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Oh, and I cannot forget to thank my dearest friend Marcio “ninja” Asche, the person that first introduced me to Counter-Strike, and who I am trying to get back to play the game.

Thank you all, from the bottom of my gamer heart.
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INTRODUCTION

The goal for this thesis is to explore how Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) eSports teams from Brazil accomplished the challenging task of becoming world champions, creating elite players despite coming from a country that lacks support compared to United States and Europe (see Table 1). In order to do so, this study is going to be based on two research questions:

1) What is involved in becoming a professional CS:GO player?

The first question should address the challenges and meanings of becoming a professional CS:GO player. It is important to notice the word “involved,” a vague word chosen on purpose to denote different aspects of becoming a professional player. Those aspects were explored as the researcher delved deep into the data, resulting in different meanings, which include the awareness of CS:GO player as a profession, the definitions of professionalism in eSports, player motivations, and the challenges of constant hard work and practice.

To better understand those aspects, this study looks at the history and popularity of Counter-Strike, going back to Half-Life, the game from which Counter-Strike was modded, released in 1999. Also, this thesis touches ground on the importance that internet cafes (also known as LAN houses) had in the wild growth of the game, and how they ignited a generation interested in competing against each other.

Finally, this work dives deep into how players define being professional Counter-Strike players, their motivations, and the challenges that come before and after deciding to turn their leisure activity into work and the consequences of that transition. The purpose for the first research question is to give readers the big picture about this emerging world.

2) How are Brazilian eSports CS:GO players excelling in an industry that lacks extrinsic incentives?
Complementary to the first research question, the second question tries to explore in more depth the problems Brazilian teams and players face in order to pursue their goals. It utilizes archival research on the Brazilian scene from the time people started playing the game until today, tackling information on specific situations such as tournaments, organizations, laws against Counter-Strike and the infrastructure for players to practice. The table below shows some of the disparities in incentives based by Brazilian Counter-Strike eSports players.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extrinsic Incentives</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>North America and Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Tournaments per Year</td>
<td>20-50</td>
<td>60-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Prize Pool per Tournament</td>
<td>500$ - 2,000$</td>
<td>$20,000 - $100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournament Payment Conditions</td>
<td>Usually delay payment or end up not paying what was promised.</td>
<td>Payment always on time, full amount.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Between Organizations and Players</td>
<td>Organizations do not benefit the player, with abusive clauses, or no contract at all.</td>
<td>Real contracts that value the player as a professional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Player Salaries (excluding sponsorships, prizes, donations)</td>
<td>Top Teams: $400 - $600/mo</td>
<td>Top Teams: $10,000 - $25,000/mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Infrastructure</td>
<td>Small places with a lack of training and living spaces.</td>
<td>Big places with enough space for players to feel comfortable playing and living.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Extrinsic Incentives table comparison between Brazil and North America/Europe CS:GO scene

The choice of the Brazilian scene for this study is part of the author’s identity as well as the curiosity behind great personalities that are proud to represent their country by becoming the best players in the world, and at the same time, not having enough extrinsic incentives. The intrinsic value is what drives players forward, and has a big role in Brazilians’ success. On the other hand, the lack of extrinsic values such as monetary support, infrastructure, professionalization and infrastructure serves as an active disincentive to push players away.

Finally, this thesis talks about the release of Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, the renovated game made for competition, and how it is reinvigorating the game. Not only that, from sport stars’ investments, to the powerful influence of social media and streaming platforms, chapter six explores the future of the game as an eSport in Brazil and everything that might contribute to making the professional scene in the country more mature.
This study is based mainly on online data collection and archival research, and understands it as a limitation. The goal of this approach is to trace back the path from casual to professional and to be able to understand how it is affected by the lack of extrinsic incentives. Nonetheless, both research questions should complement each other in understanding the big picture that is the professional scene of CS:GO in Brazil.
METHODOLOGY

The Researchers Role

The role of the researcher in qualitative research yields identification of personal values, assumptions and biases that are key to understanding the outcomes of the study (Creswell, 2014). The investigator’s contributions are a big part of qualitative research, which has a more positive and useful result than a detrimental one (Locke et al., 1987). The topic of this research is very special to me as a researcher for many reasons. The first reason is my experience in the beginning of the year 2000, where I had contact for the first time with Counter-Strike, at the same time this phenomenon started. Most of what I am studying here I experienced myself, and understanding that is a large part of who I am.

Secondly, by being Brazilian myself and living outside the country, I perceived this as an opportunity to show other people the culture of Counter-Strike surrounding Brazil. The fact that most information is found in Portuguese, my native language, made it easier for me to work with data, but at the same time, a challenge for me to transfer all that information to English, so a broader audience can have access to a big part of Brazil’s Counter-Strike culture.

The third reason is due to a personal interest in eSports, competition and Counter-Strike. As I mentioned before, the game was a big part of my life, mostly because I am a very competitive person, and it is still a dream for me to be part of the competitive scene, so studying this subject in depth is a step towards understanding how others have achieved what I always dreamed of myself. Hopefully, this study gives me more tools that I can work with in achieving professionalism in Counter-Strike. And if not, just by being close to what interests me is a pleasure in itself.

Furthermore, a fourth reason should be added, as it is important from a research point of view. A number of studies have been done on the new phenomenon of eSports, but few studies actually take into consideration a specific culture. It is mostly viewed as a global phenomenon that started predominantly in South Korea, with a few other exceptions (Taylor, 2012), not considering that each individual culture has different contributions. For this reason, this work is unique in gathering information from the Counter-Strike Brazilian scene, sharing its hidden culture not only to outsiders within the country, but with the whole Counter-Strike community worldwide.
Data Collection

All the qualitative research done in this study is through the collection of data from blogs, social media and eSports reporting sources. According to Mann C., & Stewart F. (2000), one of the advantages of using computer-mediated communication to conduct research is the wide geographical access it gives. By being geographically distant, the internet allows access to information from different cultures and languages, consequently encouraging cross-cultural comparisons of issues (Coomber, 1997). More important, this type of data represents participants that have given their attention to a certain subject regardless of the audience (Creswell, 2014), as they had no obligations to share that information. The research will benefit especially from numerous articles in distinct news websites, social media, blogs and audiovisual materials such as YouTube videos.

