



# RESEARCH REPORT

849629

PLAY YOUR ROLE





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# I- Introduction

Hate speech is defined by European Union law "as the public incitement to violence or hatred directed to groups or individuals on the basis of certain characteristics, including race, colour, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin"<sup>1</sup>. Playing an online game or interact in a game community is part of everyday life of most of the teenagers, and their understanding of video games world may represent a great influence in their behaviour and conflict management. In cyber gaming, players can often find prejudice and outright hatred, through outrageous and offensive comments, harassment, physical threats, and stalking. Frequently, hate speech victims expose that they are targeted based on their race, religion, ability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

This report was developed in the framework of the European project "Play Your Role", whose main goal is to achieve how to prevent hate speech in video games, one of the most favourite activities of young people nowadays, involving gamers, teachers and educators, video game enterprises', video game developers and the civil society. Providing secure contexts of discussion, the project wants to explore, in the field, working with youngsters and game creators, the challenges and the difficulties of video games, the role of media literacy and serious games in education and learning for a life of constant change, in the 21st century. The definition of the problem consisted in the first stage of the research, attempting to perceive the level of awareness of young people for the existence of hate speech. The literature review, with specific information about online hate speech in video games, led to a deep notion of the state of art and served as a basis for data collection. Looking forward to the prevention as an important path to explore the games literacy and the use of serious games as significant learning tools to reinforce positive and empathic behaviours, it was important to analyse the phenomena in the field, with the quantitative analysis of the survey applied, and the qualitative analysis of the focus groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:133178>

Starting from a deductive perspective, from particular to general, the research was divided into five phases: i) Definition of the problem; ii) Literature review; iii) Survey analysis; iv) Focus group analysis ; v) Discussion of the results and final conclusions.

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## **II- LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 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. In the virtual world, the ethical and moral are suspended, and the player immerses in a freer and independent environment, allowing him to be different, aggressive, beautiful, killer or king of an empire. "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 does not 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: in Europe, 97% of teenagers (between twelve and seventeen years old) play or have played video games; counting just the European console market, the top 20 best-

selling games have sold a sum that exceeds 973 million copies<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, during 2018 the video game market has reached new records in terms of size of gaming communities. Two relevant examples are “Playerunknown’s Battlegrounds” (PUBG)<sup>3</sup> and “Fortnite”<sup>4</sup>.

It has been observed that online games make the interaction between gamers easier and the 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 defend an increase in social behaviour after playing (Colwell et al., 1995), others claim the isolation of the player (Selnow, 1984).

Game’s narrative can involve the player, transmitting ideas and values, showing that beyond functionality, there are concerns with the emotional user experience. When immersed in the game, the user builds a virtual world based on his game decisions, especially when he is represented by an avatar. The virtual freedom may lead to unethical behaviours (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 behaviour to adopt. The fact that most users are children and teenagers (Ferreira, 2003) increases their susceptibility and vulnerability to interactions in video games.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2008/09/16/teens-video-games-and-civics/>

<sup>3</sup> PUBG is the first videogame 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.

<sup>4</sup> “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 more than 125 million players and has become a cultural phenomenon.

## 2.2 Hate Speech and Violence

The manifestation of opinion that incites hatred towards individuals or groups, giving words the power to hurt physically, characterizes hate speech. Online Hate Speech has been addressed in Europe for some time now, in the public discussion as well as at political and institutional level. With the implementation of the *Code of Conduct*, since 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<sup>5</sup> shows a fourfold increase in the notifications of hate speech online 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 circumstances:

1. Offline gameplay;
2. Online gameplay;
3. Online community.

The first aspect - the offline gameplay - concerns the contents and the overall player experience. In this regard, some video games can contain material related to 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 is a European video game content rating system) content descriptors such as discrimination and hate speech used in (in)famous video games such as “Grand Theft Auto”<sup>6</sup> (GTA).

The online gameplay relates to the dynamics of interaction with other players during online multiplayer gaming sessions. Often unmoderated, activities such as the building of teams or clans, the sharing of strategies and the voice chat, can result in conflicts or

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<sup>5</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-261\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-261_en.htm)

<sup>6</sup> “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.

be a vehicle of hate speech. Real time actions that cannot be regarded only as virtual, as they implicit the gamer as a real person and can have implications and influences outside the game, as leading to conflicts among friends. As an example, PewDiePie<sup>7</sup> – 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 aspect regards the online communities, formed around specific video games (for example “PUBG”, “Fortnite”, “League of Legends” and “Overwatch”) on social media and video game platforms (such as Twitch, Steam and Reddit), where it’s easy to find comments full of verbal violence, intolerance, or even “virtual stones” to those who express conflicting opinions.

Unfortunately, in recent years these attitudes can be found in several examples, such as harassment campaigns against women of the video game industry or hate groups or white supremacist servers. More serious episodes have seen a shift from the digital world to the real one, putting at risk the privacy of prominent personalities of these communities or even their own safety.

The murder and the crimes presented in cinema and television, where usually the public has no say or doing in what is happening in the screen, are also present in the games, where players can act like murderers or haters. Since the beginning of the millennium, the use of hate speech has become a trend, being more and more present in the game’s ambiance. The virtual world seems to promote and allow a freer expression, giving a feeling of autonomy to the player and letting him take control, sometimes ignoring the laws of the countries they are part of. In games, like “GTA”, “Fortnite” or “Call of Duty”<sup>8</sup> players are free to act as they want and behaviours that are considered unethical, or even a crime<sup>9</sup>, outside the virtual world, like racism or sexism, seem to be accepted and encouraged in the world of “GTA”. This ability to unlock virtual violent behaviours of an individual is called the "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004)

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<sup>7</sup> PewDiePie, comedian and video producer known for his video game vlogs and live streams on YouTube.

<sup>8</sup> “Call of Duty”, first-person shooter video game franchise published by Activision in 2003, first focused on games set in World War II. In 2014, was considered by Guinness World Records, the best game series ever.

<sup>9</sup> Hate speech is considered a crime in some countries like the UK and Australia.

that, due to factors such as invisibility and minimization of authority, may increase the use of rude language, criticism, aggressivity and hatred (Joinson, 1998).

The verbal expression of hate speech is often tolerated as a normal reaction in moments of anger or frustration suggested by the competitiveness in video games. During the games, the interaction by chat is common and comments can go from performance compliments to ironic criticism, personal or ethnic insults, to sexual orientation, harassment, or minority attack. The use of anonymity in front of a supportive public and the absence of consequences may support the use of hate speech like a power demonstration or frustration relieve. This kind of behaviour is detrimental to the physical condition and the self-esteem of the aggressors and the victims (Breuer, 2017).

According to Consalvo, Ivory, Martins and Williams (Consalvo et al., 2009), the main ones affected by hate speech are women and minorities, as there is a tendency for over-representation of males, whites and adults, and an under-representation of females, Hispanics, Native Americans, children and elderly. Like television, games can have an impact on the cognitive modelling of social identity formation, influencing players impressions of social groups.

The results of Consalvo's et al. studies (2009) showed that there are no female characters in 40% of the games and that when they appear is most of the times with secondary roles. More than two-thirds are white characters (68%), followed by Latinos (15%) and black (8%), often associated with gangsters in games like GTA. This unbalance can provide the creation of stereotypes, reflecting in games the social inequalities of the physical world.

