Playing Against Hate Speech – How Teens See Hate Speech in Video Games and Online Gaming Communities

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Abstract

This article proposes the study and analysis of the state-of-the-art in video game panorama, focusing on the tendency to use hate speech among young players. The immersion of the player in the symbolic arena of the game, where everything becomes possible, raises questions about the relationship between video games in the virtual world, and the player's behavior in the physical world. It is shown that anonymity and the creation of communities and game groups can lead to the exclusion of and attacks to minorities; chat communications can facilitate sharing interests and game techniques as well as insults in times of tension between players, leading to imperative reflection on the role of gaming platforms in the control of shared content. Considering the boundless possibilities of video games, this article also reflects on game literacy and on how games have the potential to become powerful learning tools.

Keywords: Video games; Game Literacy; Hate Speech; Teenagers

Introduction

Hate speech is defined by European Union law "as the public incitement to violence or hatred directed to groups or individuals based on certain characteristics, including race, color, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin"[i].

This research is developed in the framework of the project "Play Your Role: Gamification against Hate Speech", whose main goal is to pinpoint effective approaches on how to prevent hate speech in video games. Nowadays, video games are known as one of the favorites leisure activities among young people, involving gamers, teachers and educators, video game enterprises, video game developers and the civil society. The project "Play Your Role" aims to understand hate speech in online video games, in the field, among young people, to counteract it and explore game literacy and serious games as significant learning tools to reinforce positive and empathic behaviors.

Playing an online game or interacting in a gaming community is part of the everyday life of most teenagers. According to recent studies, at European level, 97% of teenagers between 12 and 17 years old play or have played video games[ii] and their understanding of the video game world often has a pervasive influence on their behavior and their conflict management skills. Malik (Malik, 2008) states that in addition to providing entertainment, and technological skills, video games give practice in problems solving, verbal cognitive performance and social interaction to solve conflicts. Isabela Granic et al. (Granic et al., 2014) summarize on the benefits of playing video games, focusing on four

main domains: cognitive (e.g., attention), motivational (e.g., resilience in the face of failure), emotional (e.g., mood management), and social (e.g., prosocial behavior) benefits. Prensky (Prensky, 2006) showed that exposure to video games with open-ended problems has influenced the conflict management skills and the problem-solving capacity of the millennial generation.

Providing secure contexts for discussion, this project intends to explore, in the field, working with youngsters and game developers, the challenges and difficulties of video games, as well as the role of media literacy and educational games in learning in our constantly changing 21st-century lifestyle.

Online Video Games

Video games enable the discovery of knowledge through a simulated reality that allows the player to fail without physical consequences (Silva, 2010). Via image production and immersion techniques, games invade everyday life with an interesting and safe reality. According to Salen & Zimmerman

> *"The game is a system that engages players in an artificial conflict"* (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p.80)

where, stimulated by curiosity, gamers look for answers and rewards. Studies have shown that if a player must choose between a bloody game that doesn't challenge him or one that does but has no violence, he will choose the second one (Ramos, 2008). On the other hand, video games can provide the ability to learn new concepts, with constant feedback on players progress; autonomy, freedom to build their own game and relatedness, interaction with others, and also the ability to play cooperatively and competitively (Nass et al., 2014).

Nowadays video games represent one of the most influential media in popular culture: counting just the European console market, the top 20 best-selling games have sold a sum that exceeds 973 million copies[iii]. During 2018 the video game market has reached new records in terms of the size of gaming communities. Two relevant examples are "Playerunknown's Battlegrounds" (PUBG)[iv] and "Fortnite"[v].

It has been observed that online games make the interaction between gamers easier and this form of socialization, without access to sex, age, race or physical aspect, creates ephemeral or circumstantial relationships. Players make virtual communities with specific rules and values and with a sense of belonging, they work for a common purpose. However, while some argue that there is a prosocial behavior after playing that might generalize to their peer and family relations outside the gaming environment (Colwell et al., 1995), others claim that the player is ultimately led to isolation (Selnow, 1984).

Game's narrative can involve the player, transmitting ideas and values, showing that beyond functionality there are concerns with the user's emotional experience. When immersed in the game, the users build a virtual world based on the decisions they make during the game, especially when they are represented by an avatar. This virtual freedom may lead to unethical behaviors (Machado, 2007; Ramos, 2008). According to Kinder,

> *"As if to strike an ironic balance between manichean morality and total nihilism, characterization and plot remain minimal. The only moral justification that appears essential are the rules of the games"* (Kinder, 1996, p.28)

Video games present a vast world of possibilities for interaction and creation, and it is the player's responsibility to choose which kind of behavior to adopt. In our study, we focus Video games present a vast world of possibilities for interaction and creation, and it is the player's responsibility to choose which kind of behavior to adopt. In our study we focus gamers between 12 and 19 years old analyzing their possible susceptibility and vulnerability to interactions in video games.

Hate Speech and Violence

Expressing opinions that incite hatred towards individuals or groups, i.e. giving words the power to hurt physically, characterizes hate speech. Online Hate Speech has been addressed in Europe for some time now, in public discussion and at the political and institutional level. With the implementation of the Code of Conduct, in May 2016, many important platforms have committed themselves to fight the spread of such content in Europe. The evaluation of the Code of Conduct on countering illegal online hate speech carried out by NGOs and public bodies[vi] shows a fourfold increase in the notifications of hate speech online as being the main grounds for reporting Xenophobia (17.8%), which includes anti-migrant hatred, has been reported, together with anti-Muslim hatred (17.7%), as the most recurrent ground of hate speech, followed by ethnic origin (15.8%). Hate speech in video games can be mainly found in three different contexts:

1. Offline gameplay;

2. Online gameplay;

3. Online community.

The first context, the offline gameplay, refers to the content and the overall player experience. In this regard, some video games may contain clear traces of hate speech or can encourage its development in the form of very cruel and violent language and situations. This issue is well exemplified by the identification of PEGI (Pan European Game Information, a European video game content rating system) content descriptors, such as discrimination and hate speech used in famous video games such as "Grand Theft Auto"[vii] (GTA).

