Perceptions about online hate speech in games and gaming communities: results from a survey in Portugal

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Abstract
This paper presents the results of a survey aimed at students aged between 10 and 18 from three schools in the South of Portugal. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about their perspectives regarding online hate speech (OHS). The study, whose central objective is to understand the intricate dynamics of online video games and social gaming platforms, is part of a project entitled "PROPS: Interactive Narratives Propose a Pluralistic Speech". From the data collected, the project envisages the creation of a set of interactive media designed to counteract main OHS discourses. By developing a thoughtful approach to the emergent issue of OHS, the aim is to promote media literacy in young players, thus cultivating a gaming environment that is both inclusive and safe.

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Introduction

The intersection of games and hate speech has emerged as a growing concern within the gaming community and society at large. For decades, the presence of hate speech in video game platforms has been partly overlooked, as the pressure on social media platforms continues to mount (ADL Center for Technology & Society, 2022; Siegel, 2020), through changes in usage policies, increased social awareness, and greater demands for accountability from civil society, governments, and activists.

The issue of hate speech in the world of gaming has gained significant attention since 2014, marking a shift from its earlier neglect, when compared to hate speech on social media platforms, when a highly controversial and toxic campaign known as #gamergate targeted women in the gaming industry, involving actions such as doxing, hacking, and personal threats. Since then, discussions about toxicity within gaming communities have continued to bring widespread attention to the subject (Veale, 2020).

The distinction between social media and video game platforms is not clear when considering their usage. Gaming platforms, as social media, facilitate global connections, enabling instant communication and community-building. They have even served as platforms for free speech protests, like the digital demonstrations against the Chinese government in the game Animal Crossing, or the movement "Black Lives Matter" in World of Warcraft, Splatoon, ToonTown, Grand Theft Auto, and NBA 2K20 (Davidson, 2020; Schofield, 2020). However, video game companies have faced more lenient content liability regulations compared to its social media counterparts, resulting in gaming platforms implementing less moderation of online interactions, which has in turn led to environments often saturated with toxic content. The lack of tougher regulations regarding hate speech in games and gaming platforms is partly attributed to them being more private and less moderated (Brown, 2020; Einwiller & Kim, 2020).

Video gaming stands as one of the fastest-growing industries globally, with an estimated 2.7 billion gamers worldwide (Clement, 2023). Simultaneously, online gaming represents a vast sector with over 900 million gamers. The projected trend from 2023 to 2027 for the "Video Games" segment of the digital media market indicates an estimated growth of 0.4 billion users, equivalent to a substantial 14.81% increase. This upward trajectory is expected to persist for the fifth consecutive year, ultimately reaching a milestone of 3.1 billion

users by 2027, marking a new peak in user engagement within this sector (ibid). Some factors that contribute to this growth are the continuous development of online games and gaming communities, but also of dedicated game hosting and communication platforms tailored for gamers.

Considerable research has delved into understanding the effects of video games on players, extending to how young people engage with others, their interactions, and preferences of content and language (Gee, 2003; Clark et al., 2016; Warmelink & Siitonen, 2011; Mäyrä, 2016; Beres et al., 2021; Costa et al., 2022; Turner et al, 2023; Frommel et al., 2023; Meriläinen, 2023).

This paper explores the results of the first stage of the project entitled "PROPS: Interactive Narratives Propose a Pluralistic Discourse", which aims to understand the context of hate speech exposure and aggression within gaming communities and tackle it through the development and dissemination of purposeful and pedagogically driven interactive narratives that can improve individuals' critical media skills.

To achieve this objective, a questionnaire was created, addressed to young students, aged between 10 to 18, from schools located in the Algarve region of Portugal. The collected data allowed us to analyze not only these students' exposure to OHS, but also their reactions to it. Additionally, we aimed to identify the most prevalent types of hate speech and pinpoint where such hate speech is most encountered.

Online hate speech: An emergent problem

The issue of hate speech practiced in online platforms has been increasingly debated by academics, government institutions, and legal experts. Although there is no consensus on its definition (Siegel, 2020; UNESCO, 2023), OHS is often described as a set of behaviors considered deviant (Castãno-Pulgarín et al., 2021) in relation to prevailing social norms. It encompasses the digital reproduction of ideas that promote hatred, discrimination, or violence against an individual or a group, based on factors such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, historical events, gender, or sexual identity (Anti-Defamation League, 2016; Blaya 2019; Agustina et al., 2020; Deslauriers et al., 2020; Paz et al., 2020; Costa et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Gagliardone et al. (2015) identify permanence, transience, anonymity, and inter-jurisdictional nature as some of the most complex characteristics regarding OHS, however there are other

obstacles that hinder the identification of OHS, such as the use of codes, which involves replacing easily identifiable offensive terms-racist, xenophobic, homophobic, misogynistic, etc.- with seemingly innocuous terms (Duarte et al., 2018). This tactic can make this type of speech appear unsuspecting and imperceptible (Siegel, 2020). As a result, OHS becomes intricate and obscure, making it difficult to identify, define, and consequently, delimit (Sellars, 2016; MacAvaney et al., 2019; Zhang & Luo, 2019). Watanabe et al. (2018) highlight the systematic and uncontrollable nature of offenses committed on the Internet, while Castãno-Pulgarín et al. (2021) underline that these social deviance behaviors range from minor transgressions to the perpetration of illegal acts.

The urgency of this problem has been increasingly recognized by non-governmental organizations. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly's proclamation of June 18 as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech reflects the urgent need to address this issue and promote a safer and more inclusive online environment (United Nations, n.d.). *The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech* (United Nations, 2019), launched on June 18, 2019, serves as a guiding framework to combat hate speech in all its forms, including within gaming communities.

