

The Logic of Affective Economics in Philippine Fans' Discursive Articulations in Response to a *League of Legends* Skin Sale

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ABSTRACT

This study has employed a single case study approach to examine how Filipino *League of Legends* (LoL) fans reacted to sale of a skin, or character cosmetic, to raise awareness for the Taal Volcano eruption in 2020. The promotion was posted on Facebook and received over 9,000 reactions. It also received over 1,000 comments, which served as the data source for this study. Following a discourse analysis of relevant comments, the researcher has found that commenters' articulations were underpinned by the logic of affective economics. Responses to the skin promotion either exemplified brand loyalty towards *League of Legends* or expressed the possibility that the game's producers ran a promotion to endear themselves to fans and simultaneously generate profits. As a study that has brought together discourse, fandoms, and affective economics, this article demonstrates how the assumptions of affective economics can inform the discursive articulations that fans make towards media producers. This article hopes to expand scholarly understandings of affective economics, which have hitherto been somewhat neglected in the field of fan studies.

Keywords: affective economics, discourse, fan studies, *League of Legends*

INTRODUCTION

On 12 January 2020, Taal Volcano, located 66 kilometers from the Philippine capital of Manila, erupted. The blast blanketed neighboring regions in volcanic ash, and triggered a mass evacuation of 70,000 people (Reuters Staff 2020). Tremors and explosions continued until 16 January, and authorities only lowered alert levels on 26 January, two weeks after the volcanic activity had started (Colcol 2020). Non-governmental organizations, private citizens, and businesses responded to the calamity by initiating donation drives for those who lost their livelihoods, homes, and loved ones. Moreover, public awareness campaigns to inform other Filipinos about the devastation caused by the eruption and the measures they could take to protect themselves from volcanic ashes (Cabico 2020).

Two days after the eruption, the following image was posted on a Philippine League of Legends (LoL) Facebook page (see Figure 1):



Figure 1: The image accompanying the Facebook post.

Source: Screenshot by the author.

The words "VOLCANIC ERUPTION" are prominently displayed, followed by a list of precautions for protecting oneself from hazardous airborne particles. These include donning an anti-dust mask and goggles, sealing any holes in the home, protecting entire skin with outerwear, and being aware of emergency service contact information.

On the right side is an image of Wukong, one of the *League of Legends*' playable characters, called "Champions." He appears in an alternative appearance or "skin," called "Volcanic Wukong," which is advertised as "available for 1 RP [Riot Points] until 31 January." Normally, *League of Legends* allows players to spend actual currency to purchase Riot Points, which they can then use to buy cosmetic modifications or skins for their champions. The Volcanic Wukong skin was practically given free by League of Legends' creators, since that it typically costs between 60 and 900 RP.

The post went viral, gaining almost 9,000 reactions, with 83% of them being either "Likes" or "Loves," signifying a broadly positive response. The content also received over 10,000 comments, which served as the data source for this article. The articulations are varied, with some commenters simply tagging friends, while others made irrelevant statements, such as advertising a business. This study specifically analyzed comments that responded to *League of Legends*' skin sale to raise awareness of the volcanic eruption. A discourse analysis of this subset of articulations revealed that they were underpinned by the logic of "affective economics" (Jenkins 2006, Hills 2015). The framework refers to media producers' emotional labor to build fan loyalty, which can then be translated into material or financial gains.

The comments analyzed represented two aspects of affective economics. On the one hand, some articulations praised *League of Legends*' producers for initiating a skin sale to raise awareness of the natural calamity. On the other hand, some commenters suggested that the Volcanic Wukong promotion exemplified the leveraging of fans' emotions for profit. Following the prescriptions of van Dijk (2008) and Wodak (2009), the researcher analyzed the comments by examining their connection to their intra and extra-discursive contexts. As such, commenters' articulations were understood in reference to the international nature of *League of Legends*' corporate ownership structure and its previous efforts at emotional labor.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study draws on and contributes to the academic literature on (1) discourse and (2) effective economics by investigating the ways in which emotional economics underpins Filipino League of Legends fans' comments in reaction to the Volcanic Wukong skin sale in 2020.

