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Violence, Hate Speech, and Discrimination in Video Games: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic review analyses the relationships between violence, hate speech, discrimination, and video games. A comprehensive search of the Web of Science and Scopus databases identified 47 relevant studies published between 2018 and 2023. The review examines how video games may provide fertile ground for online violence, hate speech, and discrimination, while also exploring their potential as educational tools. Key findings suggest that exposure to violent video game content can increase aggressive cognitions and behaviours, particularly when combined with competitive gameplay. However, prosocial aspects of gaming may promote positive intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice. Hate speech and discriminatory behaviours remain prevalent issues in online gaming communities, disproportionately affecting marginalised groups. The article highlights the complex interactions between game content, individual factors, and sociocultural contexts in shaping player experiences and behaviours. While video games pose risks, they also offer opportunities for fostering empathy, cultural understanding, and critical thinking, if they are thoughtfully designed. The findings underscore the need for evidence-based interventions to mitigate online hate and maximise the educational potential of video games.

Keywords

cyberhate; hate speech; inclusion; video games; violence

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of the video game industry as a global entertainment cornerstone (Ripoll & Muñoz, 2023) has raised concerns about cyberbullying, a form of online violence that compromises safety by the

intimidation of individuals through text, audio, or video communication (Rančić, 2018). In addition to being a form of entertainment, video games have been used as propaganda tools, not only by political and social actors (Aouragh, 2016) but also by terrorist organisations and extremist groups (Hartgers & Leidig, 2023; Moreno, 2022).

Although many social networks have implemented mechanisms to detect and block such content, these measures are often superficial and largely ineffective (Pohjonen & Udupa, 2017). Research has shown that the use of online media drives aggressive behaviour across cultures, regardless of social norms (Anderson et al., 2017), and facilitates the spillover of bullying behaviour into real life (Barter et al., 2017). In this vein, the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) annual report on online gaming experiences (ADL, 2022) reveals that while many gamers appreciate the social connectivity offered by these spaces, a troubling majority still faces instances of hate and harassment. The survey, conducted in the United States with a representative sample of multiplayer online gamers, reveals disturbing reports of hate-related experiences. As many as 83% of adults aged 18–45 have experienced harassment while playing these games, representing more than 80 million adult gamers. In addition, 60% of young people aged 13–17 have experienced harassment in these environments, which equates to almost 14 million young gamers. Meanwhile, 8% of adults and 10% of young people have been exposed to online conversations involving white supremacist ideology, which promotes a belief in the superiority of white people over other races. In addition, 7% of adult gamers in online multiplayer environments have been exposed to Holocaust denial during gaming sessions (ADL, 2022).

Video games also provide an immersive environment in which players actively engage in interactive narratives, increasing their persuasive power. The rules of the game determine what is permissible, creating a space that can serve as a metaphor for real-world norms and values (Bogost, 2008). It is this ability to simulate complex social and political contexts that makes video games an effective medium for internalising extremist ideologies. Interaction in virtual communities has enabled radical groups to exploit the empathic potential of video games to recruit new members. Such narratives reinforce the idea that violence is a legitimate means of resolving social and political conflicts, in line with the beliefs of the target audience. Unlike other forms of propaganda, video games are interactive, meaning that players can make moral choices within the game. As Sicart (2011) argues, video games are a powerful tool for ethical reflection because players experience the consequences of their actions in the virtual world. Research has highlighted the long-term impact of video games on attitude and behavioural change. Immersive interventions have been shown to reduce fearful attitudes and encourage more cautious decision-making in ambiguous situations, which is essential in contexts of violence (Hasson et al., 2019).

