may have to define a certain period of time, what parts of the newspaper. This is called the outer delimitations. “The purpose of sampling is to use a relatively small number cases to find out about a much larger number.” (Gorard, 2003:57). It can also be necessary to make content delimitations, where you sort out material that was included but is not relevant (Nilsson, 2010:129-133). Including every broadcast of League of Legends E-sport would give weeks of broadcasting hours, therefore the material is delimited to include the world championships (from year 2011-2017) and further delimited to the finals of every year; this is the outer delimitation. Time is one factor here but I also believe that I will find that these are the moments viewed by the most people; the world championship is a worldwide tournament and the finals our often the most popular since its the two best teams. By only looking at certain part of every world championship you won't get an understanding of the whole picture, but “The main reason that samples are used is to save time and money for the researcher. Sampling is a useful short cut, leading to results that can be almost as accurate as those for a full census of the population being studied but for a fraction of the cost. Most studies are subject to a law of diminishing returns, in that after a certain number of cases/individuals have been involved each successive case is likely to add little to our understanding and do little to change any emerging patterns.” (Gorard, 2003:57).

I am aware that there is a lot other material, like interviews, pre-talk and even events focused on the community that would contribute to this research; but because of accessibility I have chosen to only look at the actual games. The matches count from the second they start till one team wins, excluding the “pick and ban-phase” and any after talk, to make sure every year will be measured in the same way.

The finals are based on a “best out of five” system (except for in 2011 that had a “best out of three”), which results in that there isn't a consistent length of each years finals; therefore I will divide the measured number of the variables (from each year) with the combined amount of minutes form all the games each respective year. The shortest game that I looked at was 21
minutes long, and the longest game was 71 minutes long. So the time definitely varies from year to year and even game to game. The amount of commentators or people in the ”on air team” has also changed over the years, with only 1 person in 2011 and 28 in 2017 (LoLESports, 2018). This makes so that it is not the same people or constellations that commentate every game, over the years. I have looked at a total of 25 games which ads up to 18,42 hours of game time.

3.2.4. Defining the variables and the values of the variables

Defining the variables is essentially defining what is going to be measured, and to do this so precise as possible to eliminate any occurrence of interpretation (objectivity). Here you take into account what aspects of the data stands relevant to the research issues, a variable can have multiple values. “Variables in an analyze-scheme is nothing but tools by which one aims to characterize the content.” (Nilsson, 2010:135). The variables don’t have to cover the whole content, but the values of the variables need to be contained within the variables. This means that some of the content will not be relevant, but the content that is relevant needs to be assigned with a value that matches the variables; which means you need to assign the variables with every possible value before the research process starts (Nilsson, 2010:141-142).

The variables will be contained within the three elements that Brand Community consists of: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, moral responsibility. There is a lot of room for interpretation to what these variables may occur like in the content; I have therefore interpreted/defined these elements and categorized the variables according.

Consciousness of kind is here interpreted as giving the feeling that you belong in the community. The variables will therefore consist of names of players and mentions of team names, just like in any other sport where you can root for a certain team and feel a connection to a certain club, and you can idolize a certain player. To clarify, “player names” does not refer to a players birth name, but rather the chosen alias; just like some artist have stage names; I will measure the amount of mentions, quantitative.

Rituals and traditions are here interpreted as a form of language, with words, terms and names that would have to be explained for someone outside the community. I have chosen to only
include two of these as variables: “Champion names” and “Ability names”. This is motivated by the material being not becoming to big and that there will leave no room for interpretation, as for example strategies and game terms could be. This will also be measured in the amount of mentions.

Since moral responsibility is a “sense of duty” to the community, it could be any number of actions or gestures. I have therefore not assigned any variables under moral responsibility; but rather looked at the material to see how it has evolved over the years; using a qualitative description rather than quantifiable data. The players get better and better over the years and become more and more advanced, and so should the commentating. The commentators need to keep pace with the game, and the duty here would be to give the audience quality commentating that not just anyone could do. The commentators need to be as professional and cunning as the players, in each respective way. I will also be looking to lightly touch on what has been added to the world championship for the community.