Discourse

This study applies an approach similar to that found in McGeehan, James, and Burke (2020) and Shirazi (2012). Their studies viewed social media comments as being discursive. As such, the comments examined in this study can be viewed as representing 'ideas, concepts, and categories through which

meaning is given to social and physical phenomena' (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, 175). Discourses' articulations are significant because they shape how individuals interpret reality, influencing how they behave.

Scholars in discourse studies have pointed out that understanding articulations, whether spoken or written, requires a knowledge of the context (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Flowerdew 2017). According to Blommaert (2015), context refers to the "totality of conditions under which discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted" (Blommaert 2015, 251). Wodak (2009) identified different levels of context, dividing them into the intra-textual and extratextual. Van Dijk (2008) emphasized that there is a dialectical relationship between context and discourse. On the one hand, individuals' statements are informed by existing linguistic, political, social, economic, and cultural factors. On the other hand, utterances can shape how reality is perceived and acted upon (Dryzek 2006).

Also significant in the academic literature on discourse is its relationship to power. Dominant discourses are used to maintain existing power relations because they reinforce ideas of normality (Cohen 1993; Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). Foucault (1977) demonstrates this through its differentiation of disciplinary mechanisms in pre-Modern and Modern France. In the pre-modern period, a criminal's body was simply punished. However, the modern period saw the rise of a new discourse on criminality in which convicted offenders were kept secluded in a prison until their sentence expired, or they were deemed sufficiently rehabilitated. As a result of the shifts in discourse, correctional facilities such as prisons were established, and the pre-modern executioner was replaced by modern specialists like wardens, doctors, and psychologists mandated with the duty of rehabilitating the convicts. A new discourse on criminality gained dominance, and this resulted in changes in penal institutions and processes.

Foucault (1977) also emphasizes the dynamic character of discourses, arguing that they might hold dominating positions in one context but not in another. Nevertheless, they are not static, and individuals can include, modify, or eliminate discourses in their regular conversation. For this reason, Foucault (1972) stated that discourses are "fragments of history" (117) since their meanings and significance can shift with each individual articulation.

There are a number of aspects of discourse theory that have had an influence on the underpinnings of the current investigation. First, it was underpinned by the assumption that discourse represents an understanding of reality. While analyzing the comments, the researcher sought discourses that underpinned the articulations and found that the logic of affective economics was significant. Second, as with all manners of discursive articulation, there is a dynamism with individuals highlighting different aspects of discourse in their statements. The findings have demonstrated that although some comments showed the brand loyalty part of effective economics, others emphasized the relationship

between emotional labor and profit development. Finally, the context was relevant in this study, since articulations were interpreted in the environments in which utterances were made. Of particular significance to this study was the international nature of *League of Legends'* corporate operations, and its producers' previous efforts at emotional labor.

Affective Economics and Producer-Fan Relations

This study makes the argument that the articulations in response to the Volcanic Wukong promotion were underpinned by the logic of affective economics. The concept was first discussed by Jenkins (2006), who referred to it as a marketing theory that focuses on the "emotional underpinnings of decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions" (61-62). The framework emphasizes how the media can take advantage of consumers' loyalty to build support for and generate profits from their products. Hills (2015) addressed how fans' emotional attachment to the Veronica Mars television series was mobilized during a crowdfunding effort to generate money for the series' feature film, which was based on the notion of affective economics.

Affective economics emphasizes that media producers need to consider their fandoms' emotional reactions to their actions. Scholars in the field of fan studies have described fandoms as groups of enthusiastic customers. Their enthusiasm stimulates them to engage with one another and even create products related to their product of interest (Fiske 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992). As Jenkins (1992) put it, fans are engaged in "a rich and complex participatory culture" (Jenkins 1992, 23). The work of Hills (2002), for its part, defined *fandoms* as "communities of imagination" that performed for imaginary audiences online. Fans would express their enthusiasm for media, such as television shows, films, celebrities, or video games through the creation of artwork or films that would be featured online through Twitter, YouTube, 8Tracks, DeviantArt, and Tumblr (Busker 2008; Crawford and Rutter 2007; Hemphill et al. 2017; Stein 2017; Zubernis and Larsen 2012).