In addition, video games not only change attitudes towards other groups but also help players internalise prosocial values that are transferable to the real world. Despite the limitations outlined above, the research demonstrates solid evidence supporting the use of video games as an educational and preventive tool to combat violence (Breves, 2020; Hasson et al., 2019; Olson & Harrell, 2020). Video games have been shown to be effective in reducing prejudice and promoting social inclusion by providing a platform for interactive learning and the development of interpersonal skills (Lippe et al., 2022; Pech & Caspar, 2022). Studies by Pech and Caspar (2022) have shown how video games improve cultural understanding and encourage helping behaviour towards out-groups. The portrayal of ethnically and culturally diverse characters in video games has proven effective in reducing discriminatory attitudes and promoting tolerance. Breves (2020) found that interactions with characters from different ethnic groups significantly reduced prejudice, suggesting that these

interactions can be transferred to the real world. This phenomenon is akin to the "Proteus effect," in which players take on the traits of the characters they control, thereby influencing their actual behaviour (Olson & Harrell, 2020). Immersive virtual reality environments have been shown to be more effective in reducing explicit bias than 2D video games (Breves, 2020).

Video games can be valuable tools in education and prevention because they can be adapted to different educational settings (Lippe et al., 2022) and provide controlled scenarios where norms and stereotypes can be safely challenged, helping to counter extremist narratives. However, they must be designed to be inclusive and promote peaceful solutions (Lippe et al., 2022; Pech & Caspar, 2022). The effect of virtual experiences on reducing fear and increasing empathy is crucial. Hasson et al. (2019) found that participants who assumed the perspective of an out-group in virtual reality exhibited greater empathy towards that group, even months later. This suggests that such interventions using video games can have a lasting impact on intergroup relations, which is essential for preventing violent extremism.

In a digital society, characteristics such as idealism, self-centredness, and a propensity to engage in risky behaviours are exacerbated by widespread access to technology and social networks, which bring with them risks such as privacy issues, internet addiction, and the misuse of social media platforms (Marín-Díaz & Cabero-Almenara, 2019). Such characteristics are inherent to adolescence (Martín-Martín et al., 2021), which makes young people a specific target of many video games.

Due to the rapid increase in research on this topic, an updated systematic review is essential to inform future decision-making. The aim of this systematic review is therefore to analyse the relationships between online violence, hate speech, discrimination, and video games among young people. It examines how video games facilitate these behaviours, identifies key individual and sociocultural factors that influence these experiences, explores their potential as educational tools, and assesses the methodological quality of existing research in this area.

2. Method

2.1. Eligibility and Study Selection Criteria

This systematic review followed the updated PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The scientific literature search was conducted in the Web of Science and Scopus databases. Titles, abstracts, and subject headings were searched using the following terms: hate speech OR hate crime OR violent behaviour OR cyber hate OR online hate OR racism OR discrimination OR violence against women AND video games OR MMOs OR online games OR games OR games AND adolescents OR adolescent OR youth OR young people OR young adults OR children OR child. The search was conducted in both English and Spanish. Relevant articles and their corresponding abstracts were selected. Subsequently, the studies were screened to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria for the selection of studies were: (a) studies focusing on violence and hate speech in video games, (b) studies focusing on adolescents and young adults (under 35 years old), (c) studies with a publication date between 2018 and 2023, and (d) articles written in English or Spanish. The following were excluded from the review: single case studies ($n = 4$), studies in which the sample was over 35 years of age

(*n* = 15), doctoral theses (*n* = 8), articles on extremism and violent radicalisation not related to potential hate crimes (*n* = 24), and cyberbullying or other forms of harassment not related to discrimination or hate speech (*n* = 64), as these were beyond the scope of the systematic review. The identification and selection process were carried out by blind peer-review, with two independent reviewers using the search strategies to identify scientific articles only, excluding books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and reviews. After performing this procedure in the two databases, 47 studies were identified (WOS, *n* = 31; Scopus, *n* = 16). The details of the study selection process are outlined in the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1).