The online gameplay, the second context, is related to the dynamics of the interaction with other players during online multiplayer gaming sessions. Often unmoderated, activities such as building teams or clans, sharing strategies and voice chat can cause conflicts or be a vehicle of hate speech. These are all real-time actions that can't be regarded only as virtual, as they engage the gamer as a real person and can have implications and influences outside the game, e.g. conflicts among friends. As an example, PewDiePie[viii] – YouTube celebrity related to the "let's play" genre – has suffered fines and has seen its sponsors withdrawing contracts for having made anti-Semitic insults on his YouTube channel.

The third context refers to online communities created around specific video games (for example "PUBG", "Fortnite", "League of Legends" and "Overwatch"), both on social media and video game

platforms (such as Twitch, Steam and Reddit), where it is easy to find comments brimming with verbal violence, intolerance, or even "virtual stones" to those who express conflicting opinions.

Regrettably, these attitudes are widespread, and it has become more and more common to witness harassment campaigns against women within the video game industry, hate groups or white supremacist servers. In some serious episodes there has been a shift from the digital world to the real one, putting at risk the privacy of prominent personalities within these communities and even their own safety.

Since the beginning of the millennium, hate speech has become more frequent. Non-governmental organizations and public agencies, shows a considerable increase in online hate speech notifications, the main reasons for denouncing xenophobia (17.8%), which includes hatred against migrants, together with anti-Muslim hatred (17.7%), one of the most fertile areas of hate speech, followed by ethnic origin (15.8%).[ix]

Hate speech is often tolerated as a normal reaction in moments of anger or frustration aroused by the competitiveness inherent in video games. While playing, the interaction by chat is common and comments can range from performance compliments to ironic criticism, personal or ethnic insults, discrimination against sexual orientation, harassment or minority attack. Using anonymity in front of a supportive public and the absence of consequences might endorse the use of hate speech as a demonstration of power or frustration relief. This kind of behavior is detrimental to the physical condition and self-esteem of both the aggressors and the victims (Breuer, 2017).

According to Consalvo, Ivory, Martins, and Williams (Consalvo et al., 2009), women and minorities are the most affected by hate speech, as there is a tendency for over-representation of males, white people and adults, and an under-representation of females, Hispanics, Native Americans, children and elderly people. Not unlike television, games can impact the cognitive modeling of social identity, influencing players' impressions of social groups.

Studies showed that there are no female characters in 40% of the games and that when they do exist, they mostly have secondary roles. Over two-thirds are Caucasian characters (68%), followed by Latinos (15%) and African-American (8%), often associated with gangsters in games like GTA. By mirroring social inequalities of the physical world, this unbalance in games can boost the creation of stereotypes (Consalvo et al., 2009). More recent studies about gender in video games shows that an increasing number of female protagonists are headlining games, but they are still largely limited and defined by male figures (Perreault et al., 2016). Analyzing the video games media characters Adrienne Shaw (Shaw, 2010) concluded that most of the times representation may be available, but only to those who seek it out.

Consequently, an environment where a group is highly represented will catch the attention of players with the same characteristics, creating virtual communities, which appeal to certain majorities (Consalvo et al., 2009). According to Breuer (Breuer, 2017), the fact that minorities are under-represented leads to few minority players who are consequently more exposed to exclusion and hate speech. Despite the need to defend minorities against hate crimes, control is often used as a tool to

spread intolerance (Bernardes et al., 2016). Many authors and scientific researchers have found a relation between violent depiction and aggressive behavior in children. According to Packard (Packard, 2013), violent video games like "GTA" or "Fortnite" may promote unhealthy relationships between boys and girls, as it encourages sexual harassment and dehumanization. On the other hand, there are many recent studies that have underlined the positive role of video games, focusing the potential in providing for safe zones of behaviour and confrontation, reinforcing, and rewarding positive behaviour, the ludic approach to serious topics and debates with a language that speaks directly to youngsters, without necessarily leading players to hideous and socially unacceptable behaviors and attitudes (Alves, 2005)

Video Game Platforms and Creators

The fact that players systematically choose a certain type of socially identifiable game will economically encourage the video game industry to match that preference; creating something with ethical and moral value is not reachable for industries designed to make money (Zagalo, 2019). Their goal is to satisfy this audience rather than expand it by making games for other audiences. MMORPG[x] games[xi] are increasingly popular, giving players multiple options to create more distinct identities, by enabling them to choose gender, race or age (Consalvo et al., 2009). There are several gaming genres currently on the market with MMORPGs being one of the most popular. Blizzard's World of Warcraft, one of the most, if not the most, well known MMORPGs, last reported an active subscription base of 5.5 million players in September of 2015 (Manocha, 2017).

When combating hate speech, creators have the most important and immediate role; as decision makers, they have the chance to block content, or diversify the available characters. This way, they will increase the number of players from the minorities (Breuer, 2017). It is almost impossible for game creators to predict the player's behavior during their interaction with the virtual environment, the control must be done by small A.I. programs which, acting as virtual police, can rectify mistakes (Machado, 2007).

In the light of this, big companies like Ubisoft[xii] have implemented a Code of Conduct on their community systems and in-game chats, banning players who use racist or homophobic insults. Players banning depends on how extreme the offense is, and it might result in a two, seven or fifteen day-ban or even a permanent one (e.g., Tom Clancy's Rainbow Siege). Harder to track is everything that happens in chats and discussions.