This leaves us with the following variables:

- Player names
- Team names
- Champion names
- Names of abilities

### 3.2.5. Constructing a Code-scheme

Following the code-scheme is the systematic order in which you break down the content and categories it. Nilsson (2010) gives the example of first assigning the data with an ID-number then assigning it with the different types of values within the variables. You can also assign a date to the data and a coder-ID if there are multiple persons collecting the data. Since the variables in this essay only can have one value, the important thing is to mark the data with the right year.
4. Analysis and Results

Here I will go through each element of brand community and show the results of the measurements of the variables in graph format and attempt to answer the research issues. First I will go through moral responsibility that include both secondary parts; visual evolution and the expansion. I will then go through the main part that includes consciousness of kind and rituals and traditions.

4.1. Moral Responsibility

Muniz and O'Guinn describes moral responsibility as a “sense of duty towards the community” (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:424), I have interpreted this as a duty the commentators have towards the community; that as the game progress professionally, so should the commentator. Although this haven't been measured in the same way as the other variables have, you can still note big changes in professionalism in a lot of aspects.

4.1.1. The Expansion

League of Legends was first released in 2009, in 2011 the first world championship was held; it was the end of season 1. In season 2, the championship expanded and you could see a lot more Asian teams joining in, with the winning team being from Taiwan. From 2011 to 2012 the prize pool went up from 100.000 USD to 2 million USD; and in the 2017 world championship the prize pool had come up to about 5 million USD.

If we look at the research done by Fält and Norén (2011), their findings suggest that in order for a game to become an E-sport the game can not have elements of randomness and that the larger the prize pool the more appealing it is to the audience. Their findings about elements of randomness in a game suggest that the game developers at Riot Games have actively worked to make League of Legends an E-sport; since they have worked hard over the years to rework champions and items in the game that have had these elements of randomness.
In 2012 Riot Games introduced the *Summoners Cup*, a big trophy (30kg) that is awarded to the winning team of the world championship (LeagueofLegends.wikia, 2018). The trophy is always the same and passed on to the next winning team; like the *Stanley Cup* in the NHL.

In season 3 (2013) Riot Games released the first skin in a series called *championship skins*; a skin is something you can buy in the game to alter a characters and the characters abilities appearance. You buy it using an in-game currency that you have to purchase with actual money. It has no impact on the game other than looks, this *championship skin* – series is available only during the world championship, and each year one new champion gets a skin like this (LeagueofLegends.wikia, 2018). Riot also has another series like this called *victorious skins*, as a reward for player who has achieved a certain rank each respective season.

In season 4 (2014) the band *Imagen Dragons* created a theme song for the world championship called *Warriors*. The song has 129.8 million views on YouTube. In season 5 (2015) the *worlds summoner icons* were introduced; a summoner icon is equivalent to a profile picture, that you use in the game (also purchased). And this specific line of icons was to show the spirit of the world championship. And later they also introduced icons and emotes (when you use it in a game the icon is shown above your character) for every team that participates in the world championship, so that you could show everyone else in the community who you were rooting for.

### 4.1.2. Visual Evolution

One of these aspects that shows the professionalism is the fact that the different kinds of roles for the commentators have been established; in 2011 (first world championship) there were just two people in t-shirts commentating what was happening, in 2017 the “on-air-team” consisted of a total of 22 people. This “on-air-team” was divided into three different subgroups/roles: “Play-by-play commentators”, “Color commentators and analysts” and “Interviewers and Hosts” (LoLESports, 2018). The dress code has gone from very casual t-shirts to very formal suits and shirts, adding a certain style and professionalism to the profession. The scene has also gone from an “all male”-profession to include some women, although there still is a heavy male majority.
aAa vs fnatic - Grand Final Season 1 Championship

(League of Legends 2011 world championship. Rivington ‘Riv’ Bisland III and David ‘Phreak’ Turley.)

SSG vs SKT | Game 1 Grand Finals S7 LoL Worlds 2017 | Samsung Galaxy vs SK Telecom T1 G1

(League of Legends 2017 world championship. James ‘Dash’ Patterson, Chris ‘Papasmithy’ Smith, Joshua ‘Jatt’ Leesman and Isaac ‘Azael’ Cummings-Bentley.)
4.2. Consciousness of Kind

The variables that fell in under this category were *player names* and *team names*, I’ve counted each time a player or team was mentioned and divided the amount of mentions by the number of minutes the matches each year took.