Fandoms have also been portrayed as united through language. Swales (1990) refers to them as discourse communities. Fans have been described as having their language, sometimes termed "fan talk" (Fiske 1992), which they use when discussing topics relevant to their fandoms. Scholarly works, such as Hobson (1989) and Seiter et al. (1989), remarked that soap opera fans had common reference points that they used when discussing their favorite shows and characters with one another. The discourse of fan communities could also be observed in the intra-fandom debates that occur. For example, Denison (2011) discussed how fans of Japanese anime argued about whether or not it should be acceptable behavior to continue downloading a series online, even if a local television company had already obtained a license to distribute it. Hemphill, Kocurek, and Rao (2017), discussed how video game players would write about their experiences on forums or social media. In so doing, they were

able to engage with fandoms discursively. These interactions were found to augment fans' sense of enjoyment about the cultural product they consumed (Brown 1987).

In terms of affective economics, fans' high levels of engagement with one another make them a powerful force. Media producers need to consider the emotional impacts that their actions may have. Hills (2015) asserted that this has resulted in a compulsion among media producers to engage in emotional labor for their fans, to strengthen their loyalty. Their ultimate goal would be for their products to become what Roberts (2005) refers to as "Lovemarks." The brands that achieve the status of a lovemark are beloved, developing such deep affective bonds that ordinary consumers become fans. Consequently, they gain a productive community of enthusiastic consumers that are emotionally invested in their products.

According to researchers' views on affective economics, media producers' emotional labor might have two distinct but interrelated implications. First, is the building of intense consumer loyalty, which will transform their followers into fans who think highly of them and their products. Corollary to that is the building of an emotional connection that will transform their brands into lovemarks. The second effect is that media producers can leverage their lovemark status into material returns, whether in the form of a more extensive consumer base, mobilizing their fans to contribute to a crowdsourcing campaign, or convincing them to purchase more of their products.

The price reduction of the Volcanic Wukong skin certainly reflects the imperatives of affective economics. *League of Legends'* producers initiated a promotion that exemplified emotional labor, using it to ingratiate themselves and build loyalty among Philippine League fans. The articulations examined in this study reflect ideas from affective economics and represent how emotional labor can be translated into brand loyalty, profits, or both.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a discourse analysis approach in examining the comments responding to the Volcanic Wukong promotion on the *League of Legends* Philippines Facebook fan page. It is crucial to analyze the text of the conversation to see what was really written and what context was utilized to influence what individuals said. Scholars have demonstrated different ways to connect discourse and context (Foucault 1977; van Dijk 2001, 2005). However, this study followed the analytical method of Wodak (2009), who proposed that researchers examine discursive articulations on four levels: 1) the intertextual and interdiscursive, 2) extralinguistic social variables, 3) institutional frames, and 4) broader socio-political and historical environments. The first two levels are discursive focusing on the text itself or related ones. The other two are extra-textual and relate to articulations' broader

environment. As such, the comments in this article are understood based on broader contextual factors.

The data was drawn from the approximately 1,300 comments written in response to the Volcanic Wukong skin promotion. Among them, the researcher had access to only 773 comments, because Facebook users can set their privacy settings so that their comments on public posts cannot be viewed. Data collection occurred on 25 January 2020, one week after the skin sale was published on Facebook. In analyzing the collected qualitative data, the researcher followed the inductive thematic analysis model proposed by Frith and Gleeson (2004). Data was not categorized into a predetermined coding scheme. Instead, categories emerged from existing patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). This approach allowed the discourse analysis to be more authentic, reflecting the ideas underpinning commenters' articulations.

The first step entailed organizing the data from Facebook in tabular form, and identifying comments that had similar content. This made it more convenient for the data to be scrutinized for patterns. Of the 773 comments available to the researcher to view, only 86 were categorized as responses to the emotional labor inherent in the skin sale. The vast majority of articulations were unusable because they exemplified themes and categories not relevant to this study. Examples include commenters who were tagging their friends, asking technical support questions, sharing their in-game names (IGNs) to find available players to join them, or sharing unrelated content. The relatively low proportion of relevant comments indicates that only a minority of commenters responded on Facebook to the emotional labor done by *League of Legends'* producers. However, the relevant comments were found to represent the logic of affective economics.