Like Simon Morris, Sega UK's marketing director said, "Violence is a problem that is part of our society and we are not to blame for that. Our games are produced because of consumer demand and we are just responding to what people want to buy" (Cunningham, 1995, p.196). Consequently, an environment where a type is highly represented will catch the attention of players with the same characteristic, creating virtual communities frequented by certain majorities (Consalvo et al., 2009). According to Breuer (Breuer, 2017), the fact that minorities are underrepresented leads to few minority players who are consequently more exposed to exclusion and hate speech.

Despite the need to defend the minorities against hate crimes, control is often used as a tool to spread intolerance (Bernardes et al., 2016). Many authors and scientific research have found a relation between violent depiction and aggressive behaviour 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.

## 2.3 Platforms and Creators - Censorship and Freedom

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<sup>10</sup> games like World of Warcraft<sup>11</sup> are becoming increasingly popular, giving players multiple options for choosing gender, race, age, creating more distinct identities (Consalvo et al., 2009).

When combating hate speech, creators have the most important and immediate role, giving the change to block content, or diversifying the available characters. This way, they will increase the number of players from the minorities (Breuer, 2017). It's certainly almost impossible for game creators to predict the player's behaviour during their interaction with the virtual environment, the control must be done by small A.I. programs, that acting as virtual police, are capable of rectifying mistakes (Machado, 2007).

In this regards, big companies like Ubisoft<sup>12</sup> have decided to implement a Code of Conduct on its community systems and in-game chats, banning players who use racist

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<sup>10</sup> Massive Multiplayer Online, online role-playing video game in which a very large number of people compete and interact simultaneously.

<sup>11</sup> World of Warcraft, MMORPG online game developed and distributed by the producer Blizzard Entertainment. Launched in 2014.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

or homophobic insults. Players banning depends on how extreme the offense is, and it might take two, seven or fifteen days or even permanent ban (e.g., Tom Clancy's Rainbow Siege). Harder to track is everything that happens in chats and discussions.

A bigger concern and vigilance are a higher control and censorship. The EU Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online<sup>13</sup> must serve as a model for platforms. UNESCO also promotes media role to counter hate and extremism. The publication "Countering Online Hate Speech"<sup>14</sup> 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).

The game platforms and communities usually serve as a means for the propagation of this kind of speech. Discord<sup>15</sup>, which allows the creation of 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 forbidding harassment or threatening messages. On the other hand, Steam, the gaming community, and store, refused to block games or content in defence of the right of decision, reaffirming itself as a game market closed to cultural disputes. Twitch<sup>16</sup> and YouTube<sup>17</sup> are other platforms allowing to watch live streams<sup>18</sup> 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 kind of 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-fulfilment, 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

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<sup>13</sup> [https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-18-262\\_en.htm](https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-262_en.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231>

<sup>15</sup> Discord, application with voice and text chat designed for players. Launched in 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Twitch, streaming site focused on streaming video games. Launched in 2011.

<sup>17</sup> YouTube, video sharing platform. Founded in 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Live stream, live transmission of an event over the Internet.

the influence of the content in opinions and actions, showing that violent speech can generate inconsistent answers (Hurley, 2004). On the other side, banning certain video games may not be the correct approach, because it could be understood as turning violent video games into a "forbidden fruit". Maybe the literacy and games 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.

## **2.4 Video Games Literacy**

Video games create challenging situations while they liberate, normalize, organize, and integrate, leading to the recognition of its educative potential (Moita, 2007). In a context where video games serve as a pedagogical resource, educators face a strategic function to promote this learning tool to the new generation, searching for resources that encourage students. Using intellectual techniques as read, count, memorize or identify, games can approach society themes including violence and amoral behaviour, which prohibition may not be enough to disinterest young people. Instead, it is necessary to problematize games, alerting for an ethical behaviour in the virtual world and empathizing the difference between the physics and the virtual, 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 worked at schools and requires critical thinking, collaboration, and participation, showing the importance of the balance between the two education forms. This way of learning is very relevant for the modern man, 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 favourite

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? In game design it is important the existence of elements that interact with players to create user-friendly experiences able to teach. Players can choose a new identity and discover an interactive world that allows them to take risks without real consequences to evolve their gaming skills. However, there are some barriers against this mode of learning, such as high costs, the time that it takes to learn, or the difficult access to them, but above all, the preference of some students for the traditional methods (Nass et al., 2014).

Besides the knowledge of the rules, objectives and game's interface, the user can communicate with others with a specific language, developing social skills. Unlike the traditional education often characterized by the individualization of work, conditioned by the classroom space, in video games players learn with the actual interaction with software and other players. Students receive the knowledge actively, being in control of the activity that challenges them to a certain goal (Delwiche, 2006).

According to Zagal (Zagal, 2008), "Gamer literacy", a result from an avid interest and years of gaming experience, should not be equated with "games literacy" or the ability to understand games. To understand games is also necessary to perceive their role in culture because many times the language, music or other elements are 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 the valid ideas 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 it

seems certain that education and awareness are a key element to combat hate speech online, playing a crucial role in the promotion of media and information literacy. Recent initiatives of UNESCO 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 extremist --- 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"<sup>19</sup>. This media and information literacy must be applied to both formal and informal education and such intervention should target especially youth, giving a rich insight about their knowledge, attitude, and practice online when they encounter hate and extremist content.

To perceive the video game's role 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 focus and motivate young people to learn certain skills based on the development of critical thinking, cooperation, and interaction.

## 2.5 Serious Games

The Serious games allow the player to learn a certain kind of educational material while playing, where gameplay and learning cannot be separated. Usually, they do not make a first good impression, with an unappealing appearance, they aren't received with the same enthusiasm as other kind of games. In most cases, they are associated with only one skill, that once learned, leads to discarding the game. Another discouraging aspect is the need to read the instructions before the game begins, making those games not attractive, as the player must be able to start playing, naturally understanding the rules as he progresses: 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 behaviour. *The International Journal of Videogames or The*

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<sup>19</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism>

*International Journal of Game-Based Learning*, with periodical publications, have been dedicated, for a decade, 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 of work. We also highlight the work of James Paul Gee, which has dedicated his scientific career to the study of the relationship between games, learning and society. According to this 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 of the principles that are good practices in the creation of 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 in the field work with various communities, looking for behaviour changes, educational<sup>20</sup> and cultural development. Immersing a student in a virtual environment with physical world characteristics, that allows him to test possibilities is one of the most effective means of learning (Giasolli et al., 2006). In many ways, video games can encourage learning, through historical games or by representing a known character, who teaches about the period in which he lived. As an example, "My Child Lebensborn"<sup>21</sup>, where the player takes care of a child from a Nazi program in Norwegian society after the war, where the emotional drawing is the key. Or the game "Florence"<sup>22</sup>, which through a simple game allows the player to formulate questions about the society (Zagalo, 2018).

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<sup>20</sup> We highlight the work of [gamesforchange.com](http://www.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>).

<sup>21</sup> My Child Lebensborn, is a nurture, survival game, based on true events. Developed by Sarepta Studio AS and released in 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Florence, interactive story video game developed and published by Mountains Studio in 2018.