Other advantages of doing an online data collection is that all information provided is publicly accessible and available with no restrictions for research. It is an unobtrusive method to gather information. On the other hand, it requires the researcher to seek out the information; some materials might be incomplete or lack accuracy (Creswell, 2014). To avoid this last point, searching for other sources that share the same information is imperative. A number of studies have tackled information on the advantages of computer-mediated communication data collection as a valid qualitative methodology (see Hine, 2000; Mann, C., & Stewart, F., 2000; Bell, D. 2001).

Because of the numerous sources, a focus to specific channels worked as a funnel to major information. The first step in searching for information was done by following a select number of specific Brazilian players in their social networks and search engines. Those are the members of Schroet Kommando (which means Shrapnel Command, known as SK Gaming), more specific Gabriel “FalleN” Toledo, Marcelo “coldzera” David, Fernando “fer” Alvarenga, Epitácio “Taco” de Melo, Lincoln “fnx” Lau and João “felps” Vasconcellos. These players are considered among the most influential from Brazil, as they are part of the top 3 best teams in the world, with 4 players ranked between the 20 best players (2016) according to HLTV.org (Figure 1), and so information is abundant.
In addition to following the careers through online resources of individual players, a second and important source is the Gamers Club and Games Academy portal, an eSports platform that shares news about eSports, especially from Brazil. They also have a blog, which contain interviews and discussion about many different subjects pertaining to the Brazilian scene. These sources provide sufficient data to gain an understanding of the current state of eSports in Brazil and the career trajectories of professional Brazilian Counter-Strike players.

All the data collected was catalogued into a spreadsheet specifying the URL of the source, a small explanation of what the subject is, and a coding category assigned based on the researcher’s initial understanding of the content (see Appendix). From the initial data gathering, more categories emerged that drove the researcher to other sources. Only by exhausting the search within each category did the researcher realize he reached a point where he was satisfied with the amount of content.

**Data Analysis**

This study uses Glaser & Strauss (1967) Grounded Theory as the research analysis method. It is a method that allows researchers to move from data to theory, rather than analyzing based on a preexisting theory, therefore creating opportunities for new theories to emerge. It takes into consideration the application of codes very early in the process, which is then iteratively adjusted over the course of the project to generate a theory (Boellstorff et al, 2012).
As a way to analyze data, each source was catalogued with a small description of its content and a category that fits that description. This first categorization is supposed to be broad, and codes or even other categories should emerge from the content itself. A few examples of categories and codes I have created includes professional player [practice; dedication; life choices; image; obstacles], popularization [Counter-Strike; eSports; platforms; small tournaments], professional scene [big tournaments; broadcasting; repercussion; obstacles], to name a few. These codes and categories seek to identify and describe patterns and themes from the writer’s perspective, to finally be explained by the researcher (Agar, 1980).

The categories were created as a deductive process. Because the intention of this work is to give a general overview of the Brazilian Counter-Strike scene, no further coding cycle was deployed. The goal is to provide the reader with enough information that (s)he can find interest in the subject. For this reason, the way this thesis was structured is using information on every chapter from the sources, selected to explain the claims from the research questions, with a little explanation of its importance.

The research also makes use of two case studies, intentionally added to give a palpable example of how every aspect discussed in previous chapters was experienced by players. Furthermore, the case studies give insights for the future of the Counter-Strike scene, which are discussed in the last chapter.

The way I decided to organize the report was to help readers have a better grasp of the scene in general, including some very important concepts such as Counter-Strike and eSports. For that reason, all data collected was organized not only in categories, but also in a certain order to create an overall story arc that will guide the reader throughout the entire paper. The first two chapters work as background information with extra content that is better understood by being part of the same chapter.

Information in every chapter is connected to its previous chapters, as it gives valuable content that can facilitate the reading of further chapters. I decided to use this technique as the way to analyze and make sense of all the data collected, which will be then discussed at the end of this paper in the conclusions section, where I elaborated on the emergent theory that could answer both research questions.
CHAPTER 1
THE COUNTER-STRIKE FEVER

What is Counter-Strike

Counter-Strike is a first-person shooter multiplayer game that started as a modification (mod) of the original game Half-Life developed by Valve. The mod was created by Minh “Gooseman” Le and Jess Cliffe in 1999 and was acquired by Valve in 2000 when they started to work on different installments of the game, until its major update known as Counter-Strike 1.6, released in 2003. Many other versions of the game were released with no such success, until Valve realized how popular electronic sports (eSports) had become to create the new Counter-Strike we have today, completely shaped for competition, known as Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO).

The rules in Counter-Strike are simple: the players are divided into two teams of five. They can be either Terrorists or Counter-Terrorists. The first one’s objective is to plant the bomb and have it explode; and the second being to prevent the bomb from being planted and/or exploding. Also, the game consists of rounds; after a total of 15 rounds, players need to switch teams (from Terrorist to Counter-Terrorist and vice-versa), then the team that first achieves 16 rounds is the winner. If the game ties in 15 rounds, it goes to overtime, which consists of a best of 6 rounds, 3 on each side, having the team that gets to 4 rounds first win. If the game ties again, the same rule applies until a winner is decided.

The creation of Counter-Strike was timed perfectly with the rise of internet cafes, and because of its multiplayer nature, required a certain number of players to be played; this prompted internet cafes users to invite their friends over to try out the game. That was the beginning of how Counter-Strike would become widely popular, influencing a generation of players to come.

Popularization of Counter-Strike: Internet Cafes

The concept of internet cafes, or LAN houses, started as regular coffee shops to check e-mails and work related subjects. At the time, the Internet was still described as an “electronic bulletin board.” It was only in 1991 that Wayne Gregori would found SF Net, a network that connected computers in different coffee houses where people could post short stories and chat with each other (Lufkin, 2015).
From there, internet cafes would emerge with different purposes, from simple internet use, to be a place where people gathered to play games together.

In South Korea, a very special phenomenon happened in 1998, an era called “PC Bangs.” After the release of the game StarCraft, people started to migrate to internet cafes to make use of better computers equipped for gaming (Lufkin, 2015). Understanding the importance of games for its citizens, the Korean government started to support the game industry and its initiatives (Taylor, 2012), which ended up strengthening the growth and development of eSports worldwide (Huhh, 2008).