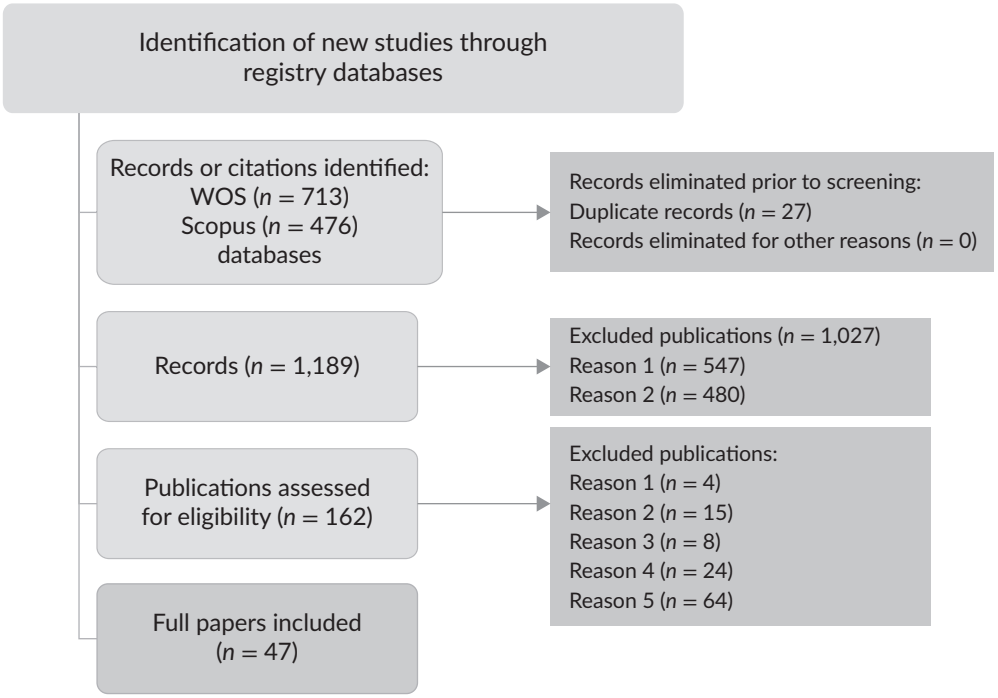

Figure 1. PRISMA. Selection process of articles that met the criteria for this review.

2.2. Data Analysis

A double-entry table was designed to facilitate the collection and categorisation of the characteristics and interventions of each study. To this end, the following data were extracted from each study, where available: study objectives; type of intervention; evaluation design; country; sample and sample characteristics; instruments and/or variables; data analysis; results; and limitations.

The characteristics of each study were extracted, taking into account both methodological strengths and limitations and overall quality. To assess the quality of the studies, we used the classification system proposed by León and Montero (2020), which allowed the documents to be organised by type. This classification allowed the subsequent use of a quality assessment tool.

2.3. Quality of the Studies

The methodological quality of the studies was assessed independently by two reviewers using a 27-item checklist (Downs & Black, 1998) organised into five dimensions:

1. General information: assessing the clarity and accuracy of the description of key aspects such as objectives and hypotheses, study measures, procedures, interventions, confounding factors, main results, appropriate statistical estimates, probability values, sample characteristics, and limitations (ten items).
2. External validity: measuring the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the population from which the studies were drawn (three items).
3. Internal validity and bias: assessing potential biases in the measurement of the intervention and in the interpretation of the results (seven items).
4. Internal validity and confounding variables: examining bias in the selection and assignment of participants (six items).
5. Power: assessed by a single item evaluating the capacity of the study to detect significant differences.

Responses to the items were scored as either 0 or 1, except for item 5 in the general information dimension, which was scored from 0 to 2, and item 27 in the power dimension, which was scored from 0 to 5. The highest possible total score was 32 points.

A checklist was used to assess the studies according to their level of compliance with the reviewed characteristics. Higher scores reflected a higher quality of study. The two reviewers agreed on the rating of most of the studies, and where there was disagreement, the articles were reviewed to reach a consensus.

3. Results

Table 1 summarises the studies that analysed the relationships among violence, hate speech, discrimination, and video games, organised based on the scores obtained during the review process. As can be observed, study scores ranged from 16 to 30. Most studies were clustered around scores 19 and 20, while lower scores 16–18 had fewer studies, suggesting a possible minimum quality threshold. More than half of the studies (61.70%) have a score of 20 or more. The distribution of studies across the higher scores highlights their relevance in the context of the current review.

Table 1. Selected studies organised by obtained quality score.