This strategy provides a roadmap for governments, civil society, and online platforms to combat it effectively. Key elements of the plan include legal frameworks, encouraging member states to enact and enforcing laws that prohibit hate speech, while respecting freedom of expression; promoting education and awareness about the dangers of hate speech and the benefits of tolerance and diversity; engaging with media outlets and technology companies to take responsibility for monitoring and preventing hate speech on their platforms; developing counter-narratives to challenge hate speech and promote positive messages of inclusivity and diversity; and developing international cooperation, since this phenomenon often transcends national borders.

UNESCO recently released a guide for policymakers titled *Addressing hate speech through education*. This guide emphasizes the significance of tackling hate speech because it can trigger violence and discrimination while perpetuating biases, populism, and social divisions. The text also acknowledges the pivotal role of education in combating the complex issue of OHS over the long term, by promoting awareness, critical thinking, inclusivity, and resilience. This approach helps address the underlying causes of hate speech

and empowers learners with the knowledge and skills to counter the hateful narratives they encounter, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and informed society (UNESCO, 2023).

Online gaming communities have a worldwide influence that surpasses geographical limits and hate speech within these spaces can impact individuals from different backgrounds and from all over the globe, in particular young people, who are more susceptible to these types of discourse (Krotz, 2007; Costa el al., 2020; Beres et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2023). This is a form of speech that can disrupt constructive interactions and worsen divisions.

The issue of OHS is a multifaceted challenge which is emerging in games and gaming communities, and that requires a collaborative effort involving governments, civil society, online platforms, and individuals to create a more tolerant and inclusive digital landscape. PROPS, the project presented in this paper, aims to counteract hate speech through the development of interactive digital narratives (video games and interactive films) and analog experiences (gamified journeys) designed to engage and motivate teachers, educators, instructors, and young individuals to reflect about OHS and to actively combat it.

Media literacy and hate speech

Digital citizenship education seeks to empower individuals to become informed and conscientious citizens who understand their rights, exercise freedom of expression responsibly, and assume social and civic responsibilities. It is paramount to reconcile personal beliefs and opinions with respect for others, tolerance, and inclusivity, conciliating three aspects of the digital environment: "being online", "well-being online" and "online rights" (Council of Europe, 2022: 5; UNESCO, 2023).

The advent of technologies and social media has revolutionized how individuals engage with media- shifting them from consumers of messages to producers, creators, and curators of information (Reia-Baptista, 2009; Gagliardone et al., 2015; Lopes, 2015). This transformation has expanded the scope of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), adapting it to the dynamics of the Internet.

Citizenship education's role in addressing hate speech encompasses two main dimensions: providing individuals with the knowledge and skills to identify hate speech and with the tools and information to react and counter harmful messages (Gagliardone et al., 2015). MIL plays a pivotal role in achieving these objectives,

encompassing both technical skills required for digital technology use and the ability to locate, analyze, evaluate, and interpret media content, while also acknowledging their social and political impact. It deals with issues such as freedom of expression, privacy, inclusive citizenship, and the promotion of civic participation.

The politics of media representation- focusing on social class, gender, race, and sexuality- play a significant role in media literacy, especially within the framework of critical citizenship education (Helberger, 2018). It ensures that representations underpinning power systems and inequalities are not distorted. In the context of this project, the importance of media representation is also recognized within gaming communities, where the portrayal of diverse characters and narratives impact gaming perceptions, behaviors, and, ultimately, the prevalence of hate speech.

Building on pioneering documents from the European Union, such as the *Recommendation on Media Literacy in the Digital Environment* (2009), UNESCO's Recommendations like *Media and information literacy: policy and strategy guidelines* (Grizzle et al., 2013) or *Think Critically, Click Wisely! Media and Information Literate Citizens* (Grizzle et al., 2021) emphasize the development of critical thinking skills and ethically reflective media use. The cited texts highlight the need to empower individuals to identify and challenge hateful online content. Moreover, these skills will enable people to question their assumptions and biases and formulate persuasive arguments to counter them.

These recommendations not only pioneer discussions on the fundamental role of media education, but also emphasize the role of the audience and the interpretive/receptive dimensions of media products, encompassing cultural, critical, and creative aspects (Ranieri & Fabbro, 2015).

MIL involves three different dimensions: information literacy, media literacy and digital literacy (Council of Europe, 2022). It is a multifaceted set of skills that encompasses technical, cognitive, social, civic, and creative abilities, that empower individuals to critically engage with various forms of communication, whether traditional or digital (Ranieri & Fabbro, 2015). This literacy involves a pedagogical strategy aimed at promoting critical understanding and mindful production and use of media. It is intimately connected with active participation in a democratic society, the exercise of citizenship, and the cultivation of independent critical judgment, equipping individuals with the tools to reflect on both personal and collective

actions while enhancing resilience against extremist messages and misinformation.

Digital literacy can be regarded as a complement to MIL, as it refers to the ability to use, understand, and interact effectively with digital technologies, electronic devices, computers, and the Internet. It encompasses not only the technical skill to operate these technologies but also the capacity to evaluate online information, comprehend digital security issues, apply critical thinking when analyzing digital resources, and use digital tools productively. Digital literacy is essential in an increasingly technology-driven world, empowering individuals to fully participate in the digital society and make informed decisions in an ever-evolving digital environment (Rheingold, 2012; Belshaw, 2014; Vuorikari et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Complementarily, digital citizenship education aims to prepare individuals for an informed and conscientious citizenship by instilling knowledge of rights, freedom of expression, and social and civic responsibilities. According to Lopes (2015), an individual's array of practices and skills can be grouped into three categories: integration into society, associated rights and responsibilities, and active community participation. Thus, it becomes essential to build and to have a symbiotic relation between personal freedoms, beliefs and opinions, with citizenship, respect for others, tolerance and inclusion.