The success of these games depends on the player's emotional response while interacting, the aesthetic and the design, where the most important factors seems to be: awareness, the player must be sensitized by a narrative that encourages him to a goal; immersion, the game must be able to shut down the player from the real world, focusing on the game (Shell, 2013); the feeling of progress that encourages the performance (Werbach & Hunter, 2012); the feeling of danger, when simulated with precaution can focus the player (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 an important path for teaching and modelling behaviours in the era of the digital natives, we can understand serious games as a tool to sensitize the player through emotional drawing, which motivates natural and fluid learning, avoiding boredom.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

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, behaviour patterns and conflict management. The attention to this influence has been addressed mostly through the negative connection with violent behaviour, violent radicalization, or lesser worrying but problematic leisure activities of students. Disregarded is the positive potential of the video game 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. Media Literacy plays here a crucial role in providing the tools for critical thinking, but also to reinforce more sensitive approaches around creativity.

In the revision of the studies that have been developed in this field, we gathered some authors, like Breuer (Breuer, 2017), Bernardes et al. (Bernardes et al., 2016), Packard (Packard, 2013) and Ferreira (Ferreira, 2003), who concretely analysed the violent and aggressive behaviours triggered by video games. There are also numerous articles launched by blogs or websites, like Kotaku or Vice, that warn to the controversial

content that can be found on online gaming platforms and communities. Analysing the sources, it is notable an insistence on the subject over the years, without finding a consensus, because, on the other hand, there are those who argue that games do not influence violent behaviour (Ulanoff, 2019), seeing them as a way for behavioural, cultural and social change. As Zagalo (Zagalo, 2014) points out, what is discussed is the production of culture, because however violent the game can be, it forces the player to be aware of himself and of the environment he's inserted, each video game is a human expression with an idea, and who plays 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), the consequences that each game could bring are impossible to be predicted by game creators. It can be argued that games can be less violent, and individuals may still be able to 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 in a game literacy perspective with educators.

## **III- SURVEY**

### **3.1 Methodology**

After analysing the state-of-the-art, hate speech in online games and communities, it was important to analyse 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.

This stage of the investigation focused on the treatment and statistical analysis of the responses with *Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22.0* of IBM SPSS (SPSS) where we perform descriptive statistics and correlations with no omission cases registered. At first, was carried a descriptive statistical analysis for each country, then proceeding to the analysis of the respective correlations. In the fifth stage, the results were discussed trying to reach some final considerations that allow a better understanding of the phenomenon of study.

### **3.1.1 Sample Characterization**

For this study we selected students of both genders, living in Portugal, Italy, and Lithuania. The samples consisted of 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 years old, with a predominance of individuals with 12 years. Off all applied surveys, 9,3% (n=53) of respondents revealed not to play video games.

### **3.1.2 Hypothesis**

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

Since the beginning of the millennium, the use of hate speech has become a trend, being more and more present in the game's ambience, the virtual world seems to promote and allow a freer expression, giving a feeling of autonomy to the player and letting him take control, sometimes ignoring the laws of the countries they are part of. The virtual freedom may lead to unethical behaviours (Machado, 2007; Ramos, 2008).

The verbal expression of hate speech is often tolerated as a normal reaction in moments of anger or frustration suggested by the competitiveness, video games present a vast world of possibilities for interaction and creation and it's the player's responsibility to choose which kind of behaviour to adopt. During games, the interaction

by chat is common and comments can go from performance compliments to ironic criticism, personal or ethnic insults, to sexual orientation, harassment, or minority attack. This ability to unlock virtual violent behaviours of an individual is called the «*online disinhibition effect*» (Suler, 2004, p.321) that, due to factors such as invisibility and minimization of authority, may increase the use of rude language, criticism, aggressivity and hatred (Joinson, 1998).

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

In the virtual world, the ethical and moral may be suspended, and the player immerses in a freer and independent environment, allowing him to be different «*the game is a system that engages players in an artificial conflict*» (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p.80). It has been observed that online games make the interaction between gamers easier and the 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. In the online communities, formed around specific video games on video game platforms (such as Twitch, Steam and Reddit), it's easy to find comments full of verbal violence, intolerance, or even “virtual stones” to those who express conflicting opinions. In recent years these attitudes can be found in several examples, such as harassment campaigns against women of the video game industry or hate groups or white supremacist servers, putting at risk the privacy of prominent personalities of these communities or even their own safety.

Video games have long been associated with negative effects on the physical and mental health of the players, currently, they seem to be a virtual space where hate speech manifestations are growing without mediations. However, more recent studies show that although digital games could, for various games (hate speech, addiction, violence, isolation), affect human health, 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 considered safe and with a positive impact on behaviour and learning (Felicia, 2009).

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

Video games can approach society themes including violence and amoral behaviour, which prohibition may not be enough to disinterest young people. Instead, it is necessary to problematize games, alerting for ethical behaviour in the virtual world and empathising the difference between the physics and the virtual, reinforcing games as a space for learning, fiction and fantasy (Moita, 2007; Ramos, 2008).

The fact that the majority of users are children and teenagers (Ferreira, 2003) increases their susceptibility and vulnerability to interactions in video games, maybe the literacy and games design could be the answer, encouraging discussion about the messages and contents and stimulating young people's moral reasoning (Lourenço,1998). In a context where video games serve as a pedagogical resource, educators face a strategic function to promote this learning tool to the new generation, searching for resources that encourage students.

According to Grizzle and Tronero (2016), there is no clear consensus about how to counteract the negative impacts of online hate speech, but it seems certain that education and awareness are a key element to combat hate speech online, playing a crucial role in the promotion of media and information literacy.

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

Video games have long been associated with negative effects on the physical and mental health of the players, currently, they seem to be a virtual space where hate speech manifestations are growing without mediation The manifestation of opinion that incites hatred towards individuals or groups, giving words the power to hurt physically, characterizes hate speech.

Playing an online game or interact in a game community is part of everyday life of most of the teenagers, and their understanding of video games world represents a great influence in their behaviour and conflict management. The online gameplay relates to the dynamics of interaction with other players during online multiplayer gaming

sessions. Often unmoderated, activities such as the building of teams or clans, the sharing of strategies and the voice chat, can result in conflicts or be a vehicle of hate speech. Real time actions that cannot be regarded only as virtual, as they implicit the gamer as a real person and can have implications and influences outside the game, as leading to conflicts among friends. The use of anonymity in front of a supportive public and the absence of consequences may support the use of hate speech like a power demonstration or frustration relieve, this kind of behaviour is detrimental to the physical condition and the self-esteem of the aggressors and the victims (Breuer, 2017).

## **3.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

The questionnaire aimed to collect results from three countries divided by age groups - Italy, from 11 to 13; Lithuania, from 12 to 15 and Portugal, from 14 to 20. According to the chosen strategy, it was carried out a descriptive statistical analysis of each country, followed by a global analysis of the countries involved.

### **3.2.1 Italy descriptive statistical analysis**

Italy sample consisted in 195 surveys with an average age of 12 years old, 49% were male (n=96) and 51% female (n=99) revealing a gender balance.

With respect to personal questions about video games, data shows that 57% of students play 1-2 hours per day, 34% in their houses or bedroom and even though most of them reported don't feel angry after playing, 13% reported the opposite. Most respondents do not perceive video games as a way of learning but see online communities as a place to make friends.