LAN houses in Brazil started to appear in 1998 and became massive in the year 2000, where people used to go play games such as StarCraft and Counter-Strike (NVIDIA Brasil, 2016a). Those spaces used to attract young people from the middle classes especially because there was no quality internet available at home. With the development of higher quality internet for cheaper prices, this audience started to abandon the LAN houses, which had to adapt to a new audience composed of the lower classes who did not have access to this technology. These places were responsible for creating the first Counter-Strike professionals that are still acting today (NVIDIA Brasil, 2016c).

My personal story about this subject is probably similar to most other players at the time. A good friend of mine invited me to go play this game called Counter-Strike in a LAN house in São Paulo when I was 9 years old. After that point, I was going there almost every day to play, and as I was improving, people would invite me to play on their teams. Just as it happened to me, players started to organize a number of teams, and it was natural that tournaments would start to pop up everywhere.

**Players want to compete: self-organized tournaments**

It was not by accident that players started to organize their own teams. The game itself is based on team play, and by going to the same LAN houses and playing with the same people, naturally, teams began to appear. From there, players decided to organize small tournaments inside the LAN houses with small prizes, usually a small amount of money or other prizes like mice or headsets (NVIDIA Brasil, 2016a). Understanding this phenomenon, tournaments started to pop up between LAN houses, organically developing Counter-Strike as an eSport.
It is worth pointing out that at the time, Counter-Strike had no spectator capabilities besides people behind players watching them playing. Sometimes, LAN houses would get completely full of people going there just to watch, which demonstrated how interested people were in the game. If it was not for those passionate players, who would receive nothing in return to organize and play in tournaments, Counter-Strike would never be considered an eSport (NVIDIA Brasil, 2016a).

![Image of LAN house tournament](image)

**Figure 2: Tournament inside a LAN house in Brazil (Nascimento, 2010).**

I remember being invited to play for a LAN house team in São Paulo. The problem was that I was living in a different city, and was just visiting my father. I accepted and said that I could only play while I was there, and therefore I was not going to be part of the official team. We played some games against other LAN houses (and I remember my father being worried that I had to walk to a different location and he thought it was dangerous). The feeling of being part of that was really good, as people were acknowledging my skills as a player and wanted me there to play for them.
CHAPTER 2
THE RISE OF ESPORTS

Short History on eSports

It is not the intention of this study to dive deep into how eSports grew to be what it is today, but to understand how it began and why is important to try and extract the very unique spark that initiated everything: the love for the game.

eSports is a term that emerged in the past few years and is getting stronger as time goes by. But competition in electronic games is as old as the first computers. In 1972, "a number of computer scientists (some of the best in the business) gathered around the infamous PDP-10 computer for a playful, and apparently raucous, evening of Spacewar" (Taylor, 2012).

After that, the arcade opened space for players to compete against each other through high scores. The problem though is that the score would be only available at one specific machine, and to be able to actually compete to be the best in the world, players would have to take a picture of the score notation and post it somewhere else, where other people could also share their scores. Some companies, such as Twin Galaxies, were one of the first ones to seek, organize and distribute information about the best gamers (Taylor, 2012).

This way of comparing scores survived for years, even with the rise of home systems. The difference is that players now can play side-by-side, which gave space for in person tournaments with players playing each other at the same time in the same place. With the development of PC gaming and first person shooters (FPS) games like Doom and Quake, large communities of players started to emerge, and they were responsible for the growth of a larger scene (Wagner, 2006). It would later create opportunities for major tournament organizations to rise, being the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) and World Cyber Games (WCG) the best examples of how big those events can be.

Today, with the advent of social networking, high-speed Internet, streaming platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming, and, especially, spectator mode, eSports have the opportunity to become mainstream. More people have access to everything that is going on, which attracts even more spectators and fans. Not only that, game companies are shaping their games for competition, and a massive number of new games are emerging labelled as eSport focused.
As in sports, eSports have different types of games, known as genres, which are divided into many major categories. Four of them are responsible for more than 80% of all genres (Olsen, 2015), starting with fighting games such as Mortal Kombat, followed by real time strategy (RTS) games, the ones that gave ground to what eSports are today, with Starcraft being its benchmark. Then, as cited earlier, comes FPS games and finally the multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs), which are today's most known competitive games out there, with titles like League of Legends and DOTA 2 having tournaments with prize pools that exceed millions of dollars (PBSoffbook, 2013).

**Defining Electronic Sports**

With the advent of the term eSports, people were divided about whether it was considered as a regular sport. It is not rare to see an eSports article on a sports website followed by hate comments on how this should not be treated as a sport. According to sport scientist Claus Tiedeman (quoted in Wagner, 2006), the definition of sports is the following:

> "Sport" is a cultural field of activity in which human beings voluntarily go into a relation to other people with the conscious intention to develop their abilities and accomplishments - particularly in the area of skilled motion - and to compare themselves with these other people according to rules put self or adopted without damaging them or themselves deliberately.
By being broad, his definition can be applied to eSports, noting that, in this particular case, eSports have a different set of skilled motions that is focused particularly into small movements based on hand-eye coordination and motor dexterity. Another aspect worth noting is that in his definition, Tiedeman does not talk about competition, which is intrinsic to eSports. Moreover, there is the fact that it is played in virtual environments. For the sake of this study, a simpler definition is that eSports is a competitive way of playing computer [or any digital medium] games within a professional setting (Wagner, 2006).

Counter-Strike as an eSport

One of the aspects that makes Counter-Strike a good candidate to be an eSports game is how it was received by the players and especially by Half-Life developer Valve. The setting in Counter-Strike allows consistent players to improve their skills over time. After reaching a certain threshold, players would start to organize themselves into teams, and the challenge would not only be about their solo skills, but overcoming another team’s strategies and tactics. By being aware of the opportunity, Valve acquired Counter-Strike, making it reach the visibility it needed by constantly improving the game.

As previously shown in this paper, two teams composed of five players compete against each other in rounds of 1:45 minute, having the team that wins a given number of rounds to be the winner. The presence of a set of rules and regulations is what shaped the perfect scenario for the game to emerge. As a result, “teams are faced with an extremely well defined virtual environment in which the only way of winning a match is to find and execute strategies that outperform the strategies of the opposing team” (Wagner, 2006).