A bigger concern and vigilance walk hand in hand with higher control and censorship. The EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online[xiii] must serve as a model for platforms. UNESCO also promotes media role to counter hate and extremism. The publication "Countering Online Hate Speech"[xiv] gives an overview of hate speech and some measures to counteract and mitigate it, showing good practices that have emerged at local and global levels (Grizzle & Tornero, 2016).

Game platforms and communities usually serve as a means for the propagation of this kind of speech. Discord[xv], which allows creating chats and groups to unite players, already imposed its position against hate speech by banning several users linked to neo-Nazi or white supremacy ideologies and by forbidding harassment or threatening messages. On the other hand, Steam, the gaming community and store, refused to block games or content in defense of the right of decision, reaffirming itself as a game market closed to cultural disputes. Twitch[xvi] and YouTube[xvii] are other platforms allowing to watch live streams[xviii] of almost everything, including games. The content goes live without filters, so it is impossible to predict any inappropriate actions. Live streamers can become stars, like PewDiePie, influencing players to act according to certain attitudes. Banning or censoring video games can be considered a way to oppose free speech; and it is important to protect freedom of speech because it promotes self-fulfillment, autonomy, democracy and truth (Greenawalt, 2005). Can censorship be justified? If the exposure to a type of content can lead to imitation, limiting the access to it can increase the ability to take freer decisions. The power of words is revealed in the influence of the content in opinions and actions, showing that violent speech can generate inconsistent answers (Hurley, 2004). On the other hand, banning certain video games may not be the correct approach because it might turn violent video games into a "forbidden fruit". Maybe literacy and game design could be the answer, encouraging discussion about the messages and contents and stimulating young people's moral reasoning (Lourenço, 1998). On the other hand, the features of the game could be improved, assigning different missions so that the player would be encouraged to do less violent acts which could reduce potential harm.

Video Games Literacy

Video games create challenging situations while they liberate, normalize, organize and integrate, leading to the recognition of its educational potential (Moita, 2007). In a context where video games serve as a pedagogical resource, educators are given a strategic role to promote video games as a learning tool among the younger generations, scouting for resources that engage students. Using intellectual techniques such as reading, adding, memorizing or identifying, video games can offer an implicit awareness-raising approach on social issues including violence and amoral behavior, whose effectiveness would significantly outperform all attempts to impose any restrictive or prohibitive measure to disengage gamers. Instead, it is necessary to problematize games, urging creators and game developers to open ground for ethical behaviors in the virtual world and emphasizing the difference between the physical and the virtual, while reinforcing games as a space for learning, fiction and fantasy (Moita, 2007; Ramos, 2008).

How can young people learn from video games? How to promote video game literacy among educators, children and teens? According to Espinosa and Scolari,

> *"Video game literacy can be described as: having the ability to play games, having the ability to understand meanings with respect to games, and having the ability to make games"* (Contreras-Espinosa & Scolari, 2019, p. 48-49).

Informal learning should be viewed as a set of skills that are rarely cultivated at schools and require critical thinking, collaboration and participation, showing the importance of the balance

between both educational approaches. This way of learning is very relevant for the modern human being; by solving problems, simulating, evaluating and imitating, players can learn from the virtual world. Imitation is the most important ILS (informal learning strategy), while observing their favorite players on platforms like YouTube, young people can complete tasks and solve problems in video games (Contreras-Espinosa & Scolari, 2019).

Which factors can encourage learning through video games? Designing games with a set of key elements that enable gamers to create an experience user-friendly and educational experiences is of the utmost importance. Players could choose a new identity and discover an interactive world that allows them not only to take risks without real consequences but also to improve their gaming skills. However, there are some barriers to this educational method, such as affordability, the time that it takes to learn, the difficult access to gaming devices, and, above all, the preference some students nurture for the traditional methods (Nass et al., 2014).

Besides understanding the rules, objectives and game's interface, the user has the opportunity to communicate with others resorting to a specific language, while developing social skills. Unlike traditional education, often characterized by the individualization of work and conditioned by the classroom space, in video games, players learn with the actual interaction with software and other players. By being in control of the activity that challenges them to achieve a certain goal, students are offered an active role in constructing their knowledge (Delwiche, 2006).

According to Zagal (Zagal, 2008), "Gamer literacy", a result from an avid interest and years of gaming experience, shouldn't be equated with "games literacy" or the ability to understand games. To understand games is also necessary to perceive their role in culture because language, music or other elements are often valued by a specific culture or subculture. The cultural context is often important to understand games and vice versa.

Understanding games implies the ability to explain, discuss, situate, interpret and position games in the human cultural context (artifacts), other players context and platforms context. In his research, Zagal (Zagal, 2008), looking for a framework for games literacy, pointed out two educational lenses that contextualize the meaning of understanding games and supporting the students: the "communities of practice", where the user is part of a community, sharing beliefs and goals, and the "knowledge building" where ideas valid to the community are encouraged and improved.

According to Grizzle and Tornero (Grizzle & Tornero, 2016), there is no clear consensus about how to counteract the negative impacts of online hate speech, but education and awareness are key elements to combat hate speech online, thus playing a crucial role in promoting media and information literacy. Recent UNESCO initiatives include the launch of a Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through education. The organization notes that "It is not enough to counter violent extremism – we need to prevent it, and this calls for forms of 'soft power', to prevent a threat driven by distorted interpretations of culture, hatred, and ignorance"[xix]. This media and information literacy must be applied to both formal and informal education and such an intervention should target especially youth, given their rich insight on their own knowledge, attitude, and practices when they encounter hate and extremist content online.