About young people's perception of hate speech in online gaming communities, the results reveal that 67% of respondents know the rules of online gaming platforms. Regarding the existence of hate groups in online communities, although 60% of the inquiries have never noticed their existence, 16% has. It should be noted that 77% has never been contacted by hate groups during the utilization of online platforms and 80% have never denounced any abnormal situation. Only 5% does not agree with censorship in this communities.

According to the data about the behaviour in Livestream and chat platforms, 53% of the students does not use any Livestream, and 62% does not use chat platforms. For those who use these platforms, Youtube and Discord are the favourites. To mention that 56% of the youngsters did not notice aggressive language, 68% didn't found any inappropriate content, and 33% revealed that already have spoken to strangers in games or communities.

When it comes to the responsibility for hate speech promotion, data reveals that 46% of the respondents blame the players and 38% believes that this trend can be changed by community managers work. The results obtained do not allow us to get conclusions about the total elimination of hate speech, neither the educative role of video games.

In relation about the way students face hate speech in video games and online communities, 85% agrees that is not "cool" to be a hater. According to data, 76% have never been a victim, 82% have never practice hate speech and video games are indicated as the place where it happens. It should be noted that data are not conclusive about the way young people face hate speech. Concerning most common types of hate speech, data reveals that insults against race (29%), sexual orientation (22%) and ethical questions (20%) are the most frequent hate speech, practiced by the players. Regarding the role of parents/educators, data seems to indicate a tendency to warn to the dangers of hate speech (47%), however, 45% of the inquiries claim that parents do not supervise their games. Finally, 77% revealed that has never felt affected by hate speech in everyday life and only 21% of the students play "serious games" regularly.

### **3.2.2 Lithuania descriptive statistical analysis**

The sample consists of 228 individuals aged between 12 and 15 years with an average of 14 years. 52% are male (n=119) and 48% female (109) also revealing a balance regarding gender. According to the personal relationship with video games, 75% of the students play with some regularity, between 1-2 hours per day, in their houses. It is notable a tendency to see video games as a way of learning (49%) and 63% said that they don't feel angry after playing, and 75% of the respondents see online game communities as a place to make friends. Regarding the young people's perception of hate speech in online gaming communities, the results show that 54% know the

utilization rules of the platforms and 56% has already noticed the existence of hate groups, although 70% has never been contacted. Most of the youngsters (68%) never reported any situation of hate speech, but there is no conclusion about their agreement with censorship of hate speech in gaming platforms.

According to behaviour in Livestream and chat platforms it is noted that 57% of the students don't use Livestream nor chat platforms, being YouTube (55%) and Twitch (43%) the favourites for the 42% who watch real-time games, and Discord (96%) for the ones who use online chats. 46% of the inquiries said that aggressive language is not common during the Livestream games, neither the existence of inappropriate content (70%). Data also seem to reveal that 48% of the students do not feel influenced by digital content creators and only 20% have never spoken with strangers during the utilization of gaming platforms.

When it comes to the responsibility for hate speech promotion, 47% of the respondents believe that players can change this trend and 49% argue that prevention is not game designer's work. According to data, only 15% believe in the total elimination of online hate speech with no conclusion about the educative role of video games.

Concerning the way youngsters face hate speech in video games and online game communities, data seems to indicate that although 59% of the respondents agrees that is not cool to be a hater, 15% disagree. 62% do not take online hate speech seriously, 67% have never been a victim of hate speech and 52% have never practice hate speech. Between video games and gaming communities, 93% pointed out that video games are the place where hate speech is more frequent, and the most common types of hate speech are insults against race (36,6%) and sexual orientation (17%). Data also seem to show that 39% of parents and educators do not supervise children's gaming activities. Lastly, it was concluded that 62% of students have never felt affected by online hate speech in their everyday life and 23% plays regularly "serious games".

### 3.2.3 Portugal descriptive statistical analysis

In a sample of 149 surveys applied to students with ages between 14 and 20 years, the average is 16 years old. 54% of the questioned students are male (n=81) and 45% female (n=67).

Through the analysis of the answers about the personal relationship with video games 34% of the students spend less than one hour per day in video games and 17% never play. The ones that play, 46% do it at home, 25% in their bedrooms and 46% do not feel angry after playing. 40% seems to perceive video games as a way of learning and 48% stated that online communities are a place to make friends.

According to their perception of hate speech in online gaming communities, 40% know the rules of utilization for online gaming platforms, 26% have never found hate groups, 63% have never been contacted by one and 46% never reported any situation of hate speech.

When it comes to the behaviour in Livestream and chat platforms, 66% of the students do not watch LiveStream video games regularly, 32% have noticed aggressive language in the videos and 42% never felt influenced by any live streamer. The 30% that use live streams platforms prefer YouTube (52%) and Twitch (48%). About chat platforms, 42% of the respondents never use them and although 53% have already talked to strangers in these platforms, 38% never found inappropriate content. For 22%, that answered, Discord is the favourite platform (97%).

Concerning the responsibility for hate speech promotion, the answers of the respondents do not allow any conclusion about their perception of game designers and community managers work in the prevention of hate speech. Although it seems to exist a tendency to agree that players can change this trend (52%), 30% claims that games can educate players to not use hate speech - 38% of the students don't believe in the total elimination of hate speech from online video games and gaming communities.

About student's way to face hate speech in video games and online communities, 65% of the respondents agree that is not cool to be a hater and 58% do not take hate speech seriously. According to the data, hate speech is far more frequent in video games than in gaming platforms and more than 50% of the respondents have never been a

victim nor practice hate speech in online video games or gaming communities. Students also claim that insults against national and ethnic origin (22%), race (22%) and sexual orientation (20%) are the most frequent, practiced by players.

Regarding the role of parents/educators, 52% of the parents never supervise gaming activities of their children. Finally, 62% of the students never felt affected by online hate speech in their everyday life and 30% never played "serious games".

### **3.2.4 Global descriptive statistical analysis**

According to the data about the personal relationship with video games, 40% of respondents play with regularity and only 9% never play. 60% of the students tend to spend between 1-2 hours per day on video games, playing in their homes. 36% seems to see video games as a way of learning and 57% uses gaming communities as a place to make friends. 58% claim that does not feel angry after playing.

About young people's perception of hate speech in online gaming communities, 53% said they were aware of the utilization rules of the platforms, 29% never notice the existence of hate groups and 71% have never been contacted by one. Although most of the respondents never reported any situation of hate speech (66%), 45% agree with censorship of online hate speech.

Regarding the behaviour in Livestream and chat platforms, is noticed a tendency to not watch live games (45%), more than 40% have never used a Livestream platform nor see any livestreamer as an influence, for the 37% that use it, YouTube (53%) is the favourite. Data seems to reveal that 48% have never used any chat platform, against 23% that use it, Discord is the favourite (95%). 28% have never talked to strangers during online games and 46% of the students claim that have never found inappropriate content in chat platforms.

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 is the work of game designers. 48% agreed that players can change this trend but is noticed a tendency to not believe in the

total elimination of hate speech (39%). We cannot take any conclusion about the educative role of video games.

On the subject of student's way to face hate speech in video games and online communities, 70% agree that is not cool to be a hater, 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 more than 60% have never been a victim nor practice it.