In today's hyperconnected world, where access to diverse resources is ubiquitous, individuals not only consume content across multiple media, but also actively produce and disseminate it globally. This shift from passive media consumers to content creators has been facilitated by technology and social media. Consequently, MIL has evolved to incorporate the digital dimension, transforming individuals into proactive participants in the media landscape.

Citron and Norton (2011) highlight education as one of the potential and most effective long-term responses to OHS. Media and information literacy plays a pivotal role in this context, encompassing the development of technical skills to better use digital technology, as well as the knowledge and skills required to find, analyze, evaluate, and interpret distinct media texts.

PROPS-interactive narratives propose a pluralistic speech

Digital literacy is a central element for the project presented in this paper, where gaming culture and gaming communities serve as a

catalyst to promote democratic values and digital citizenship, thereby encouraging positive behaviors to combat OHS. Interactive films, video games, and gamification are the proposed counter-narratives, which will serve as tools to address this issue, while also enabling the dissemination of the project's findings. This strategy is in line with the guidelines found in documents such as *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech* (United Nations, 2019) and *Addressing hate speech through education* (UNESCO, 2023), that highlight the urgency in counteracting OHS through education, namely by creating counter-narratives that promote awareness, inclusivity, and diversity.

The PROPS project, hosted by the Center for Arts and Communication Research at the University of Algarve and funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, proposes an innovative approach to address hate speech. It does so by developing interactive narratives designed to engage educators, instructors, students, and young people, motivating them to actively combat OHS. Emphasis is placed on promoting active consumers, and on the active role that the public assumes throughout the process: decoding, interpreting, and recreating media messages (Gauntlett, 2015).

This project operates at the intersection of media education, forging collaboration between researchers, political institutions, the educational community, and the public. To achieve its objectives, the project aims to develop two interactive films, two video games, and two pedagogical itineraries through institutional partnerships, all linked by a transmedia global narrative. These contents will be made accessible on the project's online platform, alongside theoretical results, with the goal of disseminating and raising awareness about this sensitive issue.

All actions within PROPS seek to promote democratic values and digital citizenship, using media literacy, participatory methodologies, and playfulness as cross-cutting themes. The project intends to appropriate game culture, narrative interaction, and the concept of gamification to foster positive behaviors and counteract OHS.

The project's activities include a combination of data collection tools and techniques, including surveys and focus groups, along with both quantitative and qualitative data processing methods, which will enable the PROPS' team to gain a deeper understanding about this topic and field of study.

The educational, transformative, and emancipatory nature of this research approach is underscored, and emphasis is given to the importance of communicating research findings to diverse

audiences, transcending the boundaries of academia, and making results accessible through suitable channels and formats.

The survey: Sample and methodology

As it was outlined throughout this paper, the questionnaire aimed to gain comprehensive insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals aged 10 to 18 within online gaming. The goal of this research was to investigate several critical aspects of this demographic's online gaming environment, including (1) exposure to hate speech, (2) prevalent types of hate speech encountered, (3) the games and platforms where such incidents were most observed, as well as (4) the reactions and responses to such content. Furthermore, the study explored (5) the presence of hate speech in the gameplays watched by the respondents. Based on these objectives it was possible to outline six research questions (Table 1). Answering these questions will help to present the main conclusions of the research.

Table 1. Survey objectives and corresponding research questions

Survey objectives	Research questions
(1) Assess young gamers exposure to hate speech in online video games	1. To what extent are individuals aged 10 to 18 exposed to hate speech while participating in online video gaming activities?
(2) Assess the prevalent types of hate speech that they encounter	2. What is the nature of the hate speech encountered by gamers aged 10-18 in online video games?
(3) Assess the games and platforms where such incidents were most commonly observed	3. Which online games and social gaming platforms are most commonly associated with instances of hate speech for individuals in this age group?
(4) Assess their reactions to such incidents of hate speech	4. What are the common emotional and behavioral reactions of young gamers aged 10-18 when confronted with hate speech in online video games?
(5) Assess the prevalence of hate speech in the gameplays they watch	5. To what extent is hate speech present in the gameplays that young individuals in this demographic watch?

Based on these objectives and research questions a questionnaire, composed of 21 points, was developed to gather information about the gaming experiences and exposure to OHS of individuals aged between 10 and 18. The collection of this information will serve as the groundwork for the subsequent development of the interactive narratives and pedagogical approaches. By understanding the

experiences associated with hate speech in games and gaming platforms it was possible to grasp prominent narratives and to identify counter-narratives that may foster a safer and more inclusive gaming environment for the younger generation.

Adopting the survey method, it was possible to reach a diverse player's base, providing insights into online interactions and the prevalence of hate speech across different gaming communities.

The methodology involved a mixed approach, combining closed-ended questions with open-ended questions to gather qualitative information about their experiences and reactions (Creswell, 2009). The questionnaire also employed a Likert scale-based approach (Likert, 1932) to assess participants' agreement with various statements. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the provided sentences, each related to their gaming experiences and online behavior. The scale ranged from "Totally disagree" to "Totally agree," and from "Never" to "Always", allowing respondents to express their sentiments accurately. This scale provided a more nuanced understanding of how participants perceived their safety, reactions to offensive messages, and their own online behavior. Additionally, there was an option for "I don't know/ I don't want to answer" to include any uncertainties or abstentions from responding to these statements. This scale-based approach facilitated a more detailed analysis of participants' attitudes and behaviors towards online gaming.