This chapter explained the definitions of eSports and how Counter-Strike grew up to be part of it. These concepts are important in understanding how the scene have developed over the years and for readers to have a better grasp of the industry. In the next chapter, this thesis is going to dive deeper into the eSports Brazilian Counter-Strike professional scene as a way to compare it with other places such as North America and Europe. It will demonstrate in more detail not only the lack of extrinsic incentive, but also how the incentives ended up becoming disincentives for Brazilian players.
CHAPTER 3
THE BRAZILIAN COUNTER-STRIKE SCENE

Tournaments

Worldwide, the leading Counter-Strike leagues include Electronic Sports League (ESL), DreamHack, Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) and ELEAGUE. These tournaments are extremely well organized, with hundreds of teams trying to qualify to fight for the grand prize. They all hold their qualifiers played in both Europe and North America, with a few others including Brazil in the list.

As one of the few exceptions, the ESL Pro League Season 4 Finals were played in Brazil, which attracted a very good number of viewers to eSports for the country. The event was a success because it had a good audience, support from the fans, and coverage from giant TV providers.

Another great tournament that was held in Brazil were the qualifiers for the Starladder, a tournament where the top 16 teams in the world get together to fight for a total of $300,000 in prizes, which happened in São Paulo. Some of the aspiring teams in Brazil had the opportunity to play with a structure that only the best teams in the world have the chance to experience. Not only that, but also all teams qualified to play got all their expenses paid by the event. Additionally, the organizers updated all the computers to allow maximum performance by the players (Perez, 2017).

The Starladder shows how international organizations are serious when creating these events, something that most Brazilian tournaments lack, and that is due to the fact that (as Table 1 demonstrates): 1) the number of meaningful events is still low compared to other places. Brazil has no more than 2 or 3 tournaments a year with a prize good enough, or visibility enough that to make it worth playing it; 2) many players have condemned tournament organizations for delaying the payments or not paying them at all. Also, some tournaments have scheduled the prize to be sent a year after the event (Teixeira, Tibúrcio, 2017).

New tournaments are emerging, such as the ones by Gamers Club (more on Gamers Club in chapter 6), that are more frequent and pays what is promised on time. They still lack good compensation, but it is something that will hopefully increase as the scene gets more attention and investments. Many barriers still exist; organizations and organizers need to work together to demonstrate that eSport is worth
the investment. Nonetheless, they should have the player as the center of their business, as they are the responsible for creating a good show that will attract everything else that is involved.

**Counter-Strike as a Profession**

Outside Brazil, in particular Europe and North America, players have contracts in which they receive salaries, equipment and conditions to play that secure them as professionals. What Brazil is missing is this connection between eSports companies and players. Some companies do not have a contract and everything is combined only by word of mouth.

This lack of professionalism causes lineups to change frequently, and in Counter-Strike especially, this is detrimental to team performance. Nonetheless, companies with signed contracts abuse players by having it only benefit themselves by charging a huge amount of money for clause termination and by paying them only the minimum wage (Teixeira, Tibúrcio, 2017).

Also important to state, most teams do not get to receive money for travel expenses, and this is something that happens frequently. Strong teams can win qualifiers to tournaments outside the country, but they do not have the money to pay for all the expenses (tickets, accommodations, food) and for that reason, they simply lose a lifetime opportunity. Few teams have been lucky enough to raise the money themselves, which is the case of Made in Brazil (MIBR) and KaBuM (more details later in this thesis).

To fill in this gap, ex-players are creating their own organizations with the player in mind. Because sponsorships are hard when starting a company, these organizations are working their players’ image online, and use this as a business plan. Players are able to add an income from streaming platforms where people can subscribe or donate directly to the player, and also by creating their own brand and selling personalized products. A percentage of the sales goes to the players. This way both the organization and the players are compensated (Perez, 2017).

In the beginning of 2017 the Associação Brasileira de Clubes de eSports (ABCDE, which stands for Brazilian Association for eSports Teams) was created with the hope that it could help the scene to evolve. Players have been divided over it because of some troubles with the ABCDE policy of participation, which states that for the ABCDE organization to be part of a tournament, it is necessary to have a prize pool of R$ 10,000.00 (approximately $3,000,00), and distribute at least R$ 24,000.00
(approximately $8,000,00) between participants. Besides, organizations should add 15% more for tax
costs and have a payment date not exceeding 60 days after the last tournament match (Teixeira,
Tibúrcio, 2017). As they recently entered the scene, many adaptations will be needed, and having an
association behind eSports might be a good start towards the professionalization of the game.

To better understand the claims made previously on this chapter, the next session make use of a
case study from the Brazilian team MIBR. They were responsible for inspiring a generation of players to
come, and to show the potential of Brazilian players to the whole world, despite the adversities and lack
of extrinsic incentives from within.

Case Study: MIBR is world champion

The Counter-Strike team MIBR was created in 2003 after ARENA team wins a qualifier that would
give them a spot to play in the CPL Dallas 2002. The team had no money to travel to the United States at
the time, until one of the players, Rafael “pred” Velloso asked his father Paulo “pvell” Velloso, a great
entrepreneur, to sponsor the trip (Bueno, 2012). After that, Paulo gained interest in Counter-Strike and
decided to keep investing in the team, which now is called MIBR, which is the abbreviation for Made in
Brazil.

![Figure 4: MIBR when they win the world tournament in 2006 (Gutierrez, 2016).](image)
MIBR would represent Brazil and boost the scene for years to come. They were responsible for numerous tournament wins, including the ESWC 2006, the first big world tournament won by a Brazilian team. From there, every aspiring player would like to be part of the team, as it was not only a group of people playing Counter-Strike, it was a whole country represented by this single team. The team was responsible for the growth of eSports in Brazil, not only because they leveled up the standards, but also because they had an online portal that would feed players with information that no other platform had at the time. Also, they used to sponsor a number of homemade tournaments (Bueno, 2012; “CS:GO”: Lendária, 2016; Tugh, 2012).

Additionally, MIBR launched a star named Raphael “Cogu” Camargo, chosen by the European portal HLTV.org as the best player in South America’s history. His dedication to the team was such that Paulo “pvell” Velloso considered the team as being “Cogu” + 4. Not only Cogu, but Lincoln “fnx” Lau was also part of the lineup that won the ESWC 2006, a player who later in 2016 would win two major tournaments in a row (more about it in the next chapter). Both players are still acting in the Counter-Strike scene today.