The most common types of hate speech are insults against race (29%), sexual orientation (20,7%) and national/ethnic origin (19%).

Concerning the awareness of parents and educators about the existence of hate speech, students claim that 45% of the parents never supervised their online gaming communities.

The five most played games are Fortnite (16%), FIFA (14%), Minecraft (14%), GTA (8%) and Brawl Stars (7%). The games where they often find hate speech are Fortnite (16%), CS. GO (5%), Call of Duty (2%) and Minecraft (2%). Finally, 22% of the respondents never played serious games and only 20% play it regularly.

### **3.3 Correlations Data**

Through the analysis of the correlations, we can notice the intensity of the associations between quantitative variables. This coefficient varies between -1 and + 1 (-1 less than or equal R above or equal to 1). In this study, we will only analyse the correlations above or equal to 0.3, because according to Marôco (2011, p.24), this value is already a strong correlation.

#### **3.3.1 Italy correlation data**

**Board 1** –Playing time (Italy)

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	How many hours per day do you usually play?
Do you tend to feel more angry or aggressive while playing?	<b>.445(**)</b>
Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	<b>.354(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=183

**Board 2 – Hate groups (Italy)**

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	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	Have you ever been a victim of hate speech in video games and game communities?
Have you ever notice the existence of hate groups on game communities?	<b>.340(**)</b>	<b>.414(**)</b>
Have you ever been contacted by hate groups on the games communities	<b>.564(**)</b>	<b>.578(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=183

When analysing the correlations related to playing time (board 1) data seems to show that young people who spend more hours playing tends to feel more aggressive ( $r=.44$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and more prone to practice hate speech ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Regarding the practice of hate speech (board 2) data seem to show that the respondents who have more tendency to practice hate speech in video games and gaming communities, are more aware of the existence of hate groups on game communities ( $r=.34$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and also have been contacted by hate groups in these platforms ( $r=.56$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Also, students who have already been victims of online hate speech seem to notice the existence of hate groups on game communities ( $r=.41$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and have been already contacted by hate groups ( $r=.57$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

### 3.3.2 Lithuania correlation data

#### Board 3 – Playing time (Lithuania)

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	How many hours per day do you usually play?
Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	<b>.357(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=220

#### Board 4 - Practice of hate speech (Lithuania)

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	Have you ever been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities
Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	<b>.475(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=220

#### Board 5 - Hate groups (Lithuania)

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	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	Have you ever been a victim of hate speech in video games and game communities?
Have you ever notice the existence of hate groups on game communities?	<b>.357(**)</b>	---
Have you ever been contacted by hate groups on the games communities	<b>.352(**)</b>	<b>.429(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=220

Regard to the time that young people spend playing (board 3), data seems to indicate that those who spend more hours playing tend to practice hate speech in video games and online gaming communities ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). When it comes to the practice of hate speech in video games and online gaming communities (board 4) youngsters who are aggressors seem to be also victims ( $r=.47$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). And finally, the students who have more tendency to practice hate speech in video games and online gaming communities (board 5) are more aware of the existence of hate group on game communities ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and also seem to be more likely to be contacted by hate groups ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Data also seem to show that the students that are victims of hate speech also tend to be contacted by hate groups ( $r=.42$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

### 3.3.3 Portugal correlation data

#### Board 6 - Playing time (Portugal)

	How many hours per day do you usually play?	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?
Do you tend to feel more angry or aggressive while playing?	<b>.387(**)</b>	<b>.326(**)</b>
Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	<b>.402(**)</b>	---
Is it "cool" to be a hater in video games and game communities?	---	<b>.461(**)</b>

\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=119

#### Board 7 - Practice of hate speech (Portugal)

	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?

Have you ever been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities **.586(\*\*)**

Have you ever reported any situation of hate speech? **.428(\*\*)**

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=119

#### **Board 8 - Hate groups (Portugal)**

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	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	Have you ever been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities
Have you ever notice the existence of hate groups on game communities?	<b>.311(**)</b>	<b>.422(**)</b>
Have you ever been contacted by hate groups on the games communities	<b>.544(**)</b>	<b>.563(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=119

#### **Board 9 - Online hate speech in everyday life (Portugal)**

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	Have you ever felt affected by online hate speech in everyday life?
Do you take hate speech seriously in video games and game communities?	<b>.386(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.01, N=119

Regarding the time spent playing (board 6), those who spend more hours playing online video games are more likely to feel angry/aggressive while playing ( $r=.38$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and to practice hate speech ( $r=.40$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). The respondents who perform hate speech also tend to think that it is cool to be a hater ( $r=.46$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

According to the practice of hate speech in online video games and gaming communities (board 7), data seems to show a tendency for students who practice hate speech being also the victims ( $r=.58$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and those who already practice hate speech have also reported online hate speech situations ( $r=.42$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

With regard to hate speech groups (board 8) those who have been contacted by hate groups on the games communities tend to practice hate speech in video games and online gaming communities ( $r=.54$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and were also victims of the same speech ( $r=.56$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). Data also seems to show that those who have been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities also notice the existence of hate groups on game communities ( $r=.42$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

In regard to online hate speech in everyday life (board 9) data seems to reveal that those who felt affected by online hate speech in everyday life also seem to take it seriously in video games and game communities ( $r=.38$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

### 3.3.4 Global correlation data

#### Board 10 - Playing time (Global)

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	How many hours per day do you usually play?
Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	<b>.386(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.0, N=514

#### Board 11 - Practice of hate speech (Global)

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	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?
Have you ever been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities	<b>.465(**)</b>

Is it “cool” to be a hater in video games and game communities? **.351(\*\*)**

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.0, N=514

**Board 12 - Hate groups (Global)**

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	Have you ever performed hate speech in video games and game communities?	Have you ever been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities
Have you ever notice the existence of hate groups on game communities?	<b>.358(**)</b>	<b>.365(**)</b>
Have you ever been contacted by hate groups on the games communities	<b>.443(**)</b>	<b>.507(**)</b>

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\*\* Strong correlation to a significance level of 0.0, N=514

According to the time playing (board 10) data seem to reveal that students who spend more hours playing tend to practice hate speech in video games and online gaming communities ( $r=.36$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). When it comes to the practice of hate speech in video games and online gaming communities (board 11), the respondents who perform hate speech in video games and game communities tend to think that it’s “cool” to be a hater ( $r=.35$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and also seem to be victim of hate speech ( $r=.46$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

In the relation of the existence of hate groups with the practice of hate speech (board 12), data seem to show that the students who have more tendency to practice hate speech in video games and gaming communities, are also more aware of the existence of hate groups in these platforms ( $r=.46$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and tend to be contacted by hate groups ( $r=.44$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) in these platforms. Data also seem to show that students who have been victim of hate speech in video games and game communities also notice the existence of hate groups on game communities ( $r=.46$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and, in the same way, tend to be contacted by them on the games communities ( $r=.57$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

### 3.4 Hypothesis Validation

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 hypothesis 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.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

This research aimed to understand how youngsters see hate speech in online video games and gaming communities. After analysing the state of art, inquiries were applied to students to understand their playing habits, their relationship with other players and communities, how they see online hate speech and the role of educators, managers and designers in this matter. The formulated hypothesis guided the analysis of the inquiries, and after the quantitative analysis of each question, the correlations between them were analysed.