The initial questions contributed to the characterization of the participants by collecting demographic information such as age, gender, school year, and nationality. It also explored the respondents' preferred gaming platforms and gaming habits, including time spent playing online and preferred game themes and styles.

The subsequent questions aimed at gathering information about the participants' perceptions about safety online and the presence (or absence) of offensive behavior within the communities that are popular among these young individuals. The study also sought to understand their reactions and responses to content they found offensive.

Finally, participants were inquired about their habits related to the consumption of gameplays and the presence of hate speech in this type of media.

What follows in Table 2 is a list with the 21 questions from the questionnaire.

Table 2. List of the 21 questions/statements from the questionnaire

Question/Statement	Substatement	Type of question	Answer options
1. Indicate how much time you spend playing online.	—	Single choice	• Never • 1 hour a day • 2 to 3 hours a day • 3 to 5 hours a day • More than 5 hours a day
2. What game theme do you prefer?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	• Adventure • Science Fiction • Fantasy • Sport • Horror • Superheroes • Mystery • Militar/War • Other. What?
3. What style of game do you prefer?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	• Action and Adventure • Platforms • Puzzle • Strategy • Visual Narrative • Role-Playing Game (RPG) • First Person Shooter (FPS) • Fighting • Survival • Racing • Party / Group games • Rhythm and music • Simulators • Battle Royale • Other. What?
4. What do you like to do most in a game?	—	Open-ended question	—
5. Write the name of your three favorite games.	—	Open-ended question	—

Question/Statement	Substatement	Type of question	Answer options
6. Which platforms do you use most to play?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● Mobile ● PC ● Web ● Xbox ● Playstation ● Nintendo ● Other: Which?
7. Which platforms do you use most to talk about the game?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● Discord ● Steam ● Guilded ● DLive ● Twitter ● WhatsApp ● Other: Which?
8. After playing, do you usually talk to your friends about what happened in the game?	—	Single choice	● Yes ● No
9. When you turn off the game, how do you feel?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● Irritated ● Relaxed ● Sad ● Tired ● Happy ● I don't feel anything special ● Other: How?
10. In games and gaming platforms:	a. I feel safe b. I feel offended by other players c. I know how to react if someone is mean to me or other players d. I insult other players e. I have the same behavior online and offline	Likert scale	● I totally disagree ● I disagree ● I neither disagree or agree ● I agree ● I totally agree ● I don't know / I don't want to answer
11. Have you had contact with unpleasant expressions related to:	a. Sexual orientation b. Physical appearance c. Ethnicity or Nationality d. Religion e. Gender f. Player's performance	Likert scale	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Frequently ● Always ● I don't know / I don't want to answer

Question/Statement	Substatement	Type of question	Answer options
12. How do you react?	a. Ignore b. Tell a friend c. Tell an adult d. Report it on the platform e. Reply in the same way	Likert scale	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Frequently ● Always ● I don't know / I don't want to answer
13. When you report what happens?	—	Single choice	● The player who offended is blocked ● The player who offended is banned ● I don't know ● I rather not answer ● Other. What?
14. Indicate how you feel when another player is offensive.	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● Worried ● Sad ● Ashamed ● Angry ● Scared ● Amused ● Excited ● Vindictive ● I don't feel anything in particular ● I don't know / I don't want to answer ● Other. How?
15. In what situations do you offend someone?	—	Multiple choice	● For the excitement ● For the amusement ● Due to the player's performance ● Due to the player's physical appearance ● Due to the player's sexual orientation ● Due to the player's ethnicity ● Due to the player's religion ● Due to the player's gender ● I've never offended anyone ● I don't know / I don't want to answer ● Other. What?

Question/Statement	Substatement	Type of question	Answer options
16. Write the name of three video games where you most often find offensive messages.	—	Open-ended question	—
17. How much time do you spend watching gameplays?	—	Single choice	● Never ● 1 hour a day ● 2 to 3 hours a day ● 3 to 5 hours a day ● More than 5 hours a day
18. Why do you watch these gameplays?	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● For fun ● To improve my gaming skills ● To find new games ● Other. Why?
19. How often do you find offensive messages in the gameplays you watch?	—	Single choice	● Never ● Rarely ● Sometimes ● Frequently ● Always ● I don't know / I don't want to answer
20. Indicate the platforms where you most often find offensive messages.	—	Multiple choice (1 to 3)	● Discord ● Twitch ● DLive ● Steam ● Epic Games ● Other. Where?
21. Write the name of the gamer you follow the most.	—	Open-ended question	—

The survey was conducted through the open-access EUSurvey platform- a survey management tool from the European Commission- in three schools located in the south of Portugal. The implementation of the questionnaires was led by a member of the project's team in collaboration with a teacher from each school and the student's participation took approximately 15 min.

With regards to the ethical considerations, the participation of the students was voluntary and their anonymity was assured. Moreover, the participants were given clear information about the aim and the objectives of the survey, as the member of the project's team made sure to clearly explain the context in which the survey was being conducted, by presenting the PROPS project, its aims, procedures and possible outcomes. The researcher in charge of supervising the survey established a transparent relationship with all the participants, maintaining a neutral and unbiased stance and avoiding any speech that could possibly disempower or demean the participants. Finally, all data and information collected from the survey was handled and accessed only by the research team members, in order to ensure confidentiality (Mirza et al., 2023; Halasa, 2005; Mack et al., 2005; BERA, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Dane, 1990).