This study employed data from classified databases or online restricted groups that met the ethical criteria for social science research and adhered to the ethics of informed consent. During the data collection process, the researcher adopted the position of a professional lurker or active viewer, following the prescription of Litchfield et al. (2018). The purpose here was to avoid interacting with other commenters in order to avoid interference with their views. The researcher was aware that the method applied had ethical implications (Kozinets 2013; Beaulieu 2004; Wellman et al. 2001). Even if the comments were publicly available, there are still issues related to obtaining informed consent, ensuring statements are not attributable to avoid reputational harm to them (Franze et al. 2020). To comply with the ethical norms of conducting social science research online, the researcher paraphrased comments rather than directly quoting them in the manuscript, and did not make references that would make the statements traceable. In order to further minimize identification, the researcher did not provide the name of the Facebook page from which the remarks originated.

RELEVANT CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Before examining how comments reflect the logic of affective economics, it is helpful, to begin with, a discussion of the context in which the statements are articulated. A similar study has been made by Wodak (2009), who advises discourse analysts to study the social and institutional contexts in which discourses are entrenched. This study postulates that to clearly understand the responses to the Volcanic Wukong skin auction, one should consider: First, League of Legends' worldwide ownership and distribution, and second, its emotional labor.

League of Legends' International Ownership and Distribution

League of Legends was developed by Riot Games, a small independent American developer, and released in October 2009. It has become one of the world's most popular games (Crecente 2019), with around 100 million unique viewers online at the 2018 World Championships (Pei 2019). Players also refer to the game as "League" or "LoL." It was based on *Defense of the Ancients* (DOTA), a modified game type for *Warcraft III*, developed by Blizzard Entertainment. There are two teams of five players each commanding powerful heroes who are trying to reach the main structure of their opponent's base (Donaldson 2017). *League of Legends* belongs to a relatively new video game category called Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA), and it is currently one of the genre's most prominent titles. In 2019, it had an average of eight million active players competing with one another on any given day (Crecente 2019).

League of Legends' original game development team envisioned a DOTA-type game that was made outside the auspices of Blizzard Entertainment and would follow a free-to-play (F2P) model (Nutt 2014). Unlike other commercial game companies, Riot never asked players to spend money to play *League of Legends*, nor have they followed the pay-to-win model (P2W), where players gain advantages through in-game purchases (Jarrett 2021). According to Crecente (2019), this was one of the keys to *League of Legends'* success. At the time of its release, League of Legends was up against stiff competition from Heroes of Newerth and Dota 2, both of which had comparable concepts and were published by well-known studios. However, League of Legends dominated the market because of its free-to-play model, which made it appealing to players who did not want to spend on new games.

Seeing as how Riot Games cannot benefit from game sales, the company's monetization strategy relies on in-game microtransactions, that are purchases that can be made while playing the game. *League of Legends* entices players to purchase cosmetic modifications, such as skins or player icons. To obtain these, they have to spend Riot Points, which can be purchased using actual currency. This mode of profitmaking allowed Riot's revenue to grow from \$1.29 million in 2009 to \$1.7 billion in 2018.

Riot's financial success was significant enough to attract the interest of Tencent Holdings, a major Chinese internet and gaming company, which purchased 97% of the company in 2011. Tencent Holdings owns the majority ownership in Riot Games, that is based in the United States, and yet this arrangement has remained to this day. *League of Legends'* corporate structure can thus be described as international; involving companies from different countries. The statement becomes even more valid when one considers that Riot has a partnership with Garena, a Singapore-based digital services corporation, to publish and distribute *League of Legends* in Southeast Asia, where the Philippines is located (Lai 2019). The international nature of the game's ownership, production, and distribution are one of the reasons why this article uses the umbrella term 'LoL producers' to refer to the corporate structure behind its operations.