Media, such as video games and game-related practices, are complex and intertwined worlds that play an important role in the everyday life of youngsters and adult citizens and have therefore a significant influence when it comes to building concepts of the other, behavior patterns and conflict management. The attention to this influence has been addressed mostly through its negative connection with violent behavior, violent radicalization, or the students' less worrying yet worrisome leisure activities. The positive potential of video games in providing safe zones of behavior and confrontation has been progressively exploited, reinforcing, and rewarding positive behavior, the playful approach to serious topics and debates with a language that speaks directly to young people. Researchers like Henry Jenkins, Paul Gee, Mark Prensky, Gonzalo Frasca, Ian Bogost e Jane McGonigal (Bogost, 2011; Frasca, 2001; Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 2009; McGonigal, 2011; Prensky, 2006), among many others, have been highlighting the needs of a new generation of young people, generally called digital natives, whose distinctive characteristics must be recognized to guarantee successful learning, motivation and participation results, such as games, simulations, appropriation, multitasking environments, collective intelligence. , work networks and negotiation skills (Felicia, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Prensky, 2006)

Media Literacy plays here a crucial role in providing tools for critical thinking, but also in reinforcing more sensitive approaches around creativity. According to the European Council conclusions on developing media literacy and critical thinking through education and training, Media literacy is

> *"all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with both traditional and new forms of media (…). It is closely related to active engagement in democratic life, to citizenship and the ability to exercise judgment critically and independently as well as to reflect on one's own actions, and can thereby enhance young people's resilience in the face of extremist messages and disinformation"[xx]*

To perceive the role of video games as artefacts and experience transmitters, it is important to place them in the context of human culture. Video games can be excellent educational tools, capable of focusing and motivating young people to learn certain skills based on the development of their critical thinking, cooperation and interaction.

Serious Games

The Serious games allow the player to learn certain educational material while playing, where gameplay and learning can't be separated. With an unappealing appearance, they rarely make a first good impression, i.e. they aren't received with the same enthusiasm as other games. In most cases, they are associated with a single skill, which, once learned, leads to discarding the game. Another discouraging aspect is the need to read the instructions before the game begins. Naturally, the player must be able to play fully aware of the rules to move ahead in the game; however, going through the instructions thoroughly might easily become too time-consuming, thus making such games even more unappealing: Game play as a lesson. The difficult access and unavailability in all platforms are other factors that compromise their success (Nass et al., 2014)

Several authors and studies have been researching the importance of serious games in education and behavior. *The International Journal of Videogames* or *The International Journal of Game-Based*

Learning have devoted a decade of periodical publications to bridging the need for scientific and engineering methods for building games as effective learning tools, promoting regular meetings and job calls in this field. We also highlight the work of James Paul Gee, who has dedicated his scientific career to studying the relationship between games, learning and society. According to the author, one can be literate in the semiotic domain of video games if he or she can recognize (the equivalent of "reading") and/or produce (the equivalent of "writing") meanings in the video game domain (Gee, 2003). Gee gathered some principles that are good practices in creating serious games, guiding success as learning motors while being motivating and challenging. Also, the American Mark Prensky has been a reference for his research studies in Digital Game-Based Learning, basing his assumptions in the notion of digital natives and the need of taking the game into the classroom, while an innovative model that promotes student learning through the use of technology (Prensky, 2006).

Some non-governmental organizations have implemented the use of video games while working closely with several communities, looking for behavior changes, as well as educational[xxi] and cultural development. Immersing a student in a virtual environment with physical world characteristics that allow him to test possibilities is one of the most effective ways of learning (Giasolli et al., 2006). In many ways, video games can encourage learning, either through historical games or by depicting a historical character who teaches about the period in which he lived. As an example, let us consider "My Child Lebensborn"[xxii], where, driven by his own emotional drawing, the player takes care of a child from a Nazi program in the Norwegian society after the war; or "Florence"[xxiii], which allows the player to formulate questions about the society through a simple interactive story (Zagalo, 2018).

The success of these games depends on the player's emotional response while interacting, the aesthetic and the design. The most important factors seem to be: awareness, the player must be sensitized by a narrative that encourages him to achieve a goal; immersion, the game must be able to shut down the player from the real world, and make him focus on the game(Schell J., 2013); the feeling of progress that encourages the performance (Werbach & Hunter, 2012); the feeling of danger, when simulated with caution, can help the player focus (Chou, 2015); and, finally, the feeling of conquest, able to motivate the player to continue (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011).

The perspective of game-based learning seems to be an important path for teaching and modeling behaviors in the era of the digital natives. Taking this into account, we can understand serious games as a tool to sensitize the player through emotional drawing, which motivates natural and fluid learning, while cumulatively avoiding boredom.

Research conceptualization and descriptive statistical analysis

After analyzing the state-of-the-art, hate speech in online games and communities, it was important to analyze the phenomena in the field. Students from three countries (Portugal, Italy, and Lithuania) were surveyed, which enabled the collection of data required to apply a quantitative method. The survey was conducted by direct administration with open-and-closed questions divided into five groups. Most of the closed questions had a Likert scale basis, where respondents were

asked to specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale for a series of statements related to online hate speech. This questionnaire was composed of five groups: in the first group, the goal was to understand the relationship between adolescents and video games; the second group aimed at interpreting young people's perception of hate speech in online gaming communities; in group three, the questions concerned the use of Livestream and chat platforms; group four focused on the responsibility for the growth of this specific trend of online hate speech; and, finally, group five made it possible to gather new insight into how young people face hate speech in video games and online communities.

The samples comprised 572 individuals, 246 female and 291 males, divided between Italy (195), Lithuania (228) and Portugal (149). The age of the respondents varied between eleven and twenty, with a predominance of the individuals aged 12. 9,3% of respondents stated not to play video games.