MIBR proved that passion could take you anywhere. In a country that had few investments in Counter-Strike, it was lucky that “pvell” had the will and money to invest in the players; otherwise, they would never have reached the level they had. Sadly, for the fans, after many years, in 2012 they announced its closure. In total, playing for 9 years (from 2003 to 2012), the team’s total earning was no more than $250,000.00 (MIBR, 2016b), which is low compared to today’s standards (Bueno, A, 2012; “CS:GO”: Lendária, 2016; Tugh, 2012), where SK Gaming had a total of $934,508.33 only in 2016 (SK Gaming, 2017).

After 4 years without MIBR, they announced their return, but on April 21th of 2016, they released a note on their Facebook page (MIBR, 2016a) saying that many sponsorships would not formalize the terms and that their [MIBR] goal is to treat players as they deserve to be treated. Nonetheless, they also talked about the weak scene the country finds itself with even years after they have disbanded. This means that is still unknown the fact that MIBR is coming back, or will be forever a memory in the Brazilian Counter-Strike scene.
No more Counter-Strike?

In addition to the lack of extrinsic incentives described above, such as few tournaments and low salaries, the Brazilian competitive Counter-Strike scene has also had to content with some overwhelming disincentives. Back in October of 2007, Brazilian officials banned from sale the games Counter-Strike and EverQuest, stating that they harmed consumer health. In addition, the Brazilian Federal court specified that both games “encouraged ‘the subversion of public order’ and are an ‘attack against the democratic state’” (Modine, 2008). This decision came into effect in the beginning of 2008, and while forbidding the sale, the game could still be played.

The banning of Counter-Strike in Brazil was spurred by the creation of a fan-made level depicting the city of Rio de Janeiro as a favela, or informal urban housing characterized by its precarious homes and ways of living. In this level, created not by the company but by players, terrorists had kidnapped officials, and the police force had to infiltrate to try and rescue them. The distributor at the time, Electronic Arts Brazil pointed out that the level was not part of the original game (Modine, 2008; “Justiça proíbe games,” 2008; Bishop, 2008).

The execution of this decision contributed to the decline of Counter-Strike in Brazil, which lasted from 2008 to 2012. The number of tournaments decreased, LAN houses were not a thing anymore, and it seemed that the game would see its end. Happily, in 2012 Valve released its new version, completely revamped for competition, the now Counter-Strike: Global Offensive. It will resuscitate the game, bringing old players back and a new generation of new eSports players.

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

It was only in 2012 that Valve decided to release the new version of Counter Strike, Global Offensive. In Brazil, the new game took a while to be accepted, and only in 2015, together with the growth of the eSports scene, exploded in audience size (Ganiko, 2016). It would revive the old passion for eSports old players had, attracting even more players to the game. One big difference from the previous versions is its focus as an eSport game. The developers made the game very easy to match players based on their skills, and also added a spectator mode and a streaming channel inside the game.
With the new Counter-Strike came the possibility of becoming a professional player, as it was already usual to see other games going in the same direction. With the idea of turning a leisure activity into a profession, players started to figure out ways to accomplish the dream of living out of Counter-Strike. That is what the next chapter is all about, acknowledging the profession, defining it and understanding how to become a professional Counter-Strike player.
How to define an eSports professional?

There is no organization to regulate the profession of a Counter-Strike player, and defining a professional can be tricky. Nor is there a formal threshold or certificate that people surpass that tells them that they are now professionals. However, players do have a moment in their lives when they can tell they have finally achieved professionalism in eSports.

According to Marcelo “Coldzera” David, he knew he was serious about the game when he was hired by a team that would pay for all his costs, and also give a monthly paycheck (Coldzera, 2017). For Epitacio “Taco” de Melo, the moment he won a tournament that gave the team a spot to play in the United States, where they ended up practicing, all paid for by the organization (El Games, 2017) was the moment he realized he was becoming a professional player.

It is safe to say that a player is considered a professional when he is hired by an organization that pays for his work representing that entity. Of course, this definition is really vague, for anyone could sponsor a team of random players and not play any known tournaments just for the sake of fun. Therefore, another important step into defining a professional player is his appearance at events, mostly official tournaments, be it on a national or international level.

Now, to understand how to become one, the next section will look at one of the most influential professional players from Brazil, Gabriel Toledo. His story reflects the challenges and motivations players have to face in order to become professionals, in many ways similar to the story of Rafael Velloso, explained earlier, and many other Brazilian players.

Case Study: Most Influential Player in Brazil

Gabriel “FalleN” Toledo was considered the second-best player in the world in 2016 by the portal HLTV.org. In the same year, FalleN received the prize for Personality of the Year by the eSports Industry Awards, the Oscars’ of the games. Not only that, but one year later, he would become the only cyber athlete from Brazil presented with the 30 most influential young gamers in the United States under 30.
years, issued by Forbes Magazine. The magazine also includes his team’s total earnings for 2016, which surpasses $1.5 million in prize money (Forbes: Fallen, 2017).

FalleN’s career started very young when his brothers introduced him to Counter-Strike in 2003. He would fall in love with the game, and would try to fit it into his daily routine, which was divided between helping his mother in her work, playing soccer and attending school. After joining his first team, Soldiers of Fire, the Counter-Strike celebrity would develop his taste for competition. At only 14 years old and with the help of his brothers, he would start travelling around the country to play in tournaments with his new team, Crashers.

His official career as a professional eSports player career launched in 2009, when the team FireGamers invited him to be part of the roster. At the time, FalleN was thinking about abandoning the game to focus in his studies at the university, but FireGamers was not any team. Composed of some of the best Brazilian players from MiBR, he had to make a choice that would change his life forever: follow his regular life, or abandon everything and try to live the dream of becoming a Counter-Strike professional player.

Gabriel's hobby was now a profession. He would wake up every day, watch demos and play hard the entire day. After practicing for the World Cyber Games (WCG) 2009, the team got to the semi-finals.
on the upper bracket, where they lost to Made in Brazil. After winning all games in the lower brackets, they got into the finals, beating the same team that had sent them to the losers' bracket. The qualifier sent them to play the main event in China. That was FalleN’s first major tournament.