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, brought valuable information to the research about the student's personal experience.

## **IV- FOCUS GROUPS**

### **4.1 Qualitative Analysis**

In the project's work plan, a small group interview was previewed with few elements who answered to the survey, with the objective of clarifying and deepening some of the questions raised by the survey. The expected date for the application of the focus groups coincided with the arrival of the pandemic COVID19 in Europe and the mandatory confinement in the countries where the focus groups were to take place. In this sense, we opted for the application of an online form to students from schools in Italy, Lithuania, and Portugal. The methodology was an online survey with mixed answers, with the following objectives: understand how are aware and sensitive students about online hatred; Understand "how and how much" this phenomenon is perceived; understand if students have proposals for counter the hate online.

#### 4.1.1 Italy qualitative analysis

The surveys are 37. The sample is made up of 62% of girls and 38% of boys; the age target ranges from 11 to 14 years. There was a greater number of responses (38%) from students aged 12 years.

First question **“Do you think video games can be a way to learn?”** there was 54% positive responses and 46% negative responses. Most students believe that it is possible learn from video games and they have declared that it is can to learn functional skill (historical facts, English, learn to move the body) and compartmental skills (learn to lose and to collaborate).

In the next question **“Do you agree with the censorship of hate speech / hate groups on gaming platforms? Censorship occurs in various ways: the ban (expulsion) of a user, the automatic cancellation of some words, the possibility to "silence" or "mute" another user”** almost all of the students declared they agree on the censorship and only 11% disagree.

In the next question **“Has this ever happened to you? Do you have any other proposals to reduce or eliminate hate speech from gaming platforms?”** it never happened to be banned and they have clear ideas of what could be done: prevention (delete hate comments, avoid inserting spaces for comments); Interventions after the comments (ban, get the postal police to intervene); Make players more aware.

In the after question **“Who do you think should be most responsible for preventing hate speech online?”** a little more than half students (67%) says that the gamers should be responsible of prevention, but for 19% the responsibility is the manager and for 14% is of the designer. The students motivated the answers in the following ways: The player is responsible because he writes negative comments; Managers are responsible because they run the game and should make sure no one is a victim of online hatred; The responsibility is the designers because they create the game and they could create a platform that it cannot spread hatred.

To the question **“Do you believe that hate speech can be totally eliminated?”** almost all the students (81%) answered negatively and the 19% affirmative. Student’s motivation can be divided in three macrocategories: fatalism (hatred is human, the

human being is unaware); Specific attitudes (the thought remains even if the comment is cancelled, hatred is routine); Thoughts of change (we should follow right behaviors for making disappear the phenomenon, we can say that it is not fair behaviors).

In the next question: **“Do you believe that video games can educate players not to practice hate speech?”** more than half of students (60%) answered negatively and the 40% positively. Students proposed following ideas for possible video games that shoot down hatred online: Specific games that educate not to practice word and hate speech (game that learn the equality, a videogame that it has a victim and an executioner how protagonists); Generic game (team play, appropriate content)

Other students did not propose ideas because they say that the video games did not born for education but for play and socialize. In this case, there is probably a lack of awareness of what hate speech actually is, its characteristics and its diffusion; it can be said that it is precisely the socialization in video games that is often the ground for hate speech, and which could be, at the same time, vehicles for education not to practice it.

To the question **“Do you think that hate speech is considered a "normal" practice when playing a video game or attending game platforms? Is it considered "normal" to offend or denigrate when playing a video game or attending game platforms (such as Twitch, Discord and others)?”** the 94% of students answered negatively and the 5% positively. The few students who answered positively motivated their answer in terms of rudeness and competitiveness.

To the question **“Do you think hate speech should be taken seriously? Do you think it's something that can affect everyday life?”** almost the whole of students (87%) answered positively and the 13% negatively. The positively answers have been motivated in the following ways: Consequence on quotidian attitude (influence someone’s life, the gamer can think that hate speech is true); Consequence on personality (the gamer can believe he is weak, the gamer feels sad and angry); Serious consequences (persecution, suicide); Other (People use hate speech offline and they create bullying).

The students who answered negatively motivated their answer in the following ways: It shouldn’t be taken seriously (players who insult do not know the other players).

To the question “**Have you ever experienced or witnessed a hate speech experience in video games (e.g. you met a hater while playing, or happened to a friend of yours)? Would you like to tell it briefly?**” some students told their experiences and what emerges particularly are swearing and insults; student’s reactions have been different: user reporting, removal of hater and requital. Here are the experiences:

"Yes, it happened to me. I told the one who was making fun of me to stop, otherwise I would have gone directly to the postal police. "

“Of course, while playing a game, I think it was *Clash of Clans*. My name suggested clearly that I was not of Italian nationality, and someone decided to insult me. It made no difference to me, more because he thought I was French. I told him that I wasn't French and that he was completely wrong. He apologized and I eliminated the game because I was fed up."

"Yes, an Arab wrote me bad words like: *shit, fuck you*. I "blocked" him and closed the game."

"Yes, and I started another game."

"Yes, it happened to me. In practice on this game you must join a clan. I chose the clan that I thought was best but as soon as I entered, they started screaming at me and saying bad words. I immediately left the group"

“Yes, many times; but if it happens you only have to do one thing: don't beat him in words but IN THE GAME! The haters believe themselves superior and to make them shut up you just have to beat them, and they will shut up. First, I replied to the insults and then I beat them both: they never spoke again. On another occasion there was a whole group of haters, so I called my friends and we beat them."

#### **4.1.2 Lithuania qualitative analysis**

All in all, there have been 44 surveys received. The sample consists of 61% of girls and 34% of boys; the age ranges from 12 to 19 years. There has been a greater number of responses (23%) from students aged 14 years, more than 50% of respondents have been 15-17 years old.

To the first question **“Do you think video games can be a way to learn?”** there has been 86,4% positive responses and 13,6% negative responses. It is considered a very positive fact that most students believe that it is possible learn from video games.

Most of the respondents when asked what they have learnt while playing indicated the improvement of the English language skills; several mentioned the improvement of geography knowledge (to understand maps), learn about architecture and lifestyle of a certain historic period; several students have mentioned learning about Medieval ages, ancient Greece.

The majority of focus group participants has indicated a different set of skills developed with the help of games – concentration, cooperation, communication, fast reaction, performing tactic activities, achieving the goal, team work, strategic and logic thinking, patience, concentrate on one task, designing new things. Also, some of them have mentioned that games help to relax, get rid of psychological tension, find new friends, manage one’s emotions, not to pay attention to bullying.

To the next question, **“Do you agree with the censorship of hate speech / hate groups on gaming platforms? Censorship occurs in various ways: the ban (expulsion) of a user, the automatic cancellation of some words, the possibility to "silence" or "mute" another user”** more than 77% of respondents have expressed a positive answer.

To the question, **“Has this ever happened to you? Do you have any other proposals to reduce or eliminate hate speech from gaming platforms?”** most of the students declare that it has never happened to them. Some of the ideas of what could be done in such cases: Interventions after the incidences of hate speech - ban or mute participants; Start from yourself – be respectful towards others. Some also declare that it is impossible to stop hate speech since a lot of has already been done and it’s not working.