According to the data on the personal relationship with video games, 40% of the respondents plays regularly. Most students spend between 1-2 hours per day playing video games in their homes (60%). Few gamers see video games as a way of learning (36%) but part of the respondents see gaming communities as a place to make friends (57%). 58% claim not to feel angry after playing.
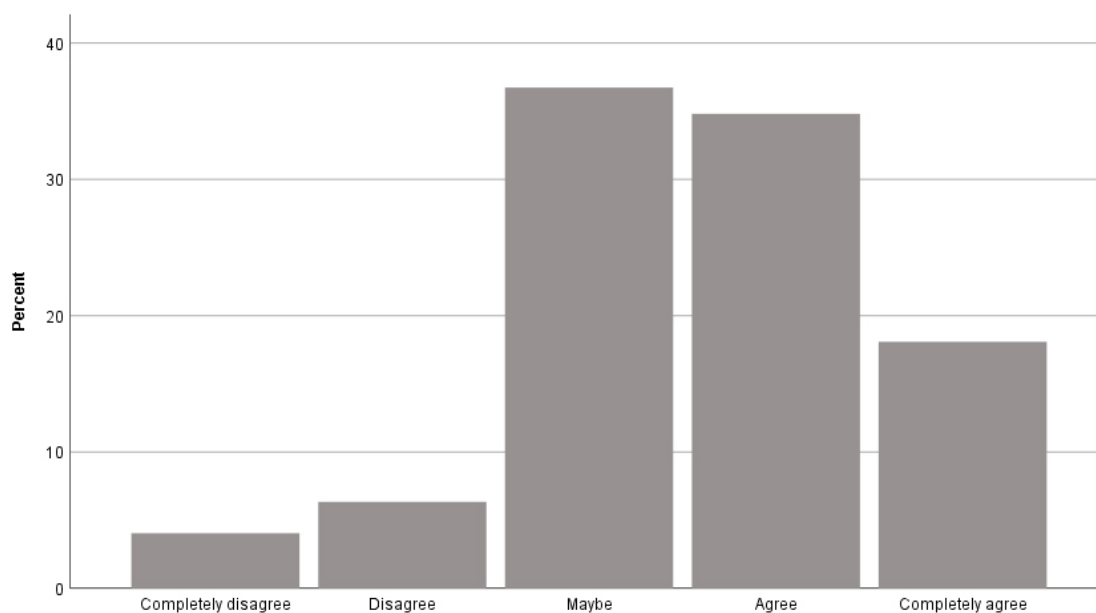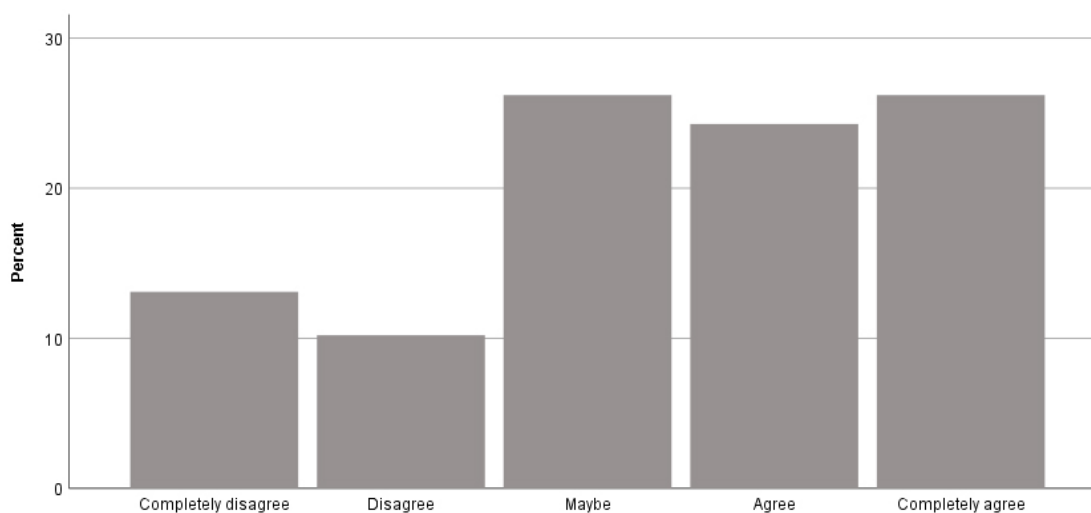

Figure 1. Do you see video games as a way of learning?

When surveyed on their perception of hate speech in online gaming communities, 53% said they were aware of the rules for online platforms, 28,8% never noticed the existence of hate groups and 71%

have never been contacted by one. Although most respondents reported no hate speech episode (66%), 45% agree with censorship of online hate speech.

Figure 2. Do you agree with censorship of hate speech in the gaming platforms?

In relation to the existence of hate groups actively using hate speech, data shows that the respondents who have more tendency to use hate speech in video games and gaming communities are more aware of the existence of hate groups in the platforms and have already been contacted by hate groups on the platforms. The same applies to the students who have already been victims of online hate speech.