With a total of 189 respondents, the metadata related to students' gender indicates that 56,61% responded as "Female", 41,27% as "Male", 1,59% as "Other", and 0,53% chose not to respond. Regarding the ages and nationality of the participants, the responses were distributed on Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Percentage of responses by participants' age

Age	%	Age	%	Age	%
10	0.53	13	5.32	16	19.15
11	-	14	19.68	17	7.45
12	3.2	15	40.43	18	1.60

Table 4. Percentage of responses by participants' nationality

Country	%	Country	%	Country	%	Country	%
Portugal	81.77	U.K.	1.04	India	0.52	Philippines	0.52
Brazil	7.29	Belgium	0.52	Israel	0.52	Romenia	0.52
Venezuela	3.13	Canada	0.52	Moldova	0.52	U.S.A.	0.52
Germany	1.04	Greece	0.52	Nepal	0.52	Ukraine	0.52

The survey facilitated a comprehensive exploration of diverse aspects regarding online gaming experiences and the extent to which participants encountered hate speech. This sample provided a broader perspective and increased the potential generalizability of the findings. However, it's

important to acknowledge that the reliance on self-reported data may introduce a potential bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), that could impact the accuracy of the responses, as participants may modify their answers to align with what they perceive as socially acceptable or desirable behaviors.

Results and Discussion

The survey results revealed the main patterns, trends, and insights that emerged from the responses.

The objective is not only to present the empirical results but also to engage in a critical dialogue surrounding the broader implications of these findings. By doing so, the aim is to contribute to the ongoing discourse about online safety, digital citizenship, and the challenge that young individuals face when navigating the virtual gaming world.

Taking into consideration the research questions (Table 1), what follows is an analysis of the main results from the questionnaire.

1. To what extent are individuals aged 10 to 18 exposed to hate speech while participating in online video gaming activities?

Table 5. Results from question 1 "Indicate how much time you spend playing online"

Indicate how much time you spend playing online	
Never	31.22%
1 hour a day	23.81%
2 to 3 hours a day	22.22%
3 to 5 hours a day	12.70%
More than 5 hours a day	9.52%
No answer	0.53%

The first question's goal was to measure how much time students spend playing online, to gain insight into the amount of contact they have with these environments that foster interactions with other players and where OHS may be present. As presented in Table 5, although the most common answer was "Never" (31.22%), a great number of students say that they play online video games (68.25%): "1 hour a day" (23.81%); "2 to 3 hours a day" (22.22%); "3 to 5 hours a day" (12.70%); and "More than 5 hours a day" (9.52%).

Table 6. Results from question 10 "In games and gaming platforms"

In games and gaming platforms

	Never	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Frequently**	**Always**	**Dont know**
I feel safe	2.29%	4.58%	29.01%	28.24%	28.24%	7.63%
I feel offended by other players	25.19%	29.77%	29.01%	8.40%	5.34%	2.29%
I insult other players	30.00%	20.00%	16.92%	6.92%	20.77%	5.38%

To assess their exposure to OHS the respondents were asked to rate their agreement with three substatements, related to their experiences in games and gaming platforms: "I feel safe", "I feel offended by other players", and "I insult other players".

In relation to "I feel safe", the majority of the respondents (56.48%) agree, with 28.24% answering "I agree", and 28.24% answering "I totally agree". On the contrary, only 6.87% disagree. This pattern is closely like the one observed in "I feel offended by other players", which shows that most respondents (54.96%) don't feel offended, with 29.77% answering "I disagree", and 25,19% answering "I totally disagree". However, the findings show that a more substantial percentage of young gamers (13.74%) feel offended by other players.

Regarding the statement "I insult other players", the majority (50%) answered that they disagree (30% "I totally disagree" and 20% "I disagree"). A noteworthy result is that the second most common answer was "I totally agree", with 20.77% of the responses. In total, 27.69% of the respondents agree with the statement.

The data confirms that young players are exposed to OHS while participating in online video gaming activities, given that a significant percentage (27.69%) agree that they insult other players and 13.74% report feeling offended by other players. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of hate speech, most young gamers perceived themselves as feeling safe in online gaming environments. These results suggest that

many young players may normalize or downplay the impact of hate speech, as confirmed by previous studies (Beres et al., 2021).

2. What is the nature of the hate speech encountered by gamers aged 10-18 in online video games?

Table 7. Results from question 11 "Have you had contact with unpleasant expressions related to"

Have you had contact with unpleasant expressions related to

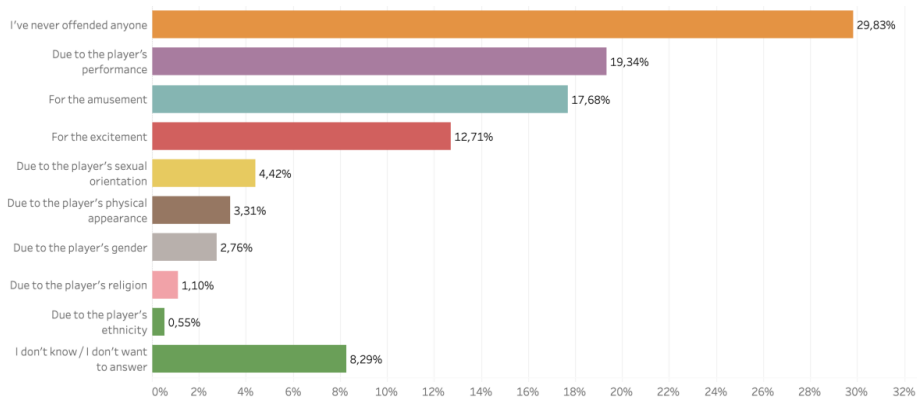|	**Never**	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Frequently**	**Always**	**Dont know**
Sexual orientation	64.62%	13.08%	10.77%	3.85%	3.85%	3.85%
Physical appearance	50.77%	20.77%	13.08%	3.08%	9.23%	3.08%
Ethnicity or Nationality	58.14%	12.40%	12.40%	6.20%	7.75%	3.10%
Religion	75.19%	7.75%	3.10%	4.65%	6.98%	2.33%
Gender	59.23%	11.54%	10.77%	7.69%	9.23%	1.54%
Player's performance	22.86%	16.43%	21.43%	21.43%	16.43%	1.43%