To the question, **“Who do you think should be most responsible for preventing hate speech online?”** almost 64% say that the gamers themselves should to be responsible for prevention of hate speech, but 1/3 say it is the responsibility of platform managers and 9% claim that this should be done by game designers. Students have motivated their answers in the following ways: Players are responsible because they write, say negative comments, and spread hate. Some of them should learn how to express emotions

properly or understand that you are not “cool” if you say improper words, some also said that it is only a game and hate speech should not be taken seriously; Managers are responsible and should see what is wrong and inappropriate. Players could help them in this process; Designers are responsible for this because they have created the game.

To the question, **“Do you believe that hate speech can be totally eliminated?”** a bit more than 77% of students have answered negatively and the rest believe that hate speech can be eliminated. Students’ answers are divided into three subcategories: Fatalism (“it’s unavoidable part of life”, “can’t change all people”, “there will always be people who will think that it’s “cool”); Specific attitudes (“you can’t forbid a person to feel it”, “for some hate speech is normal”, “the internet without drama would not be interesting”, “the player needs to understand that the game is not reality”); Thoughts of change (“we should think before saying”). The answers in the first two subcategories were the most abundant.

To the next question, **“Do you believe that video games can educate players not to practice hate speech?”** 54,5% of students have answered negatively and the 45,5% - positively. Students proposed the following ideas for possible video games that could reduce hate speech online: To mute chats; to remove the curse words from game characters; Not so venturesome/passionate games; a calm game where it is impossible to lose; A psychological game – if you do not know how to behave you cannot pass to another level; Game consisting of 3 participants where they can emotionally discharge among themselves; Game depicting difficult situations and what kind of consequences might be.

To the question, **“Do you think that hate speech is considered a "normal" practice when playing a video game or attending game platforms? Is it considered "normal" to offend or denigrate when playing a video game or attending game platforms (such as Twitch, Discord and others)?”** the 72,7% of students have answered negatively and the 27,3% - positively. Students who have positively, motivated their answer by saying that it is fun, strengthens one’s mind, encourages to think critically, say that it’s normal because a person can say what they do not like or also some respondents put the blame on the victim (that he/she provoked it because he/she does not know how to play and is just an obstacle for others).

To the question, **“Do you think hate speech should be taken seriously? Do you think it's something that can affect everyday life?”** only 34% have answered positively and 65,9% - negatively (29 out of 44 think that hate speech should not be taken seriously). Students who said that hate speech should be taken seriously motivated their answer by saying that it might have serious consequences (depression, suicide, closing from other, psychological problems).

Students who answered negatively motivated their answer in the following ways: It shouldn't be taken seriously; it's just for fun; they don't mean it; they don't think what they are saying; you shouldn't pay attention to it; a person is using hate speech because he doesn't know the other person; it's normal; it's just emotions that you lost in the game; “You have a choice not to play”; “you can shut down computer if you feel affected too much”; “Hate speech does not mean anything, but it might affect a weaker person”; “It's all about the game and not a real life”; “You feel so immersed into the game and the words just might come out by accident”; “You can just mute the disrespectful player and carry on playing”.

To the question, **“Have you ever experienced or witnessed a hate speech experience in video games (e.g. you met a hater while playing, or happened to a friend of yours)? Would you like to tell it briefly?”** some students have shared their experiences:

“They want to insult you because you have won the game”.

“Yes, multiple times. I have done it and experienced it myself. It is just because you tried so hard and did not achieve what you wanted”.

“Yes, but it was not serious. It was just a person taken over by emotions”.

“I saw a video about this - Eve Online Cyberbullying - Fanfest Alliance Leader Panel 2012”.

“We played online. Some random guy came and started insulting us, but we destroyed him with our skills in this game”.

“Of course! When you watch YouTube – there's a lot of hate”.

“I was a person who bullied other in 2-4 grades. The reason for this was partially my lack of self-confidence. I tried to please others, find friends, and look better than I was”.

“Lots of swear words and illogical arguments”.

“Absolutely everybody does that”.

“When I have won the game, I received personal messages from a member from different team. He called me bad names, but later I learned to block incoming messages”.

“Our team was losing and one member from the opposing team was very angry and used curse words against the weakest member from our team”.

“Yes, but I do not remember the exact situation because I did not make a big deal out of this”.

“I blocked others, and no one can now write to me”.

“I would have reported that person”.

“I cannot do anything against alliance with 50k people”.

“The platform manager took care of this”.

#### **4.1.3 Portugal qualitative analysis**

The samples consisted of 28 individuals, 54% male and 46% female. The age of the respondents varied between eleven and twenty-two year, with a predominance (47%) of individuals with 15 years.

In the first question **“Do you think video games can be a way to learn?”**, there was 64% positive and 36% negative answers. Most of the students claim that games helped them in the improvement of a set of skills - historical/cultural facts, English, logical thinking, emotion control (anger/frustration), teamwork, communication with others.

For the second question **“Do you agree with the censorship of hate speech / hate groups on gaming platforms? Censorship occurs in various ways: the ban (expulsion) of a user, the automatic cancellation of some words, the possibility to "silence" or "mute" another user”**, 64 % of the respondents agreed. Regarding **“Has this ever happened to you? Do you have any other proposals to reduce or eliminate hate speech from gaming platforms?”**, it has happened to 18% of the students and, beyond ban,

they claim that a punishment that affects the gameplay (taking specific items or making the players unable to do something) could be more effective.

In the next question “**Who do you think should be most responsible for preventing hate speech online?**”, the majority (68%) of the students claims that players are the main responsible, although, 25% give the responsibility to the managers and 7 % to the designers. These answers were justified by: “It's the responsibility of the players who create the community and practice hate speech”; “If players do not use hate speech, it will disappear. Designer and managers already do everything to counteract it”; “Because they are the most favourable to feel angry about the game and players in multiplayer games. In my opinion, players need to try not to take the game too seriously”; “In my opinion, the managers have the power to allow or not some functionalities of the games. If well managed, it can avoid hate speech”; “Designers are responsible because they should create a game that doesn't allow this kind of speech, not having to take corrective measures after it is launched.”

For the question “**Do you believe that hate speech can be totally eliminated?**”, most of the students (78,6%) answered negatively. Respondents believe that hate speech is something that is embedded in our culture, which is impossible to control because toxic players will always exist. They also pointed out that "Contrary ideas will always arise, whether we like it or not." and "Not every 'hate speech' should be taken seriously, sometimes it is just a joke."

In the next question “**Do you believe that video games can educate players not to practise hate speech?**”, 50% of the respondents agree, and 50% disagree.

The ones who answered affirmatively, claim that: "Video games can apply punishments that disturb the game in some way, per example, remove money/diamonds/completed missions"; "Video games can create a school environment (educative games and educative videos related to the game, per example); "Video games are the most effective and immersive way of putting someone on someone else's shoes."

To the question **“Do you think that hate speech is considered a "normal" practice when playing a video game or attending game platforms? Is it considered "normal" to offend or denigrate when playing a video game or attending game platforms (such as Twitch, Discord and others)?”**, the 57% of the students answered negatively and the 43% positively. The respondents who answered positively declare that it is important to recognize the different levels of hate speech and that sometimes it can help players to understand their mistakes. “Hate speech is something normal because it happens often and although people get angry when they lose, it shouldn't be taken seriously.” They also claim that many players think that is funny to insult others and, depending on the kind of game, new players can be judged. Even YouTubers make videos where they practice hate speech”.