Regarding the behavior in Livestream and chat platforms, it was noticed a tendency not to watch live games (45%), over 40% have never used a Livestream platform nor see any live streamer as an influence, for the 37% that use it, YouTube (53%) is the favorite. Data shows that 48% have never used a chat platform; for the 23% that use it, Discord is the favorite (95%) and 28% have never talked to strangers during online games. 46% of students claim they have never found inappropriate content on chat platforms
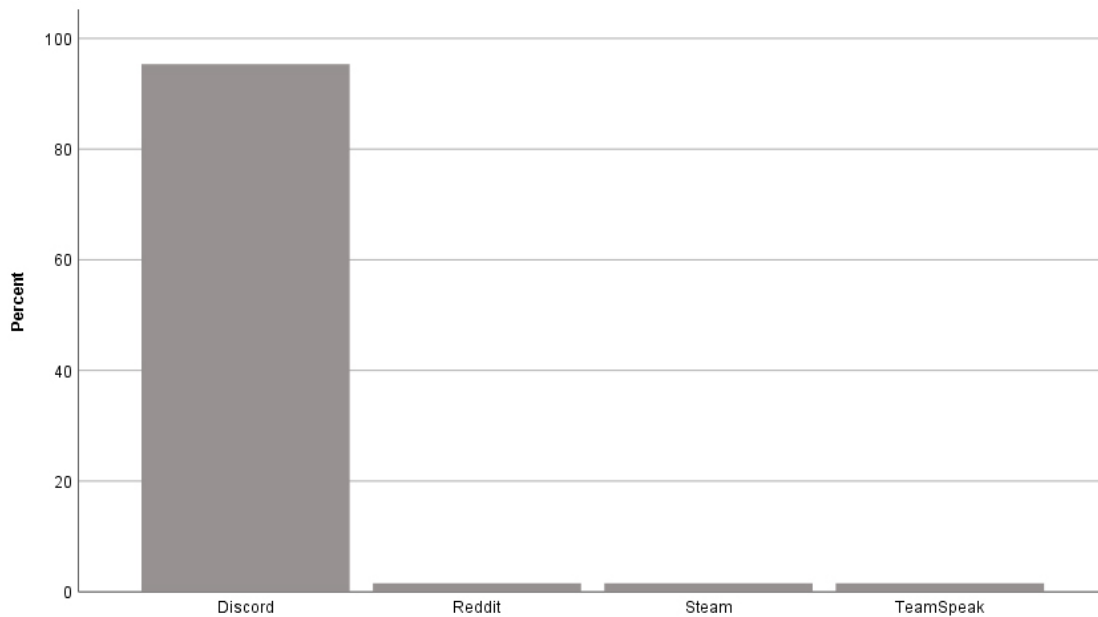
Figure 3. Which is your favorite chat platform for gaming?

When it comes to the responsibility for hate speech promotion, data are not conclusive about the responsibility of community managers in the prevention of hate speech and only 23% of the respondents agree that game designers are accountable. 48% agreed that players can change this trend, but it was noticed a tendency (39%) not to believe in the total elimination of hate speech. There is no conclusion about the educative role of video games.
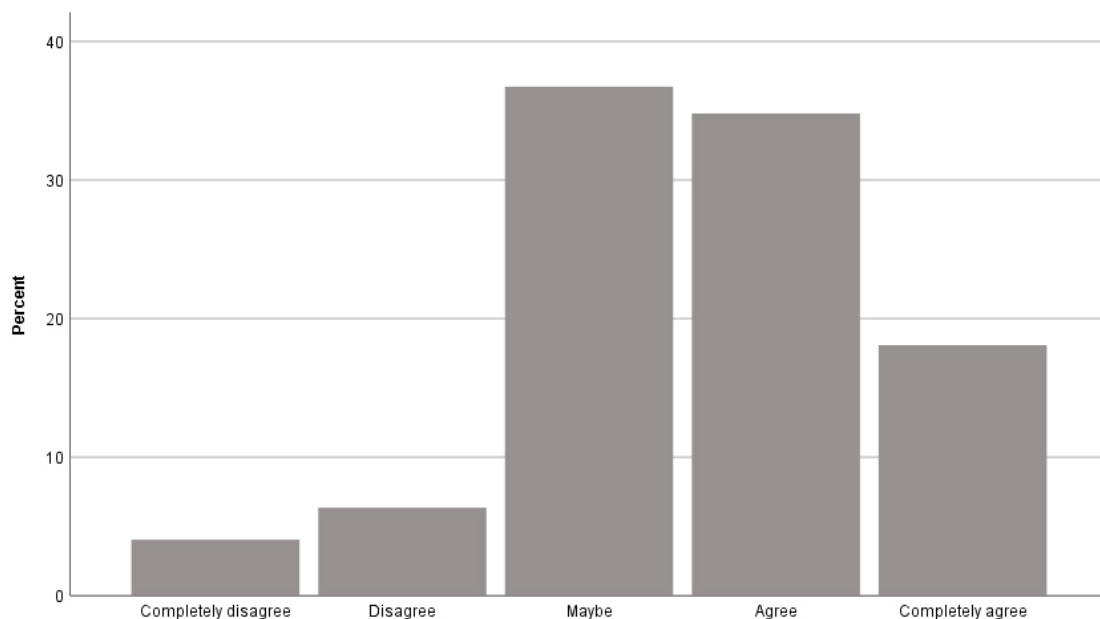

Figure 4. Do you think that players can change hate speech trend?

On the subject of how students face hate speech in video games and online communities, 70% of the students agree that it is not cool to be a hater, although 52% don't take online hate speech seriously and 67% never felt affected by it in everyday life. According to the responses, hate speech occurs more frequently in video games, between players, and over 60% have never been a victim nor use it. It is noticeable that most of the time youngsters are aggressors and victims at the same time.

The respondents who use hate speech tend to think it is cool to be a hater, but they seem to agree with censorship on gaming platforms.