Figure 1. Results from question 15 "In what situations do you offend someone?"

To understand the nature of the hate speech that these gamers find in online video games, as well as to grasp the main triggers and content of OHS, they were asked to rate the frequency of hate speech related to: "Sexual orientation", "Physical appearance", "Ethnicity or nationality", "Religion", "Gender" and "Player's performance" (Table 7). Additionally, in question 15 (Figure 1) they were asked to indicate in what situations and for what reasons they offend other players.

The results presented in Table 7 show that most of the answers to each one of the variables tended to fall on "Never" and "Rarely". These two answers combined obtained, on the low end, 70.77% (for "Gender") and, on the high end, 82.94% (for "Religion"). On the other hand, the answers "Always", "Frequently" and "Sometimes" together also obtained notable results: "Gender" (27.69%), "Ethnicity or Nationality" (26,35%), "Physical appearance" (25.39%),"Sexual Orientation" (18.47%) and "Religion" (14.73%). The fact that gender is the second most common answer is in line with previous studies that identify this type of hate as being particularly common within these communities (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). According to Sobieraj (2018), and Sundén and Paasonen (2018), women are often subjected to negative experiences, including abusive and degrading comments, hostility, defamation, intimidation, humiliation, harassment and even rape and death threats.

In contrast to the other results, the other option for type of insult, i.e., "Player's performance" showed a lower degree of disparity between responses: for comparison, "Never" and "Rarely" obtained 39.29% of responses while "Sometimes", "Frequently" and "Always" obtained 59.29%.

This contrast between students answering, "Player's performance" versus other types of insults was confirmed again in the answers to question 15- "In what situations do you offend someone?". Despite the majority answering "I've never offended anyone" (29.83%), the second most frequent answer was precisely "Due to the player's performance" (19.34%)- other answers related to the player's traits ranged between 0.55% ("Ethnicity") and 4.42% ("Sexual orientation"). As for the second and third most common answers to this question, related to the reasons why they insult other players, the respondents replied, "For the amusement" (17.68%) and "For the excitement" (12.71%) (Figure 1).

The results are clear about the prevalence of hate speech related to the players' performance and seem to indicate that this is the main trigger for the occurrence of OHS. Despite this fact, it should not be omitted that answers related to gender, ethnicity, physical appearance, sexual orientation, and religion are also clearly present.

The data from question 15 also seems to reinforce the normalization of OHS (Beres et al., 2021) within these environments, since the answers "For the amusement" and "For the excitement" are, respectively, the second and third most common reasons for insulting other players, which might demonstrate a certain degree of conformity or acceptance of OHS as part of the experience of online gaming.

3. Which online games and social gaming platforms are most commonly associated with instances of hate speech for individuals in this age group?

Figure 2. Results from question 16 "Write the name of three video games where you most often find offensive messages"
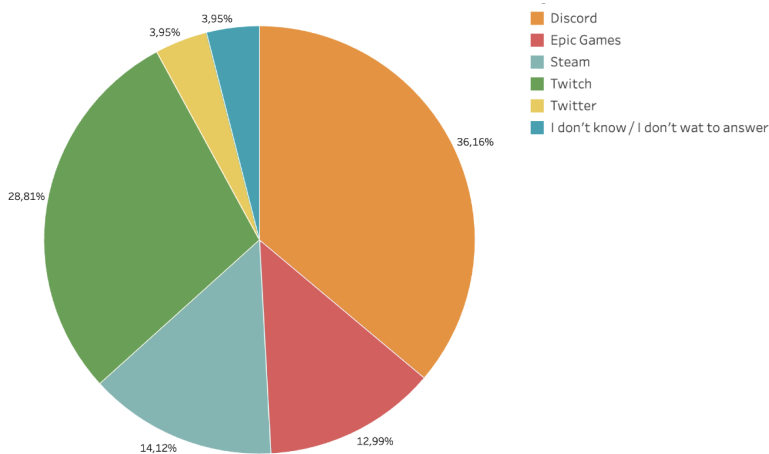

Figure 3. Results from question 20 "Indicate the platforms where you most often find offensive messages"

The respondents were asked to identify the video games and social gaming platforms where they most commonly encounter hate speech. When it comes to video games, the five titles that received the most responses were Counter-Strike (18.13%); Fortnite (16.48%); Grand Theft Auto (11.54%); Roblox (10.44%); and Valorant (8.79%). 9.34% of respondents answered, "I don't know / I don't want to answer". The remaining answers are shown in Figure 2. Regarding the platforms, the top answers were: "Discord" (36.16%), "Twitch" (28.81%), "Steam" (14.12%) and "Epic Games" (12.99%) (Figure 3).