In the next question **“Do you think hate speech should be taken seriously? Do you think it's something that can affect everyday life?”**, 64 % of the respondents agree and 36% disagree.

The students who agreed that hate speech should be taken seriously motivated their answer by saying that it can affect psychologically and physically the players, leading to behaviour changes, low self-esteem, and depression.

Students who answered negatively motivated their answer in the following ways: "If you take hate speech seriously you will feel sadder and make more mistakes in games and reality"; "I think that hate speech shouldn't be taken seriously because it's just a game and they're just haters"; "I don't think hate speech should be taken seriously because the ones who practice are insecure and unhappy"; "Many of these comments are made like a joke and are not meant to be taken seriously"; "It's just a game, people don't need to feel offended by it. There are more important things to concern us that online hate speech"; "I think that most of the players don't care because they also practice it."

In the last question **“Have you ever experienced or witnessed a hate speech experience in video games (e.g. you met a hater while playing, or happened to a friend of yours)? Would you like to tell it briefly?”**, students shared some of their experiences:

“Most of the times, it happens when they're losing the games, and start insulting and accusing the "haters".”

“Yes. Many times, when I am playing with friends who play very well, the other players start accusing them of using hacks and insult them.”

“Countless times, but never directed specifically at me. When playing competitive games like CS. GO, players are judged by their level and rank.”

“These situations happen often, so it is complicated to remember a specific one.”

“I didn't say anything, and I was careful next time. I take hate speech as learning to improve my gaming skills.”

“Yes, many times my cousin (who has a depression for not having friends) try to make friends in online games and many times is attacked. Obviously, for a person with this kind of problem it becomes a very complicated situation.”

“In the beginning, I used to get mad and answered back. After a while, you get a certain tolerance and start enjoying what happens sarcastically. Nowadays, I only respond if practiced against someone else, if it's against me I just ignore it.”

“I ignored and play with their anger.”

## **4.1 Conclusions**

The application of online focus groups that allowed participants to write their experiences and opinions, contributed to a better understanding of their point of view, clarifying the "maybes" of the survey and showing new perspectives to the investigation.

According to the collected data from the three countries involved, it's possible to understand the educative role of video games on the improvement of English

language skills or historical knowledge, as well as the development of skills like - concentration, cooperation, communication, strategic and logic thinking or patience.

Most of the participants agree with censorship and say that gamers are responsible for the prevention of hate speech, although they tend to see it as something impossible to control. Online hate speech is not seen by the majority of the students as a "normal" practice in video games and gaming platforms, but some players claim that it can strengthen one's mind making them more aware and focused in the game.

The participants seem to be aware of the consequences of hate speech in the mental health of the players, however, some of them still claim it as something that should not be taken seriously. In a general way, it is noticeable a lack of understanding of online hate speech as real problem of video games and gaming platforms.

## **V- FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

During the first stage of the 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 the 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 of the hypothesis.

We can understand that the different paths gamers can experiment in video games have given rise to many debates and reflections. Digital games have long been associated with negative effects on the physical and mental health of the players. Currently, they seem to be a virtual space where hate speech manifestations are growing without mediation. However, more 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 considered safe and with a positive impact on behaviour and learning (Felicia, 2009). The emergence of the notion of Serious Games to use new gaming technologies for educational purposes, has reinforced the positive impact that video games can have in human development. 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. The analysis of the data collected allows us to conclude that a large part of the participants in the survey and in the focus groups is able to enumerate skills acquired or deepened with video games, such as cultural and language learning. It is interesting to observe that the inquiries often think that serious games have no place for fun and entertainment. However, from the literature review, it is important to point out that serious games, must be kept pleasant, or the serious objective would not be achieved.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the surveys and focus groups allowed us to understand that unsupervised hours of playing are related to the practice of hate speech. Inquiries show awareness of the consequences of online hate speech to the mental health of players, but there is a tendency to not take this kind of speech seriously among players. It is considered normal to heard and experience hatful comments on all online video gaming systems. On the other hand, it was possible to comprehend that game's enterprises, designers and platforms are now reacting to toxic communities. More than 30 major gaming companies are teaming up to tackle the problem, developing tools and initiatives to control and prevent hate speech, taking numerous steps to clean up the language for example on the live service. Until recently, most of the concerns have focused on violence in videogames, not language.

When it comes to the responsibility of players, managers and designers in the prevention of online hate speech, respondents tend to blame players, because, without their intervention, hate speech will never occur, however, there are doubts about the total elimination of hate speech from the online video games and platforms since it's

impossible to control every intervention and as students say "haters will always exist", because they find that this kind of behaviour is very ingrained in most game communities and most users take it as a given fact, accepting it with often with some apathy.

From the analysis of the state of the art, we are able to reinforce that parents and educators can have an important role when it comes to the prevention and awareness of this problem, teaching the young players how to deal with a hate speech situation, promoting empathy and fostering a safe climate of tolerance and inclusion. These may be achieved by appealing and challenging serious games, involving communities to change online behaviours.

With the analysis of the surveys, it was noted a lack in the parent's vigilance of gaming activities of children. This is also a very important point of our study. Often video games are regarded as strange and risky by parents and teachers, who ignore the mechanisms and actions of this digital universe. We have showed that awareness with the necessary knowledge on young people's skills and online activities can be important to understand this virtual world, allowing parents and educators to identify the important issues, to raise awareness on the identified risks, and to prepare young people with better resilience and avoidance strategies, rather than forbidding or censoring the use of contemporary media. This approach could also sensitise youth to the multiple educational game's possibilities, leading to the empowerment of civil society organization and schools in countering hate speech online with new pedagogical itineraries for teachers based on video games culture, strengthening the cooperation between schools, youth institutions and video game industry and the increase of awareness in youngsters and the general public on online hate speech, boosting public perception of the issue.

The contribution of this project and the innovative aspect is in enhancing gamification in the role of creating safe zones for dialogue, debate, and awareness of hate speech, starting from one of the most loved everyday life practices of the youngsters. The project proposes to learn how to fight hate speech online starting exploiting video games in favor of the cause, by transforming a group of strangers into a community: fostering

video games pedagogical potential through the creation of new educational materials that teachers and youth workers can use in their daily work; discovering the other; activating empathy; trusting to be able to connect with others; having a common interest and the means to interact, by creating something. For this reason, the project proposes “creatively tinkering with technology” involving young game designers, promoting the dissemination of European content produced by the most innovative video game industry (often startups), laying the foundations for a greater involvement of the videogame industry in contrast to the phenomenon. The ludic approach of the project itself, for example in the form of the urban games, is also a powerful and innovative tool for creating awareness raising strategies in the dissemination of the project results, which include citizenship as a whole.

This work package was the first of four interrelated activities to implement a counter-action to online hate speech, the research on video games communities to identify the challenges and potential solutions, the creation of new pedagogical itineraries for teachers which will contain resources to promote gaming as a powerful ludic tool and change the perception of video games in educational context, the organization of a European-level hackathon, where game designers and educators will work together in short video games and the implementation of an online platform to provide new tools and organize dissemination events.

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