Fallen would participate in many other tournaments with FireGamers, until the team was hired by a North American organization called Complexity. Defending this team, they would be proclaimed champions of the IEM Season V, and the team’s first international title. During the next years, Gabriel Toledo would switch teams, and with Counter-Strike 1.6 losing all its glamour, the scene starts to be depleted, tournaments are less frequent, and the player decided to abandon the game and start playing a game called Assault Fire.

Only in 2013 did FalleN start to play CS:GO, while also playing Assault Fire. Five months after he started playing the new Counter-Strike, he joined KabuM, the team that would put him in the international spotlight. After playing for two years, and achieving great results, ESL invited them to play their selective. But they had a problem: the lack of monetary support from their own organization. Added to that, the players had no financial conditions to travel and pay for all expenses.

In times like that is when the leaders go forward. FalleN would create an online crowdfunding campaign asking for donations from national and international communities. The total amount they needed was R$ 25,000.00. Hopeful, they kept practicing and live streaming daily to try to get even more donations. After R$ 5,000.00 only in the first day, they would end up receiving a total of R$ 16,000.00 with the help of the fans. Nonetheless, two pieces were fundamental to accomplishing their goal: first, the Swedish player from Fnatic, Robin “flusha” Rönnquist would donate $1,400.00; second, the ESEA organization contributed another $ 2,500.00, completing the crowdfunding goal.

The investment proved wise. KabuM had an excellent tournament finishing between the first eight teams, which would give them the so dreamed of spot in the major tournament. From there, the roster changed, and Luminosity Gaming bought the team, where they won their first major tournament. After the amazing performance, the famous and old organization from Germany called SK Gaming signed a contract with the Brazilians, that commanded by FalleN, would win their second major in a row, becoming the number one team in the world (Marques, 2017).
By studying the game, FalleN understands that it is made of a set of players, which means different skills and styles. He is good at finding new talents and adapting the team based on each individual player instead of trying to fit a player into a unique team play style. That happened with Coldzera, a player that FalleN found and hired, and was able to enhance his full potential by allowing him to play the way he knows how to, which gives confidence to a player. At the end, it was worth it, as Coldzera is considered the best player in the world, and SK the best team.

Gabriel’s unique story is important because it shows many of the problems Brazilians face in order to become professionals. Extrinsic disincentives such as lack of monetary support are among the basic ones. If it were not for FalleN crowdfunding his team, they would probably not have become the stars they are today. Also, his story shows how frequently he switches teams, which can be considered as bad, due to the fact that they do not have time to grow as a unit, and teams need consistency to improve.

As for the profession, Gabriel’s story demonstrated how intrinsic motivations are essential to becoming a professional. He had to decide between going to college and playing Counter-Strike. Every professional player has to face that decision. As he switched teams, he was looking for opportunities to demonstrate his skills to a broader number of players, which can be considered as self-management, something players usually struggle with. Also, it is clear how much he would study and practice the game, which made him step up from other players.

FalleN is an example. Not only is he one of the best in-game leaders in the world, he is also one of the best players. Additionally, his efforts to improve and give voice to Brazilian players made him one of the most influential players in the world. His intrinsic motivations, constantly trying to get better and encouraging fellow Brazilian players, is what drives him to be one of the best. And as for me, I believe he is about to take the Brazilian counter-strike to a whole new level, to a point that will make the game part of our culture, a pride, just like Pelé did with soccer.
CHAPTER 5
A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD OF US?

Sports idols and Counter-Strike

eSports are not only creating celebrities of its Brazilians players, but it is also bringing them to the attention of traditional sports celebrities. As noted previously in this paper, the Counter-Strike scene grew up to a stage where the top players in the world are considered idols, with thousands of people watching them closely, following them and cheering for their success anywhere they go.

Members of SK Gaming have posted pictures in their social networks with Brazilian stars like Neymar, Gabriel Medina, and André Akkari, famous sports players from soccer, surfing and poker, consecutively. It is imperative to imagine how many people they have reached coming from all those celebrities: “The image that is produced in only one day of vacations with all these names [celebrities], is nonetheless, the incommensurable growth the scene can have” (Spricigo, 2016).

![Image of FalleN and Neymar Jr. playing CS:GO](image)

Another important event to take note of is the eSports Industry Awards, an international event that rewards personalities and companies from all kinds of eSports. There, Marcelo “Coldzera” David, a player from SK Gaming received the title of the best eSport player of the year, beating other very competitive players across different games.

Besides all their appearances, sports celebrities are investing in Counter-Strike teams. Neymar showed interest in investing in new teams while Ronaldo Nazário, one of the best soccer players of all
time, invested in CNB, a semi-professional Brazilian team, together with André Akkari. For them, eSports
is a new worldwide trend, and a fever in Brazil. Ronaldo, when talking about the investment:
“As athletes, we find on CNB ideals that are extremely familiar with our own, and we will transfer to
eSports the adrenaline from the soccer fields and poker tables” (Bastida, 2017).

It is important to note that not only were they references in their own sports, but these idols truly
believe that eSports are worth investing in, which demonstrates the potential of this market. Additionally,
not only influential people believe that, but major companies and brands are also beginning to invest in
and sponsoring major Counter-Strike teams as well, which is not enough yet, but can give visibility to
other people beginning to do so. Not long ago, big names like Visa and Audi, two companies that have no
relation to eSports, started sponsoring teams like SK Gaming and Astralis because they understand how
big this market is.

Gamers Club and Games Academy

Gamers Club is an online platform founded in 2015 by FalleN “with the intention to transform
competitive online gaming into a professional sport” (Gamers Club, 2017). Focused on CS:GO, Gamers
Club is committed to developing the professional eSports community in Brazil by giving the players all the
tools they need to improve their game. The platform is responsible for a number of tournaments, both free
and pay-to-play, and dedicated servers with settings specific for each type of individual and team training,
configured to simulate real tournament settings.

Additionally, the platform allows players to report bad behavior and bad conduct, which is
responsible for approximately 3500 temporary bans every day. Cheaters are banned daily by the
platform’s own anti-cheat, with a total of 2163 (as of the date of this writing) players banned permanently.