Concerning the awareness of parents and educators on the existence of hate speech, students claim that 45% of the parents never supervised their online gaming communities, and it is noticed a
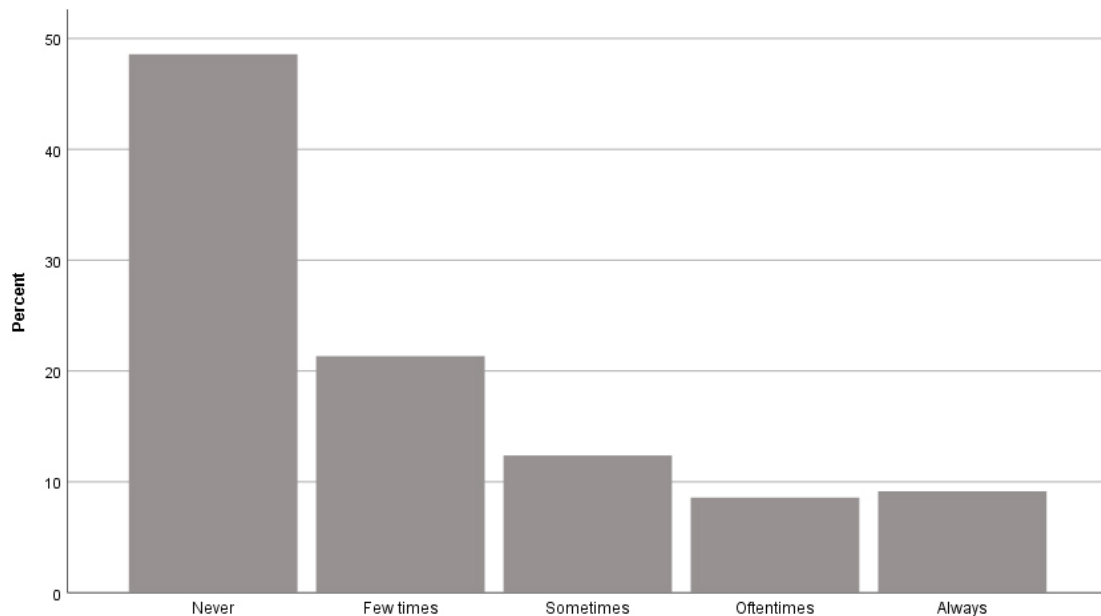
tendency in parents to warn children to the existence of online hate speech, although not regularly.

Figure 5. Do your parents/educators supervise your games and chats?

According to the answers from the students, the five most played games are Fortnite, FIFA, Minecraft, GTA and Brawl Stars. The ones where they often find hate speech are Fortnite, CS:GO, Call of Duty and Minecraft. The most common types of hate speech are insults against race (29%), sexual orientation (20,7%) and national/ethnic origin (19%).

Finally, 22% of the respondents never played serious games and only 20% do it regularly.

The results obtained with the surveys show that 91% of students play video games and most of them do it regularly. Most of the respondents don't feel affected by online hate speech in their everyday life, have also never been a victim nor used hate speech. It was noticed a relationship between the contact with hate groups and the use of online hate speech that occurs more frequently among players during online games.

It is also important to point out that most parents/educators don't supervise their children's/students' online games, nor do they warn them about the dangers they pose regularly. This urges parents and educators to engage in reflection on their role in the counterreaction of online hate speech, as well as in fostering healthy playing habits. Although most young players don't play serious games, this leisure activity can provide safe zones and tools for learning through critical thinking, cooperation and interaction, which speaks directly to the youngsters.

Discussion

During the first stage of research, the definition of the problem consisted in attempting to perceive the level of young people's awareness of the existence of hate speech. However, literature review further along the process of research, providing detailed information about online hate speech in video games, led to a deeper notion of the state of art and shaped the survey used for data collection. The data analysis model was based on the state of art which allowed the research and reflection on four previous hypotheses.

According to the results and correlations, where is possible to notice the intensity of the association between quantitative variables, we aimed to validate or not the hypnosis previously formulated.

h.1 Young people who play more hours have more tendency to use hate speech.

This hypothesis was validated in all countries, with a significative correlation between the question «how many hours per day do you usually play?» and «have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?». Italian ($r=.35$; $p<0.01$); Lithuanian ($r=.37$; $p<0.01$) and Portugal ($r=.40$; $p<0.01$), having a global correlation of ($r=.38$; $p<0.01$).

h.2 Young players who had been in contact with hate speech in gaming communities have more tendency to practice it.

This hypothesis was validated in all countries with a significative correlation between the questions «have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?» and «have you ever been contacted by hate groups on the games communities». Italian ($r=.56$; $p<0.01$); Lithuanian ($r=.35$; $p<0.01$) and Portugal ($r=.54$; $p<0.01$) having a global correlation of ($r=.44$; $p<0.01$).

h.3 Parents/educators have an active role in the prevention of hate speech.

This hypothesis was refuted in all countries with a low significative correlation between the questions «have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?» and «Have your parents/educators warned you about the danger of online hate speech?». Italian ($r=.-14$; $p<0.01$); Lithuanian ($r=.-16$; $p<0.01$) and Portugal ($r=.-18$; $p<0.01$) having a global correlation of ($r=.-19$; $p<0.01$). As well as between the questions «have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities? » and «Do your parents/educators supervise your games and chats? ». Italian ($r=.04$; $p<0.01$); Lithuanian ($r=.-09$; $p<0.01$) and Portugal ($r=.-07$; $p<0.01$) having a global correlation of ($r=.-04$; $p<0.01$).

h.4 Hate speech affects the everyday lives of young players.

In the global analysis, we noticed that 67% of the respondents claim that online hate speech does not affect their everyday life, 77% in Italy, 62% in Lithuania and 62% in Portugal. There is also a tendency to not take online hate speech seriously showing a significant correlation in the Portuguese case ($r=.35$; $p<0.01$) in the questions «have you ever felt affected by online hate speech in everyday life?» and «do you take hate speech seriously in video games and game communities?». Therefore, considering the collected data, this hypothesis must be refuted.

According to the data collected in this survey, we can notice that young people spend on average one and two hours a day playing online and most of them do not feel angry after playing, even claiming that they use this type of community to make friends.

Although there is a lack of interventionist attitude by parents in relation to this phenomenon, most of these young people do not feel the presence of hate speech in video games and gaming communities, leading not to give much importance to this type of situation, even considering this kind of attitude "cool".

On the other hand, young people who spend more time playing online, show a greater tendency to practice hate speech and, also to become a victim of that same speech. The most common type of hate speech has to do with issues related to race, sexual orientation and national / ethnic origin.