The video games where OHS seems more prevalent are games involving action, shooting and survival. This is in line with the results from question three- "What style of game do you prefer?", where the most prevalent answers were "Shooting Games" (18.77%); "Action and Adventure" (16.25%); "Survival" (15.97%); and "Battle Royale" (9.80%). It also relates to the answers to question five "Write the name of your three favorite games", the first being Grand Theft Auto (13.66%), followed by Fortnite (10.13%), FIFA (10.13%), Counter-Strike (8.81%), Minecraft (8.81%), Roblox (8.81%), Call of Duty (6.17%), and Free Fire (4.41%).

In this manner, it is worth noting that the most popular styles and the most popular games are also, for the most part, related to the games where respondents mentioned that there are more instances of OHS. The only exception to this pattern is Minecraft that, despite being indicated by 8.81% as one of their favorite games, is not mentioned when it comes to the presence of hate speech.

This trend, where the most popular answer relates to higher prevalence of OHS, also applies to social gaming platforms. Discord is identified by 36.16% as the system where they most often find offensive messages, and in question seven - "What platforms do you use most to talk about the game?"- Discord was the dominant answer, with 44.90%.

The respondents' increased exposure to hate speech in the games and social gaming platforms can be attributed to the fact that these are the online gaming environments they engage with most frequently. Therefore, based on these data, we cannot conclude with certainty that these games and social gaming platforms inherently harbor more instances of hate speech. Even so, because the cited titles and platforms are the most popular - and, therefore, where it is more prevalent to encounter hate speech- these games and platforms might serve as reference for the PROPS' project and these

results may prove crucial in the development of the subsequent counter-narratives.

4. What are the common emotional and behavioral reactions of young gamers aged 10-18 when confronted with hate speech in online video games?

Table 8. Results from question 12 "How do you react?"

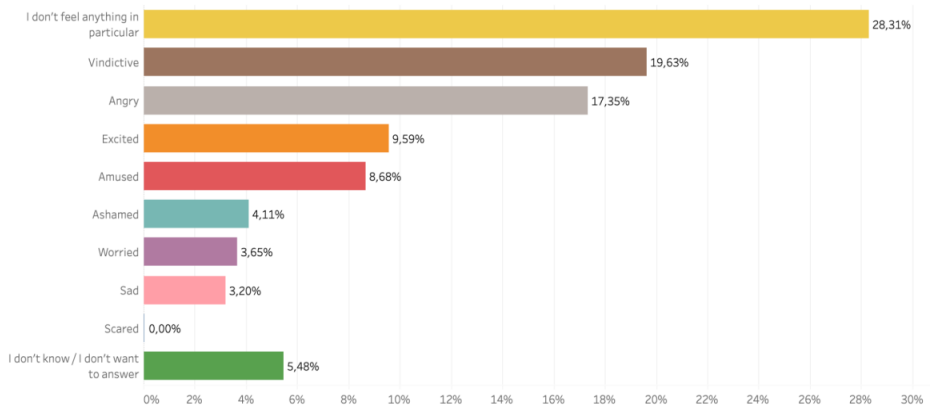| How do you react?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Dont know
Ignore	23.02%	7.14%	22.22%	19.05%	26.98%	1.59%
Tell a friend	13.71%	20.97%	23.39%	19.35%	20.16%	2.42%
Tell an adult	56.45%	22.58%	8.06%	3.23%	7.26%	2.42%
Report it on the platform or in the game	29.03%	12.10%	22.58%	13.71%	20.16%	2.42%
Reply in the same way	22.22%	22.22%	23.81%	7.94%	21.43%	2.38%

Figure 4. Results from question 14 "Indicate how you feel when another player is offensive"

To assess young gamers' reactions when confronted with OHS in online video games, the respondents were asked to rate the frequency of the following reactions: "Ignore", "Tell a friend", "Tell an adult", "Report it on the platform or in the game", and "Reply in the same way" (Table 8). Question 14- "Indicate how you feel when another player is offensive"- aimed at understanding their emotional reactions to these incidents (Figure 4).

The answers to the question "How do you react?" reveal that most individuals tend to "Ignore" with 68.25% answering either "Always" (26.98%), "Frequently" (19.05%) or "Sometimes" (22.22%). The respondents also largely prefer to "Tell a friend" with 62,9% answering "Always" (20.16%), "Frequently" (19.35%) or "Sometimes" (23.39%), than to "Tell an adult", which obtained 18.55% in these same three options (7.26%; 3.23%; and 8.06% respectively).

It can also be observed that it is common to report hate speech, with 20.16% answering "Always", 13.71% "Frequently" and 22.58% "Sometimes". There was also a significant prevalence of people responding, "Reply in the same way": 21.43% answered "Always", 7.94% "Frequently" and 23.81% "Sometimes", meaning that they offend people in return.

The results from question 14- "Indicate how you feel when another player is offensive"- show that the five most answered options were "I don't feel anything in particular" (28.31%), followed by "Vindictive" (19.63%), "Angry" (17.35%), "Excited" (9.59%), and "Amused" (8.68%).

From this data it is evident that the most common reaction is neutral ("I don't feel anything in particular") and that there are instances of positive emotions ("Excited" and "Amused"). In fact, the neutral and positive emotions, when combined, measure up 46.58% of the answers, which further corroborates the acceptance of OHS as part of the experience within this context. However, when the negative emotions ("Vindictive", "Angry", "Ashamed", "Worried" and "Sad") are combined, they measure up to the majority (47.94%) of the emotional reactions of young gamers to hate speech. This supports the urgency to promote educational content that equips learners with the knowledge and abilities to assess and oppose the hateful and toxic narratives they come across, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and informed digital environment (UNESCO, 2023).