Study	Score	Main Content
Costa et al. (2021)	30	Discusses gamification and video games as tools to combat online hate speech, promoting media literacy and digital citizenship.
da Silva and Ifa (2022)	30	Examines hate speech in online video games, highlighting adolescents' experiences and the need to tackle tolerance of hate in digital spaces.
Obermaier and Schmuck (2022)	30	Investigates why young people become victims of online hate speech using criminology's routine activity theory.
Vicentini et al. (2023)	30	Develops a theory on hate speech learning among e-sports players through a grounded theory-based retrospective study.

Table 1. (Cont.) Selected studies organised by obtained quality score.

Study	Score	Main Content
Guggisberg (2020)	29	Stresses the need for awareness, education, and early intervention to prevent harm and violence.
Aguerri et al. (2023)	28	Analyses the toxicity of League of Legends, focusing on content moderation and managing digital gaming communities.
Li (2022)	28	Finds a link between exposure to violent video games and moderate levels of cyberaggression in university students.
Zhu et al. (2020)	27	Shows that beliefs about aggression mediate the link between exposure to violent games and cyberbullying, particularly in aggressive adolescents.
Shahghasemi (2018)	27	Reports no significant link between violent online games and perceptions of the world as unsafe, with minimal impact on social perceptions.
Bowman et al. (2022)	27	Analyses Reddit posts showing the potential of video games to prevent violence.
Waddell (2020)	26	Finds that gender most strongly influences expectations about the effects of violent games.
Zhang et al. (2019)	26	Shows that players of high-violence games react more negatively to review volume, while social game players react negatively to review readability and negativity.
Koehler et al. (2022)	25	Reviews cases of minors radicalised through gaming platforms, leading to extreme-right criminal activities.
Mason and Turner (2018)	25	Describes an educational game aimed at addressing gaps in healthcare providers' knowledge about domestic violence.
Gilbert et al. (2018)	25	Links playing sports video games to increased alcohol consumption, drug use, and criminal behavior, influenced by masculinity ideology.
Dickmeis and Roe (2019)	25	Shows a positive association between violent/competitive online games and self-reported aggression.
Yuldasheva and Mukhopadhyay (2022)	22	Finds that violent content influences aggressive behaviour in young people.
Gong and Piller (2018)	21	Studies parental involvement in gaming among immigrant and native-born parents in the US.
Adelhardt and Eberle (2019)	21	Examines how a six-month break from gaming affects adolescents' media consumption habits.
TaeHyuk Keum and Hearns (2022)	21	Analyses the impact of racism in online gaming on gamers' psychological well-being.
Zhao and Liu (2023)	21	Identifies shifts in media portrayal of video games from commercial to social concerns between 2010 and 2020.
Hodge et al. (2020)	21	Explores the relationship between moral development and video game play, showing higher moral scores in male university students.
Cabras et al. (2019)	20	Reveals gender and age differences in anxiety, self-esteem, and aggression among gamers but no direct link to violent games.
Hodge et al. (2019)	20	Finds higher moral reasoning in boys than girls in the context of video gaming and notes shifts in moral development.
Wu et al. (2023)	20	Examines how online gaming influences unethical decision-making in young adults.

Table 1. (Cont.) Selected studies organised by obtained quality score.