In this sense, this essay reveals that young people tend to have a carefree relationship with video games and gaming communities where hate speech does not seem to have an active role, revealing a general lack of concern in the face of this phenomenon. They also do not seem to be in the habit of using chat platforms or Livestream, and do not assign an effective responsibility either to the creators or to the users, for the growth of hate speech on these platforms.

Some questions do not allow conclusions because of the predominance of neutral answers, the application of the online focus groups, with more open questions, will bring valuable information to the research about the student's personal experience.

Conclusions

The different paths gamers can experiment with while playing video games have given rise to many debates and reflections. Digital games have long been associated with negative effects on the players' physical and mental health. Currently, there seems to be a virtual space where hate speech manifestations are growing without mediation. However, recent studies show that, although digital games could, for various reasons (hate speech, addiction, violence, isolation), affect human health negatively, especially when talking about children, if there are good playing habits (such as limited time, appropriate environment, game literacy, moderation of games), they can be safe and have a positive impact on both behavior and learning (Felicia, 2009). The emergence of the notion of Serious Games, i.e. using new gaming technologies for educational purposes, has reinforced the positive impact that video games might have. According to a study published in 2009, written in the framework of European Schoolnet's Games in Schools project, this movement emerged

> *"to meet the needs of a new generation of learners, often referred to as the digital natives, whose distinctive characteristics should be acknowledged in order to ensure successful learning outcomes and motivation on their part"* (Felicia, 2009)*,*

being a possible way to combat violence and hate speech in certain gaming communities.

In the revision of the studies that have been developed in this field, we gathered some authors, such as Breuer (Breuer, 2017), Bernardes et al. (Bernardes et al., 2016), Packard (Packard, 2013) and Ferreira (Ferreira, 2003), who have carried out a concrete analysis of the violent and aggressive behaviors triggered by video games. There are also numerous articles posted on blogs or websites (Kotaku or Vice, just to name two) that warn of the controversial content that might be potentially found on online gaming platforms and communities. Analyzing the sources, it is notable an increasing discussion on the subject over the years, without reaching a consensus, mostly because there are those who argue that games do not influence violent behavior (Ulanoff, 2019), and see them as a way to achieve behavioral, cultural and social change. As Zagalo (Zagalo, 2014) points out, what is discussed is the production of culture because, however violent the game might be, it forces the player to be aware of himself and of the environment he's immersed in. Each video game is thus a human expression of an idea, and those who play may or may not agree with it.

It is notable the constant evolution of video game universe, new games are constantly being launched, with new themes and perspectives that will be received by the audience in many ways. According to Machado (Machado, 2007), game creators aren't fully capable of predicting the consequences that each game might have. Actually, it can be argued that games can be less violent, and individuals may still express themselves freely and violently in them. Finally, it is essential to mention the importance of dividing games in categories, using, for example, PEGI labels, and insisting on a game literacy perspective among educators.

In the next stages, the project "Paly your Role" aims to extend the current research, by carrying out deeper and wider groundwork with small focus groups, targeting individuals who claimed to have had contact with hate groups or to have used hate speech while playing on online gaming platforms themselves. In-depth understanding of the motivations inherent to the use of this type of discourse will be essential in the following stages: creating pedagogical itineraries to work on this topic within communities of players and developing video games with educational purposes to tackle this pressing issue. In this process, schools, young people, teachers, game developers and companies will be brought together in a teamwork effort to fight against hate speech in video games.

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[i] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l33178

[ii] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2008/09/16/teens-video-games-and-civics/

[iii] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2008/09/16/teens-video-games-and-civics/

[iv] PUBG is the first video game popularizing the "battle royale" genre, a type of video game in which a large number of players (usually 100) compete on the same map at the same time and where only one survives.

[v] "Fortnite" is an online video game created by Epic Games. It is a shooter cooperative survival game. Gamers have to gather materials, and weapons and try to kill each other off. The last player standing wins. It has over 125 million players and has become a cultural phenomenon.

[vi] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-261_en.htm

[vii] "Grand Theft Auto", video game series created by David Jones and Mike Daily and developed by Rockstar North. Published in 1997 by Rockstar Games. This game is censored or banned in countries like Brazil, China, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates.

[viii] PewDiePie, comedian and video producer known for his video game vlogs and live streams on Youtube.

[ix] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-261_en.htm

[x] Massive Multiplayer Online, an online role-playing video game in which a very large number of people compete and interact simultaneously.

[xi] World of Warcraft, MMORPG online game developed and distributed by the producer Blizzard Entertainment. Launched in 2014.

[xii] Ubisoft is a French video game company with several development studios across the world, producing popular games such as Assassin's Creed, Just Dance, Prince of Persia, Rayman.

[xiii] https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-262_en.htm

[xiv] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231

[xv] Discord, application with voice and text chat designed for players. Launched in 2015.

[xvi] Twitch, streaming site focused on streaming video games. Launched in 2011.

[xvii] YouTube, video sharing platform. Founded in 2005.

[xviii] Live stream, live transmission of an event over the Internet.

[xix] https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism

[xx] adopted on 30 May 2016, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9641-2016-INIT/en/pdf

[xxi] We highlight the work of gamesforchange.com, created in 2004 with the following mission: "empowers game creators and social innovators to drive real-world change using games and technology that help people to learn, improve their communities, and contribute to make the world a better place. We convene stakeholders through our annual G4C FESTIVAL and foster the exchange of ideas and resources through workshops and consulting projects. We inspire youth to explore civic issues and learn 21st-century and STEM skills through our STUDENT CHALLENGE and train educators to run game design classes on impact games. We incubate projects through our game design challenges and executive

production expertise in coalition building. We act as an amplifier by curating games for change to the public through our game's arcades and awards" (http://www.gamesforchange.org).

xxii My Child Lebensborn, is a nurture, survival game, based on true events. Developed by Sarepta Studio AS and released in 2018.

xxiii Florence, interactive story video game developed and published by Mountains Studio in 2018.