5. To what extent is hate speech present in the gameplays that young individuals in this demographic watch?

Table 9. Results from question 17 "How much time
do you spend watching gameplays?"

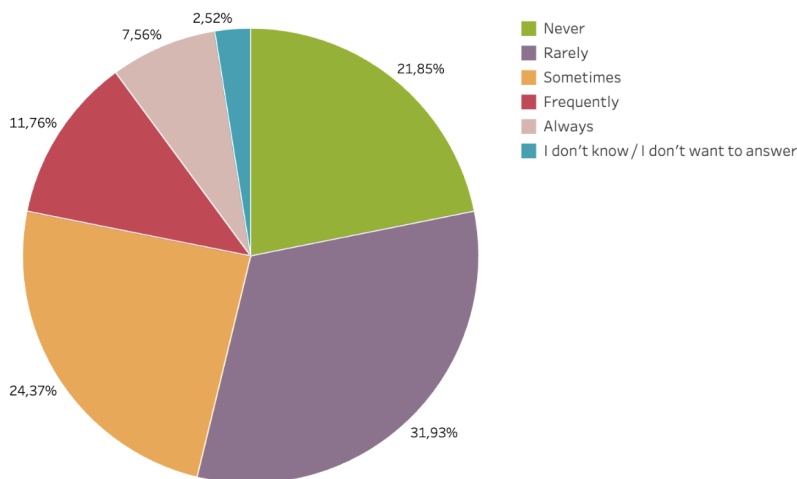| How much time do you spend watching gameplays?	
Never	46.56%
1 hour a day	28.04%
2 to 3 hours a day	13.76%
3 to 5 hours a day	5.29%
More than 5 hours a day	3.17%
No answer	3.17%

Figure 5. Results from question 19 "How often
do you find offensive messages in the gameplays you watch?"

To gain insight into the prevalence of OHS in gameplays it was important to first measure how much time the respondents spend watching this form of media. Much like playing games, watching gameplays about online video games might manifest as another form of contact with toxic discourse. As presented in Table 9, "Never" (46.56%) was the predominant answer. Regardless, the amount of students who watch gameplays is high (50.26%): "1 hour a day" (28.04%), "2 to 3 hours a day" (13.76%), "3 to 5 hours a day" (5.29%), and "More than 5 hours a day" (3.17%).

To assess the presence of hate speech in the gameplays watched by these individuals, the respondents were asked to rate the frequency

regarding the following question: "How often do you find offensive messages in the gameplays you watch?". Even though 21.85% answered "Never", the majority has at some point encountered offensive discourse in gameplays: "Rarely" (31.93%), "Sometimes" (24.37%), "Frequently" (11.76%), "Always" (7.56%) (Figure 5). This data is particularly relevant, considering that even if the individuals don't actively engage in online gaming, the results show that there are multiple forms of exposure to OHS related to gaming. This underscores, once again, the relevance of this project and of its objectives. When combating OHS, in addition to video games, it is also critical to focus on these forms of media.

Final Considerations

This paper and study mark the first stage of the project "PROPS: Interactive Narratives Propose a Pluralistic Discourse", which ultimately seeks to shed light on the complex dynamics of online gaming. To realize this objective, a comprehensive questionnaire was directed at students aged 10 to 18. The data that was collected not only facilitated an in-depth examination of these students' exposure to OHS and their responses to it, but also enabled the identification of the predominant forms of hate speech and the prevalent social gaming platforms where such discourse occurs.

The findings from this survey show that young players are exposed to instances of hate speech while participating in online video gaming activities. Even so, the data also reveals that most young gamers don't seem to perceive themselves as being in danger when playing online. The fact that there is a clear acknowledgment from the respondents that OHS is a phenomenon and form of interaction that is quite common in online video games, while at the same time downplaying its effects, expresses the acceptance of OHS as an integral and non-problematic part of these types of experiences. For this reason, it is important to build narratives that can counteract this line of thinking, an endeavor that the PROPS project and team intend to carry out by developing interactive narratives designed to engage students and young people to reflect about OHS.

Besides this challenge, the study also demonstrates that the most frequent insults encountered by the individuals are related to the player's performance. This was found both in the questions related to the reception of hate speech, as well as in the questions that assessed the types of hate speech produced by the respondents themselves. But it is also relevant to underline the indication of instances regarding gender, ethnicity and nationality, physical appearance, sexual orientation, and

religion. Furthermore, the research also shows that the most popular games and game genres are interconnected with the games and genres where OHS is more frequent.

When discussing their behavioral reactions to hate speech, the data indicates that it is common to ignore these occurrences, but, paradoxically, it is also common to report OHS. On this topic, it should be highlighted that when asked "When you report what happens?" (question 13), the most frequent answer (42.15%) was "I don't know". This emphasizes a certain lack of transparency from the industry and gaming companies in revealing the consequences to the people who engage in toxic behavior.

Regarding the emotional reactions to being offended by other players, once again some of the data indicates that OHS may be accepted as a normal part of online gaming, although we can also see that a great amount of people reports having different negative emotions. Finally, in addition to online games and social gaming platforms, OHS was also found to be present in gameplays.

These findings serve as a crucial foundation for the next stages of this research and project, underscoring the significance of digital literacy initiatives in fostering safer and more inclusive digital gaming environments. The results will also contribute to the subsequent development of interactive narratives aimed at promoting critical thinking regarding OHS and at fostering a more inclusive and secure gaming ecosystem for young players.

Ethical considerations
The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Conflicts of interests
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

Data availability
The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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