Instead of Riot, the League of Legends distributor in Southeast Asia, Garena has the exclusive right to launch the Volcanic Wukong offer for its Filipino fans. The skin sale was a form of emotional labor intended to build affective capital among *League of Legends* fans in the country. Comments in response to the promotion indicated that the Singaporean company received positive responses from commenters, who expressed gratitude towards Garena directly, rather than to Riot Games. Some even went as far as to try to correct other commenters, who credited Riot for the skin sale rather than Garena. However, Riot was applauded for the skin sale. Its inclusion may have resulted from its reputation for implementing skin sales for various charitable causes in the past. The producers of League of Legends have always deeply engaged in emotional labor, which has garnered them the respect of their fan base.

***League of Legends* Producers' Previous Emotional Labor**

Jarrett (2021) explained that *League of Legends'* freemium model, i.e. the free-to-play model, has been a significant aspect of its emotional labor. His study explored *League of Legends* players' motivations to engage in microtransactions to purchase skins for their characters, and he found an emotive component to their reasoning. The participants in the study expressed that having skins enhances the game experience, however, they also discussed feeling obliged to purchase skins as a form of support or donation to Riot, which was offering *League of Legends* to them for free. Among the takeaways from Jarrett's findings is the centrality of affective economics in the *League of Legends* business model. By not charging for their game, Riot builds loyalty among their players, who feel obliged to reciprocate them for the service they offer. As a result, players are more eager to buy in-game purchases, which translates into revenue for Riot games.

Another relevant point gleaned from Jarrett's (2021) work is that League players are aware of Riot's reliance on microtransactions for generating profits. Consequently, they would also recognize that

League of Legends skin sales provide no immediate financial benefit to Riot or its affiliates, like Garena. It has been claimed that *League of Legends*' producers has been using skin campaigns to increase awareness despite the possible income loss that may result from doing so. One of the commenters who responded to the Volcanic Wukong promotion posted the following image to indicate their awareness of such activities:



Figure 2: An image responding to the skin sale indicating a trend in Riot's activities.

Source: Screenshot by the Author

The image enumerates five of the altruistic activities that *League of Legends* had been associated with in the past. They included raising money to save manatees from extinction in 2010, providing assistance for the victims of the earthquakes and tsunami that hit Fukushima 2011, and generating funds for charities, such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an American organization. All of the cases referenced in the image featured a skin that was put on sale to promote a particular cause. Although they may not have necessarily translated to profits for Riot Games or Garena, skin sales endeared the companies to their fans, as exemplified in the image on the bottom right of Figure 2, calling for "A round of applause for what Riot Game (*sic*) did."

By foregoing potential profits and using their products for good causes, *League of Legends*' producers exemplified another way in affective labor. This reinforced their emotional bond with fans, providing them with justifications to maintain their loyalty to the game. The Volcanic Wukong promotion arguably had a similar effect on Filipino fans, who were aware that the skin sale represented potential financial losses for Riot or Garena.

Not only did the promotion endear *League of Legends* to their fan base in the Philippines, it also became a basis for distinguishing themselves from another fandom. Among the comments analyzed for this study, the researcher found references to the game *Mobile Legends: Bang* (MLBB), and Moonton, the company that developed and published it. Although both *League of Legends* and *Mobile Legends: Bang* are games categorized under the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena genre, their fandoms in the Philippines differentiate themselves from one another.

In comparison to Moonton's public service notice, commenters said that the Volcanic Wukong skin sale posting was far more generous than the latter because it effectively gave away the skin in order to raise awareness about the volcanic eruption. *Mobile Legends: Bang*, for its part, did not have a promotion. Instead, it only provided information on safety precautions. *League of Legends* fans advanced the idea that their game's initiative was more legitimate than *Mobile Legends: Bang*. An example of one of these comments contained a screenshot of Moonton's notice about the tragedy, which stated:

"Hi MLBB players. We're sorry to hear the eruption of the Taal Volcano is affecting a lot of you. We're praying for your safety and if you're (*sic*), please claim the gifts so we shall know. Here are some to-dos after volcano eruption from Moonton, do be safe and help each other out –

Listen to your local radio stations for civil defense advice and follow instructions.