(Graph 1 – Player names per minute)

Here we can see that in *Graph 1* from the first ever world championship to the second one, the number of mentions showed a big increase, and from there it slowly decreased. From 2014 to 2017 we can see that the graph gently oscillate around 7 mentions per minute.

In *Graph 1* we can see a spike in 2012, that could be explained by the E-sport scene being completely new in 2011, so players were not very well known in the community, which changed drastically to the next year, maybe with some sort of over compensation for last year. I believe that this (2012) was an over compensation because we never see a spike as high as 2012 and it is around 2013 that players start to reoccur multiple years and starts to make a name for themselves.
The next graph, *Graph 2*, shows how many times a team was mentioned per minute every year:

*Graph 2 – Team names per minute*

*Graph 2* shows a slow increase over the years except for one dip between the two highest spikes. From 2012 and forward, the graph oscillate around 4 mentions per minute. Interesting to note is that those two spikes had the same team winning both years (SK Telecom T1) and 2014 (the dip) that team (SK Telecom T1) didn't make it to the world championship. This talks for the idea of teams establishing a reputation and making a name for themselves.

In the populations of team you can clearly start to see some crowd favorites. The same team that won during these two high spikes had not participated in any world championship before 2013 and they won again in 2016. That could explain why we see a decrease from 2015 to 2016, this team winning was not really a surprise anymore and it was said that the “SK Telecom have overcome every challenge, they are the undisputed best team in the world! The SKT reign continues…” (Trevor ‘Quickshot’ Henry, 2016). However the final in 2017 had the same two teams competing as in 2016, it was the revanche for the underdogs against the titans; and that can explain why the graph (*Graph 2*) started to increase again.
After seven years of world championships, rivalry has been rooted between teams and reoccurring teams have started to get a large amount of supporters and have become well known in the community.

![Graph 3 – Player names and Team names per minute](image)

*Graph 3* shows both player and team names per minute. The line of player names will almost always indicate a higher value since its two teams and five times more players in each game. The two lines almost follow the same pattern, with increases and decreases in almost the same places. In *Graph 3*, what this could tell us is that when a player is doing something the team is also doing something and vice versa. And the commentators talk about players as individuals and teams as a unit. One thing that we cannot read out from the graphs is when a player or a team that is not actually in the match is mentioned. This is interesting to note because its relatable for people within the community that knows about it, for someone who is just watching and barely got a grasp of the team and player names in the game; other team and player names will be total nonsense.

If we go back to what Muniz and O’Guinn said about *consciousness of kind*, they talked about a form of “we-ness” and “Members feel that they “‘sort of know each other’” at some level, even if they have never met.” (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:418). This can then be described as
people feeling like they “sort of know each other” because they both like the same player or cheer for the same team. Cheering or rooting for the same team can be described as “we-ness” even though you have never met the other person. This leads us to that an increase in both “player names” and “team names” would result in more opportunities for people to get the feeling of “we-ness”; and a decrease would result in less feeling of “we-ness”. Also described as “more” or “less” consciousness of kind.

4.3. Rituals and Traditions

The variables that were measured here were *champion names* and *ability names*.

(Graph 4 – Champion names per minute)

In *Graph 4* we can see that the amount mentions decreased from the first world championship to the second and then pretty much remained the same over the years. If we put the two variables *champion names* and *player names* in the same graph, as in *graph 5*, we can see that the two variables almost exactly mirror one another.

The variable *champion names* also showed something else entirely than what was intended, rather than just being a variable for language within the community it shows the trend of whether a player should be mentioned by name or the character he/she is playing (Champion name). *Champion name* was part of the language that is unique to the community, and though
it still measures what was intended, it stands much in contrast with the variable player names and the two sort of take out one another. That is why we can see that the champion name graph and the player name graph almost exactly mirror one another, as shown in Graph 5. The variable champion names would therefore be better research in another context, where the players that play the "Champions" are not in focus.

(Graph 5 – Player names and Champion names per minute)
This trend can depend on the people commentating, since it can differ from year to year; but it can also be that a certain player is so good at a champion that the two variables almost become synonyms. It also depends entirely on the situation, is it something the player did that was really good or is it something that was unique to the champion.
The second variable that was measured was *ability names* and is shown below in *Graph 6*.