Study	Score	Main Content
Halbrook et al. (2019)	20	Suggests that social engagement within games may promote prosocial behavior and mitigate aggression.
Paz et al. (2020)	20	Analyses media messages and how they mobilise followers.
Ferguson and Colwell (2020)	20	Finds no link between exposure to sexualised content and sexist attitudes or reduced empathy.
Albaker et al. (2021)	19	Assesses the impact of video game addiction on the mental and physical health of university students.
Charmaraman et al. (2020)	19	Finds greater depressive symptoms and problematic internet behaviours in adolescents who play high-risk games.
M. Salter (2018)	19	Analyses Gamergate, focusing on the role of platforms in facilitating gender-based harassment.
Wearing et al. (2022)	19	Critiques reductionist views of video games and suggests they be studied as leisure experiences in consumer culture.
Ferguson et al. (2020)	19	Argues that the link between aggressive video games and real-world aggression is still inconclusive.
Ybarra et al. (2022)	19	Shows a significant link between violent media consumption and serious violent behaviour.
Fleet and Nurmikko-Fuller (2019)	19	Suggests massively multiplayer online (MMO) video games could serve as research environments for organised crime.
Makarova and Makarova (2019)	19	Highlights cybervictimisation as a pressing issue for device-dependent adolescents.
Bacovsky (2021)	19	Finds that adolescents who play more video games are less engaged in sociopolitical issues and prosocial behaviour.
Irmak and Erdoğan (2019)	18	Shows different influences on gaming behaviour for adolescent boys and girls, including family environment and self-efficacy.
Shortland et al. (2022)	18	Examines how personality influences extremist cognitions following exposure to extremist content.
Li (2022)	17	Finds a positive link between violent video games and cyberaggression in university students.
Madden et al. (2021)	27	Identifies gender role biases in video games, including the belief that girls dislike violence.
Kaakinen et al. (2020)	17	Identifies links between online hate and both personal and group behaviour from a social-psychological perspective.
Reer and Krämer (2018)	17	Suggests that research on first-person shooters should consider the positive aspects of clan membership alongside violence.
Liby et al. (2023)	17	Identifies key themes in young people's experiences of online racism, including types of aggression and coping strategies.
Clarice et al. (2021)	17	Explores how female gamers perceive violence in online gaming, with psychological abuse and sexual harassment being common.
Imran et al. (2023)	16	Discusses the ongoing debate on whether violent video games lead to violent behaviour.
Keipi et al. (2018)	16	Finds that online hate content negatively impacts young people's well-being in both Finland and the US.

3.1. Violence, Perception of Violence, and Violent Effects

The growing popularity of video games, especially online, has created a need to understand their influence on human behaviour. According to Guggisberg (2020), the need to understand the effects of sexual and violent content in video games is of vital importance today. In this context, Li (2022) found a positive correlation between exposure to violent video games and cyberaggressive behaviour among university students, with anger acting as a significant mediator. Similarly, Zhu et al. (2020) found that normative beliefs about aggression may partially mediate the relationship between exposure to video game violence and cyberbullying in adolescents, with aggressiveness being an important moderating factor.

The combination of competition and violence in video games may increase the likelihood of physical aggression, as shown by Dickmeis and Roe (2019), highlighting the complexity of the effects of video games on behaviour. Yuldasheva and Mukhopadhyay (2022) found that media violence exacerbated the risks for young people during the pandemic and suggested strategies to mitigate these negative effects.

Exposure to violent media during childhood correlates with an increased risk of violent behaviour in adolescence and young adulthood, suggesting that such exposure is a modifiable factor in the development of violent behaviour (Ybarra et al., 2022). Contrary to popular belief, Shahghasemi (2018) argued that there is no significant relationship between playing violent video games and perceptions of safety in society. This suggests that other factors, possibly sociocultural or contextual, may have a greater influence on perceptions of safety. Meanwhile, Bowman et al. (2022) suggested that certain levels in video games, such as "No Russian" from Call of Duty, can elicit eudaimonic responses and potentially act as reflective spaces for violence prevention. Media perceptions also play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of violent video games.

3.2. Personal Factors and Well-Being

Research on video games reveals the diverse effects they have on human behaviour. While some studies focus on differences in anxiety and aggression depending on the type of game, others explore their influence on ethics and well-being. In addition, addiction and sexualisation in video games are emerging as major concerns. Cabras et al. (2019) found significant differences in levels of anxiety, self-esteem, and aggression between players of violent and non-violent video games. However, preference for violent games was not the sole determining factor. Wu et al. (2023) explored how online gaming can influence unethical decision-making, highlighting the role of cheating and moral disengagement.

Halbrook et al. (2019) argued that the effects of video games on well-being depend on moderating variables such as motivations for gaming, suggesting that there may be an "optimal gaming profile" that maximises benefits. Bos (2023) explored how games such as This War of Mine challenge popular understandings of geopolitics and encourage reflection on the consequences of urban conflict. Sexualisation in video games and its impact on sexist attitudes is another important consideration. Ferguson and Colwell (2020) concluded that exposure to sexualised content does not necessarily increase sexist attitudes, especially in individuals with higher levels of trait aggression.