Stay indoors and away from volcanic ashfall areas as much as possible.

When it is safe to go outside, keep your gutters and roof clear of ash as heavy ash deposits can collapse your roof.

If there is a lot of ash in the water supply, do not use your dishwasher or washing..."

(Source: Screenshot by Author)

This comment elicited responses from other *League of Legends* fans who accused Moonton of being stingy while a natural disaster was taking place. Another commenter added to this exchange, saying that *League of Legends* had one-upped *Mobile Legends: Bang* in that instance. *League of Legends* fans asserted the superiority of their preferred game over its rival MOBA by implying that its developers were more altruistic. The "boundary work" (Gieryn 1983, 1999) was based on comparisons drawn between *League of Legends* and *Mobile Legends: Bang*. Filipino League fans' responses to the Volcanic Wukong sale exemplified the impacts that emotional labor can have. The skin sale endeared Riot and Garena to their fans, which not only resulted in an increase in brand loyalty, it also gave *League of Legends* players a basis for criticizing *Mobile Legends: Bang* fans, and the game that they play.

They are not the only part of the League fandom to feel this way, in any case. As this part of the article has indicated, the Volcanic Wukong promotion was one among numerous skin sales implemented by

League of Legends' producers. As a free-to-play game, affective economics is central to the *League of Legends'* business model. As a result, players feel obliged to spend on microtransactions as a way to support the game. At the same time, Riot and its affiliates used skin sales to associate their brand with charitable causes. The result of these promotions is a greater sense of brand loyalty among *League of Legends'* players and fans, which could potentially be leveraged for financial returns later on.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Both *League of Legends'* international corporate structure and its producers' previous history of emotional labor are significant aspects of the context that clarify the 86 comments written in response to the Volcanic Wukong promotion. The findings revealed that the logic of emotional economics was underpinning commenters' articulations, but that they highlighted various aspects of the framework. On the one hand, commenters exemplified brand loyalty through their expressions of support towards the skin sale. In addition, they praised League of Legends and its producers for their expression of concern for victims of the volcanic eruption. On the other hand, some comments viewed the promotion as a business strategy, which would build fan support, and immediately translate it into financial returns.

Comments Exemplifying Brand Loyalty for *League of Legends*

Based on the data, the researcher found numerous examples of positive comments to the post publicizing the skin sale. The result was expected, since the post obtained approximately 5,100 "Love" reactions and 2,400 "Like" reactions out of 9,000. Commenters expressed their approval that *League of Legends'* producers had chosen to raise awareness through the Volcanic Wukong promotion. Most of those comments highlighted the international aspect of League of Legends' business structure, with some supporting both Riot and Garena, while others just naming one of the two companies. There was one exchange where three commenters debated about which company should get the credit. The discussion ended without a satisfactory resolution. However, for this study, such articulations are understood as loyalty to *League of Legends* in general.

Another aspect of the articulations expressing support for *League of Legends* and its producers is the awareness that the Volcanic Wukong promotion was not unique but part of a long series of charitable actions associated with the game. For example, one commenter recalled that a skin sale was also implemented when the highly destructive Typhoon Haiyan, locally referred to as Yolanda, devastated parts of the Philippines (BBC). Another commenter wrote that Dark Star Cho'Gath, Jaximus, Championship Ashe, and Dawnbringer Karma were among the other skins that were used to promote

charitable causes in the past. The image in Figure 2, which emphasized previous skin sales that were undertaken to address environmental degradation or offer help after natural tragedies, belongs into this category of comments.

Almost three-quarters of the 86 comments exemplified articulations of support for *League of Legends* and its producers. They provide evidence for the building of brand loyalty that could emerge from media producers' emotional labor by connecting their claims to the framework of affective economics. Not only did Riot and Garena gain praise and recognition from their Philippine fans, but their product also became associated with charitable causes. Such activities, coupled with the knowledge that *League of Legends* is a free-to-play game, are a source of pride for *League of Legends* fans, who continue to provide emotional and financial support to the game. The comments exemplifying the discourse of support indicate the strengthening of brand loyalty, which shows one of the possible results of media producers' emotional labor within the framework of affective economics.