![Graph 6 – Ability names per minute](image)

*We can see in *Graph 6* that the amount of mentions was almost in constant growth/increase except for a big turn in the 2017 world championship.*
We can see in Graph 7 that the 2 variables champion names and ability names have come to meet the same value (about 2 mentions/minute); to give some perspective to just how many mentions this actually is, the following list show the amount of mentions each respective year before it was divided with minutes.

**Champion names:**
- 2011 - 375 mentions
- 2012 - 234 mentions
- 2013 - 142 mentions
- 2014 - 151 mentions
- 2015 - 336 mentions
- 2016 - 359 mentions
- 2017 - 236 mentions
Ability names:

- 2011 - 148 mentions
- 2012 - 249 mentions
- 2013 - 198 mentions
- 2014 - 218 mentions
- 2015 - 409 mentions
- 2016 - 819 mentions
- 2017 - 232 mentions

The reason why the quantity does not follow the same pattern as the graph is because the teams play a best out of five games, meaning that each year can be anywhere from three to five games; and each game can differ in length. The shortest game during all the years was 21 minutes long and the longest game lasted 71 minutes.

These two variables become the meaning by which the commentators communicate with the audience in form of language that is unique to the community. “Rituals and traditions represent vital social processes by which the meaning of the community is reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community.” (Muniz, Jr & O’Guinn. 2001:421). Someone outside the community might figure out that a certain champion name is a champion and that an ability name is an ability, but it is within the community that it gets meaning, and become more than words.

Just like with consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions gets a higher index the more these two variables measure on the graph.

Neither of the two variables measures exceptionally high, even though ability names were in pretty much constant increase before 2017. But considering a game can be up to over an hour long, 2-2,5 mentions per minute becomes a lot of mentions in total. If we put the numbers in the actual quantity instead of the average per minute we can get some perspective; and what this tells us, is that though it may seem like League of Legends E-sport is lacking the element rituals and tradition because of a low average per minute; the actual quantity tells us differently. The graphs does not show all the aspects that need to be taken into account, factors like game length is not shown; and therefore it’s hard to compare it with something.
The same goes for the variables under the category of *consciousness of kind* (Champion and Team names).

I also want to discuss something else that has to do with *moral responsibility* to do, I call it *language responsibility*.

### 4.3.1. Language responsibility

There are currently 139 different champions in the, each with a unique set of four active abilities and one passive ability. This gives us a total of 695 different abilities, each with a unique name; and these names are not necessarily easy. To give some example it can range from “Powerball”, “Charm” and “Ice blast” to something more complex as “H-28G Evolution turret”, “Three talon strike” and “Celestial expansion”. Learning and memorizing all this is a sign of dedication to the game, and for the casters it becomes a dedication towards the community.

*Graph 6* shows the amount of ability mentions per minute. Abilities are used all the time in the game, and the higher the value on the graph the more the commentators use the correct terms. An example of saying an ability in another way than the name is to say the key on the keyboard it is bound to (using the default key bindings that exist in the game: Q, W, E and R). *Graph 6* shows an increase in ability names over the years, except for a small dip 2014 and a larger decrease 2017. Since the graph is mostly increasing, it shows that the commentators have become more and more cunning over the years; and this can be one index, among others, that shows the moral responsibility that the commentators show to the community.

Seen as part of a language within the community, the amount of mentions of the variables under this categories can show at which extent someone outside the community would be able to understand it or not, is the E-sport broadcast exclusively for the community?
5. Discussion and Conclusions

We can see from both the Expansion and Visual Evolution that Riot games have clearly done work to develop both the game and the world championships for the community; this is what I see as the moral responsibility. With all Riot games have added and contributed to, it talks for that League of Legends e-sport is evolving as a brand community. We can even look at the extended version of a brand community that McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) have brought forth; where Riot Games can be seen through the roles of producers/marketers and where League of Legends isn’t only the brand but the product in use. Their research would also suggest that the League of Legends world championship is a brand fest; a gathering of a brand community. But this brand fest stands out since the gathering can also take place online in forums during the broadcasts. It is not geographically bound, which was a requirement for being a brand community and not a consumption community (Mossberg & Johansen, 2006:25, Muniz, Jr & O'Guinn. 2001:412). To further underline that League of Legends e-sport is a brand community, both the game and watching the world championship is free; removing the act of purchase, that is of course if you watch online, tickets for the event costs; but the game is free to play.