According to data pulled from FalleN in his YouTube (fallenINSIDER, 2017), as of February 14th,
2017, 75 thousand matches are completed every month, but this number is still low compared to non-
completed matches. Some of the causes for that are the bad connections of some players or the lack of
commitment to the game, where players simply leave the game after committing to a match. Along with
that, a range of 6 to 10 thousand players are online every day, with a total of 5 thousand players playing
simultaneously in one of the 500 hundred servers.
Another important feature is the player ranks, ranging from 1 to 20. This makes matchmaking more fair, and players or teams get to see the other team’s average ranking before committing to a match, which is a good way to filter when looking for a certain practice level. If a player achieves the top rank (20), and can maintain it for more than 6 months, he gets a prize for being considered a legend.

Nonetheless, Gamers Club has three subscriptions plans. The first plan is free, and includes specific events, statistics on each player and dedicated servers to practice; with the second plan, known as “plus,” the player gets extra benefits such as ranked matches, reserved spots, discounts on products and more. The last plan, known as “premium,” besides having all the previous benefits, also give players access to exclusive events and the opportunity to access Games Academy, a branch focused in teaching exclusive content for players to get better at the game, both individually and team based.

Games Academy’s classes are divided into topics, including different maps strategies, tips on how to practice alone, how to create and improve a team, to how to become a streamer and set up your hardware and software. In total, more than 200 online videos are helping players to improve. Most of these classes are taught by FalleN, which is a great opportunity for players to learn with an excellent player.

The power of self-promotion

Before the rise of social network usage in early 2010 (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010), eSports teams and players had little to work with to reach their audiences. Today, with the growth of social media websites like Facebook and Twitter, eSports is finally arriving to the mainstream public.

“Lacking widespread recognition, eSports still relies on an organic social network to generate followings” (Fletcher, 2016). By saying that, the eSports Marketing Blog are focusing on individual players’ influence on websites like Facebook, Twitter and Twitch. According to them, Gabriel “FalleN” Toledo had 137,000 likes on Facebook, 47,100 followers on Twitter and 84,000 followers on Twitch by early 2016 (Kresse, 2016). These numbers have skyrocketed one year later. FalleN now has 398,486 likes on Facebook (facebook.com/FalleNcs/), 389,000 followers on Twitter (twitter.com/FalleNCS) and 386,436 followers on Twitch (twitch.tv/gafallen).
The reason behind it is the constant content update from the players themselves, which shares their routines, thoughts and daily lives. The motivation from sports fans can vary from stress, escape, aesthetic pleasure, entertainment, family needs, group affiliation, self-esteem, and economic gain (Stavros et al., 2014). Additionally, eSports fans also find in their idols a way to educate themselves and learn by mimicking their in-game actions and strategies.

Besides the previously cited social networks, eSports players are using YouTube and Instagram to generate content about their daily lives, routines and behind the scenes, which attracts fans that would like to pursue a career as a professional gamer. Not only that, social networking is a way to communicate closely with their audiences and for them [audience], a way to get close to their idols and interact with them. In Twitch (twitch.tv), anyone can live stream their games and talk to their viewers on the go. Going back to Gabriel Toledo, whenever he goes online to play Counter-Strike, he gets at least 12 thousand unique viewers watching him live and chatting with each other. It helps promote him and also allows his fans to get close to him.

Twitch has other benefits as well. Viewers can donate directly to the player, as well as subscribe to his channel, which means that they will pay a monthly subscription of $5.00, where the player usually gets half. Other than that, it is a place where he can give hints and help amateur players. For his teaching on Games Academy, FalleN usually records a live streaming where people can interact and ask questions, and after finished, he just posts it on the website for its premium members to watch whenever they want.

The different platforms allow different forms of promotions, and working them all is part of creating an image for the player. With the television broadcast still slowly learning how to walk, the social media was the main channel between professionals and enthusiasts. And it was not the teams that made that effort, besides starting to be present in social network a lot more, but the players themselves that would spread eSports around the world, reaching more people every day.
CONCLUSIONS

The Brazilian Counter-Strike scene is considered one of the best in the world. A couple of teams, SK Gaming in particular, went from unknown to the world scene to knocking down everyone in their way. If it were not for the dedication of their players and the community, none of that would have happened. What is interesting to note is that both MIBR and the guys from SK Gaming had a similar story, even after being years apart. Both teams had to find ways to raise money so they would be able to leave the country to play on a different level, one that they could make a living from.

1. What is involved in becoming a professional CS:GO player?

The first research question tries to understand Counter-Strike as a profession. Based on all the data collected and analyzed previously, a theory emerged that can explain everything that is involved in becoming a professional CS:GO player. I started talking about how the game was shaped to be competitive, and that people are attracted because they love the game, and see it as a way to live their lives. I also talked about how eSports are growing and becoming mainstream, which can be compared to the history of soccer in Brazil, where it started as a game that few people played, going on to become a major sport, in which Brazilians excel.

In the past, hardly anyone thought of playing Counter-Strike as a profession, but the media is now showing us how this paradigm is shifting. More people are now considering it to be the new generation’s sport, and making a living out of it is now a possibility. Based on that, I would say that the first part of my theory is understanding that becoming a professional player can be done.

The second step after finding out that this is something people can actually do, it is to start practicing. It might be obvious at first, but people sometimes do not understand the meaning of practice, and that it takes time and effort to become a professional. Professional players started usually very early in their lives, and committed several hours of their days, every day to improving their skills, both individual and as a team. Also, studying the game composes a large part of the training.

As noticed in some of the chapters, being very skillful is not enough to become a professional. FalleN and Cogu had to find ways to raise money in order to play outside of Brazil, where they would end up having the visibility they needed so other professionals and organizations could see their potential,
thus investing in them. Part of this is participating in major tournaments, most of them located in either
Europe or North America. This goes side-by-side with Taylor’s (2006) book in which she emphasizes how
pro gamers do not appear from thin air, but are created not only from practice, but also through a broader
social process. This process includes self-management as a way to acquire visibility among players and
teams, creating a network that allows for opportunities. Furthermore, because there are usually no agents
behind the players, they have also to develop managerial skills, searching for contracts and
sponsorships, something FalleN has been doing extremely well. Furthermore, the theory pulled from the
data to answer the first question is as follows:

**Theory RQ1:** To become a professional player, one should first understand the existence of the
profession itself as a real possibility. Also, the desire to spend several hours a day, every day, practicing
and studying the game is necessary to raise one’s skill level, knowing that there is not a single moment
that practicing will cease. Finally, players have to be creative and make use of the tools available today to
be able to show their talents, to a broader audience, one that is composed of professional organizations
willing to invest in new players and teams.