Comments Suggesting the Skin Sale Generated Loyalty and Financial Returns

A quarter of the comments responding to the skin sale suggested that it was part of a business strategy that *League of Legends'* producers were using to endear themselves to Philippine fans, so that their loyalty could be translated into financial gains. Although these comments are numerically few, they are worth considering in this qualitative study because they represent another view of the Volcanic Wukong skin sale and another aspect of affective economics.

One such articulation remarked that the promotion was a sound business strategy to use the volcanic eruption to make money, albeit at a reduced price. Commenters rebutted the remark and others like it by bringing up *League of Legends'* prior skin sales, which were used for charitable purposes. They took offense at the implication that Riot or Garena were taking advantage of the volcanic eruption to generate profits. Several commenters highlighted that 1 Riot Point for a skin was not lucrative, and that it made no sense for Riot or Garena to have a skin sale for financial gain. Furthermore, they brought up how the proceeds of similar promotions in the past had been donated, rather than kept. However, another commenter pointed out that, *League of Legends'* producers ultimately benefited from the skin sale. They obtained two advantages: the income from the skin purchases, and good public relations.

The exchanges described in the previous paragraph indicate that Philippine *League of Legends* fans were loyal to the game, and willing to defend its producers against negative insinuations. At the same time, a few commenters recognized that the skin sale was a form of emotional labor. Although they labeled it as a business strategy, their articulations align with scholars of affective economics who observed that emotional labor could result in fan loyalty and potential monetary returns.

This study found that comments were underpinned by the logic of affective economics, but they represented two aspects of the framework. On the one hand, some commenters exemplified the strengthening of brand loyalty in their praise for *League of Legends'* producers. On the other hand, there were comments that suggested that the promotion was part of a business strategy to generate loyalty and profits from players. The study also considered the context of articulations, noting the international nature of *League of Legends'* ownership, production, and distribution, and its history of engaging in emotional labor.

Hills (2015) and Jenkins (2006) emphasized that media producers' efforts yielded fan loyalty, which would later be translated into financial returns. Most relevant comments praised Garena and Riot for the skin sale, which was the latest in a long series of *League of Legends* promotions geared towards charitable causes. As this article has indicated, fan loyalty was manifested in various ways, including the criticizing of MLBB players, and defending the game producers against accusations of profiting from the natural disaster. On the other hand, there were a small number of comments suggesting that the skin sale was a method for generating both fan loyalty and profits. Although their articulations attracted defensive reactions from other fans, these commenters inadvertently resonated with affective economic assumption that media companies could translate their emotional labor into brand devotion and monetary returns.

The comments are written in response to the Volcanic Wukong promotion, thus, resonate with the logic of emotive economics. While some commenters may not have been informed of the framework, their arguments were undoubtedly bolstered by it. The support and praise expressed by the majority of relevant comments indicate that the skin sale was a contributor to the success of strengthening fan loyalty. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss whether or not brand dedication resulted in financial gains. Nevertheless, a portion of the respondents stated that Riot and Garena's business strategies were acceptable and that their emotive work could be turned into monetary benefit.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined fan reactions to the Volcanic Wukong skin sale implemented after the Taal Volcano eruption in the Philippines. As a study that brought together discourse, fandom, and affective economics, this study has demonstrated how the assumptions of affective economics can inform the discursive articulations that fans make towards media producers. It is hoped that the study has expanded scholarly understandings of affective economics, which have hitherto been understudied in the field of fan studies.

Part of the intention behind this study is to serve as a springboard for further research about the nature and dynamics of fan-producer relations. There are many instances in which companies and fan communities interact with one another, and it is argued that scholars and media producers would consider fan discourses as valuable sources of information for either research or policymaking. Both may find it worthwhile to consider fandoms' perceptions of their emotional labor, paying particular attention to their sense of brand loyalty or expressions of suspicion about the financial motivations behind media producers' actions.

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