If we again look at the research done by Fält and Norén (2011), their findings suggest that in order for a game to become an E-sport the game can not have elements of randomness and that the larger the prize pool the more appealing it is to the audience. But they also found that a game is not entirely dependent on sponsors for the prize pool, there can be crowdfunding/fan contributions too. This becomes a great example of the moral responsibility that the members of the community feel towards one another. A large percent of the League of Legends World Championship prize pool consist of fan contributions, the rest is paid for by the creators, Riot Games (Wikipedia, 2018). By having fan contributions funding a large portion of the prize pool, the community itself have the power to create an even bigger tournament (world championship) for themselves; since a larger prize pool attracts a larger audience (Fält and Norén, 2011:1-50).
5.1. More or less consciousness of kind, more or less rituals and traditions

We can see that the graphs for team names and ability names have increased from the first to the latest world championship, with a few ups and downs on the way. This suggest that the League of Legends E-sport is evolving in the right direction, taking for granted that the right direction is increasing, satisfying and bringing the community closer together.

The two variables that were sort of dysfunctional and did not entirely work as intended, because they sort of worked against one another, were player names and champion names. These variables rather showed a trend, if you should mention a player by name or the champion that he or she is playing. That said, the variables still have meaning to the community and a player or champion name is more than just a name; the name has association and therefore meaning. It clears thing up if we look at an increase/decrease in the variables as either “more or less consciousness of kind” and “more or less rituals and traditions”. Meaning that an increase in both “player names” and “team names” would result in more opportunities for people to get the feeling of “we-ness”; and a decrease would result in less feeling of “we-ness”. Also described as “more” or “less” consciousness of kind. And the same goes for rituals and traditions and the use of “the communities own language”.

From a cultural studies perspective you can view League of legends as a place for identity creation and bring people together (Berglez, 2009:57-58). Badrinarayana, Sierra and Tautes (2014) research on MMORPGs is directly relatable to a MOBA-game as League of Legends. Not only does League of Legends as a game lead to people interacting and cooperating with each other, the world championship brings millions of people together physically. Following Mossberg and Johansen one could compare brand community with the qualities in storytelling: “the belonging with the other members, the experiences, the identity and everything that can be mediated about the main product, the service and/or the brand is what creates relevance for the customer.” (Authors translation; Mossberg & Johansen, 2006:25-26). Another way to put this “relevance” is the elements that you can emphasize that would create meaning and belonging for the community; and in this case it’s the variables, champion names, team names, player names and ability names.
5.2. Summary

The League of Legends E-sport scene definitely have all the elements of a brand community. Even though it's really hard to measure something so subjective as the elements of brand community in a quantitative and objective way, it can be done through well-defined variables; and it's these variables that suggest that the League of Legends World Championship can be seen as a brand community and a brand fest.

Muniz and O'Guinn say that the most important out of the three elements is consciousness of kind (Muniz, Jr & O'Guinn. 2001:418). This is the foundation on which the community is built, even though this is true and a brand community could not exist without the triangular bond of all three elements; the one that stands out the most in my research is moral responsibility. The constant work to professionalize and evolve the game and the scene is what keeps the brand community in a forward motion. This work is done by everyone included in the community, stretching from the creators to the audience.

In conclusion the League of Legends World Championship is a brand community. The community consists of a lot of parties which all work for the evolution of the brand (moral responsibility). The community has elements by which one can identify with and give the feeling of belonging, such elements are players to idolize and teams to root for (consciousness of kind). The community also have a form of own language that gets meaning when used amongst each other, this language consist partly of ability- and champion names (rituals and traditions).

5.3. Future research

There is a lot of aspects that would be interesting to add to this research and also to do the same research but with a lot more variables. There is always the limit of time and resources and therefore this work is left for the future, for anyone to grasp.
5.3.1. Ethnography

As Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) and McAlexander, Schouten and Koeing (2002) have shown, an ethnographical method is an efficient way to research a brand community. The focus of this research lay the focus on the creators and how they produce meaning for the community and in that sense how they “produced brand community”. If the focus is shifted to the community itself I believe that an (online) ethnographical method would be the best way to do it, using qualitative interviews.