Basically all Brazilian players who are making a live out of Counter-Strike are living outside the
country, where they have a place to live and practice, good salaries and all expenses paid by non-
Brazilian organizations. This indicates the lack of support that Brazilian companies have towards its
players, usually due to non-existent regulations and investments in the industry. However, this was never
a reason for Brazilian players to stop playing the game and being successful as such.

2. **How are Brazilians excelling in an industry that lacks incentives?**

   In the research I explained the problems with the Brazilian Counter-Strike scene. These facts are
important because a number of players are struggling to become professionals. This is not necessarily
because they do not have the necessary skills, but due to the lack of extrinsic incentives. Below is a list
containing the major problems faced by Brazilian players today:
• Weak investment in tournaments;
• Lack of commitment from tournament organizations in paying prizes on time
• Organizations that create abusive contract clauses that do not take players into consideration;
• Organizations that does not have contract with players at all, which cause a lot of roster changes, affecting teams’ performance;
• No salaries or minimum wage salaries;
• Organizations that do not pay for team’s expenses (which includes travel and infrastructure)
• Lack of investments and sponsorships from Brazilian companies, usually by being uninformed of the potential of the business.

According to Shields (2016), the Brazilian teams are now better than any North American (NA) teams because they rose in the ranks without any of the advantages NA teams have thrown up as the responsibility for the lack of top finishes in the last four years. And most of the improvements Brazilians are showing are areas in which North American teams have failed. Those improvements are the reasons Brazilians are excelling, even with the lack of support.

I would argue that part of the second theory is composed of the hard work Brazilians put in, in a quest to become professionals. My previous theory explains what is involved in becoming a professional, and I believe that by knowing what it takes, the South Americans are trying harder to succeed, as they know the benefits will be not only for them, but also for other Brazilian players, as noted by studying the case of FalleN. They know that the passion they have is enough for them to go that extra mile.

Before the rise of Brazilians, Europe was definitely the place to look to when talking about professional Counter-Strike, and even today, the Europeans have very strong teams that can get to the top best teams every single tournament. By knowing that, Brazilian teams have not only studied their gameplay, but also copied their style and adapted it to fit their own (Shields, 2016), which gave a fresh new twist to the scene that surprised everyone.
Another fact that I believe can be attributed to Brazilian success in Counter-Strike is how they can spot new talents and turn them into stars. The most notorious case is Marcelo “Coldzera,” the number 1 player in the world. FalleN discovered him and made sure he could play on his team. Even after Coldzera’s father prohibited him from going and playing, the in-game leader FalleN called him to tell the importance of what Marcelo could accomplish with this talent. Needless to say that he was right after all.

Also, constant changes in rosters make players adapt to different styles of gameplay. That ends up opening opportunities that were never thought of prior to that moment. For example, when Coldzera came to the team, FalleN went back to play as the sniper (the person who uses a specific type of gun) which made him the best of its kind. Brazilians know how to adapt to changes in a way that favors each player individually. Nonetheless, team strategies are created and planned according to each one’s strengths, which allows them to feel comfortable when playing the game.

Finally, as described by Taylor (2006) as “career and institutional savvy,” understanding the career aspects of a professional player is important and includes building a recognizable name for themselves, creating a public reputation and adapting their play style to fit the evolving nature of the competitive scene. Brazilians are good at doing so because they have to, as they are different from players in Europe or NA who have managers and organizations taking care of them.

All of that is summed up in my first theory, and I think it is important to underscore that a big part of why Brazilians are excelling in Counter-Strike is that Brazilians understand what is involved in the industry of Counter-Strike professionalism and make extremely good use of it. They are constantly studying the game and finding better ways to improve their game. So the second theory is formulated below:

Theory RQ2: Beyond constant skill improvements, Brazilians are amazingly good at overcoming obstacles to become better professionals, not only as individuals, but also as a group. Because they know a team is composed of different players with different gameplay styles, they focus on enhancing individual’s strengths to make players comfortable at the same time they shape team’s strategies to fit each player individually. Also, as avid students of the game, professional teams and players in Brazil have a keen eye to find and develop new talents, which differs from North American teams that try to find
perfect players to fill in roles they are not comfortable playing. Nonetheless, Brazilians can copy the gameplay from the best teams in the world and adapt it to their style, which I believe is what makes most of the successful sports team in Brazil successful. Along with this is the ability to find what is the best practice among the best in the world, and add the Brazilian way of doing things to the mix, creating a whole new way of playing sports that is unique and powerful.

For further research, an ethnographic approach including participant observation, interviews and field visits can complement this study with relevant information that is not necessarily found only by online data collection. Also, many different branches might emerge from this study that are definitely worth looking at. For example, more focused research on Europe or North America’s Counter-Strike scene would account for differences between cultures. Also, the difference between women’s Counter-Strike and why is it that people segregate CS:GO tournaments by gender, can yield interesting studies. These are some of the possible future work that can emerge from this study, and that would help develop important information in a field that is just starting.

The future of eSports in Brazil

Happily, with the worldwide phenomenon of eSports reaching the mainstream, many companies are paying more attention to Counter-Strike. Celebrities from other sports are now understanding the potential of eSports and are investing in teams, which is uncommon, as players usually invest in other businesses, like real state, or in their own field (Silva, 2016). Part of the reason for the growth of the game is the reach of social media and other information channels and how they can benefit players and teams. Knowing the power of those tools, FalleN is influencing a new generation of players that will advocate for the game and the growth of eSport inside Brazil.
eSports are already here. The whole world is looking at it and accepting it as the new generation’s sport. Hopefully Brazil will also embrace it, creating better conditions for the scene to grow and for players to feel comfortable knowing that their country is there for them. Because if there is one thing that we can learn from this study it is that Brazilian players are unstoppable. They are passionate, and it is up to Brazil to embrace these players, or watch them be successful on the account of other nations.

Figure 7: SK Gaming winning their second major tournament in a row (Moriarty, 2017).
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## Appendix

### How information was catalogued – Excel spreadsheet

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