5.3.2. Variables

There are a lot of variables that I initially intended to include, but it would be to time consuming for one person so I had to prioritize. The following variables were originally included:

**Consciousness of kind:**

- Time-indication
- “We”
- “You”
- “Our”
- “Audience/crowd”
- “Everyone/everybody”

**Rituals and Traditions:**

- Strategies
- Jungle/top/mid/bot - lane
- Structures in the game
- Monsters in the game
- Items in the game

To briefly explain what I mean by these variables, “We, You, Our, Audience/crowd, Everyone/everybody” is each time the commentators say either of these words. It indicates that the commentators are aware that the audience is there and include them, giving the feeling that we are all watching together as a community. The “time-indication” variable was
intended to stand for when something was referenced for “outside” the game, like when another player or team was mentioned; this would be a measure of something the community had experienced earlier together.

The Rituals and Traditions variables remind a lot of the already existing ones I measured (Champion and Ability names). Just like there is a fixed set of champions with a fixed set of abilities in the game, there is a fixed set of structures, monsters and items; therefore including these for measure would enrich by which extent you can measure the “own form of language” in the community. The same goes for “Jungle/top/mid/bot - lane”, these are locations on the map where the game takes place; you could also include “the river” which is also a location on the map.

Strategies is a little more difficult variable, it can be how a team prioritizes and what they try to accomplish, there are some established tactics that have got a name over the years; that would lead to having to define very specific what can be accounted for as a strategy and then measure each time it is mentioned.

### 5.3.3. Cultural Perspective

The broadcast of the League of Legends world championship is not exclusively in English, the scene is very big in Asia that have their own “on-air-teams”. It would be interesting to do the same analyze as this one on a South Korean broadcast or a Chinese one to compare with this one that is in English. This would research the different stretches of brand community depending on the view on video and computer games in different cultures.

In my research I found that the highest peak of viewers, at the same time, (during the 2017 world championship) on a Chinese broadcast measured up to 104,68 million viewers (ESC, 2018).
5.3.4. **Other Events**

The same research questions can be applied to other tournaments or even the series leading up to the world championship, and it does not have to be limited to only the finals, you can look at a tournament as a whole or divide it up in some other way where you follow one specific teams’ progress.

There is also events that revolves around League of Legends but the actual game is not played, like when members of the cosplay in contests; the members dress up like different champions from the game. You could also include after talk and interviews from games; that was excluded from this research because of the time limit.
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https://www.unrankedsmurfs.com/blog/players-2017
Wikipedia - (2018-01-06)
Graph List

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**Graph 4** – Champion names per minute
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**Graph 6** – Ability names per minute
Graph 7 – Champion names and Ability names per minute
Appendix

Appendix 1: League of Legends 2011 World Championship Game 1 and 2
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMT1kYG4h0&t=215s

Appendix 2: League of Legends 2012 World Championship Game 1
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlyqpRhaoj8&t=11s

Appendix 3: League of Legends 2012 World Championship Game 2
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heMS4Jo9tkY

Appendix 4: League of Legends 2012 World Championship Game 3
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLCfo3LqYJ4

Appendix 5: League of Legends 2012 World Championship Game 4
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lcAj2WMlH8

Appendix 6: League of Legends 2013 World Championship Game 1,2,3
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGRXIAh41IA

Appendix 7: League of Legends 2014 World Championship Game 1,2,3,4
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bY-hTW1W-DU

Appendix 8: League of Legends 2015 World Championship Game 1,2,3,4
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0QRxcEiiHU

Appendix 9: League of Legends 2016 World Championship Game 1
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v_fOssLa1R0w&t=2s

Appendix 10: League of Legends 2016 World Championship Game 2
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64d8W83TSLY

Appendix 11: League of Legends 2016 World Championship Game 3
(2018-01-06) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8RhBVbOLC8
Appendix 12: League of Legends 2016 World Championship Game 4
(2018-01-06)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5Pgdo5OACk

Appendix 13: League of Legends 2016 World Championship Game 5
(2018-01-06)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MohnyO0xv2I

Appendix 14: League of Legends 2017 World Championship Game 1
(2018-01-06)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCz8u9UQq9M&t=2505s

Appendix 15: League of Legends 2017 World Championship Game 2
(2018-01-06)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1prvLZzUk

Appendix 16: League of Legends 2017 World Championship Game 3
(2018-01-06)https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKX-NcOd5xQ