In addition, a study by Adelhardt and Eberle (2019) showed that separating adolescents from video games during a trip led to a significant decrease in video game use. Addiction, especially among university students,

has an impact on sleep habits, as observed by Albaker et al. (2021). Finally, Charmaraman et al. (2020) highlighted the negative social consequences of high-risk gaming, including depressive symptoms and problematic internet behaviour.

3.3. Sociocultural Factors: Social Influence and Extremism

Research on video games has revealed their impact on public perceptions and sociopolitical attitudes. Factors such as player gender, family background, and game features influence these dynamics. In addition, video games can influence radicalisation and provide a framework for studying complex behaviours. Waddell (2020) noted that media communications can shape public perception, with the participant's gender being a significant factor in how expected effects are perceived. At the same time, Zhang et al. (2019) demonstrated that the level of violence and social orientation of video games affects how consumers respond to online reviews, with significant differences observed depending on individual traits and product features.

Gaming can have a negative impact on the sociopolitical and prosocial attitudes of adolescents, posing a challenge to the development of democratic attitudes (Bacovsky, 2021). Irmak and Erdoğan (2019) found that factors such as family environment and school performance influence adolescent gaming behaviour, with computer self-efficacy and impulse control being key factors. Parental perception also plays a significant role in mediating video game use. Gong and Piller (2018) highlighted differences in perceptions between immigrant and native-born parents in the US, with implications for parental mediation of exposure to violent games. Studies by Adelhardt and Eberle (2019) and TaeHyuk Keum and Hearns (2022) have addressed both the negative and positive effects of video game use, including addiction and social well-being.

In terms of radicalisation, Koehler et al. (2022) examined right-wing extremism on video gaming platforms and highlighted the importance of online and offline interactions. However, they found no evidence of organised recruitment campaigns. This suggests that radicalisation may be a more subtle process, influenced by multiple everyday interactions within the gaming environment. Moreover, MMO video games provide a controlled environment in which to study behaviours such as those of organised criminal networks, providing valuable data for research and the prevention of real-world problems (Fleet & Nurmikko-Fuller, 2019).

3.4. Hate Speech

Analysis of hate speech in video games reveals that these platforms may have an impact on discriminatory behaviour and discourse. The Play Your Role: Gamification Against Hate Speech project has highlighted the importance of harnessing gamification to create spaces for dialogue and awareness raising around hate speech (Costa et al., 2021). In this context, tools such as pervasive and serious games have been developed to transform video game culture into an engine for media literacy and digital citizenship. Another study, through a nationally representative survey, identified six profiles of young victims, highlighting factors such as sex, migratory origin, religion, and age (Obermaier & Schmuck, 2022).

Research by Costa et al. (2024) showed that young people have been victims and witnesses of hate speech in games such as Free Fire. This study highlights the lack of awareness regarding the seriousness of hate speech among gamers and developers, and underlines the need to combat the tolerance of hate speech in online environments. Violence and toxicity in video games are ongoing concerns, particularly in popular titles

such as League of Legends. Aguerri et al. (2023) found that a high percentage of matches in this game are affected by disruptive behaviour. This phenomenon not only affects the gaming experience but also has implications for content moderation and community policies, as only a fraction of these games involve extremely harmful behaviour.

Furthermore, research into e-sports by Costa et al. (2024) showed that hate speech is often learned and reinforced through gameplay behaviours and outcomes. This highlights the need for e-sport administrators to implement effective measures to minimise these behaviours and promote a more positive environment for players.

Mechanisms to prevent hate speech and violence in video games have focused on education and the development of advanced technological tools. The Interactive Narratives Propose Pluralist Speech project focused on the use of interactive narratives to engage educators, trainers, and young people in curbing hate speech online (da Silva et al., 2020). This initiative highlighted the importance of collaboration between researchers, public institutions, and the educational community in the development of transmedia educational tools.

3.5. Discriminatory Behaviours

Research on video games and online platforms has revealed complex interactions between content, perception, and behaviour. Several studies acknowledged the importance of recognising that while sexualised content may not always promote sexist attitudes, it is nonetheless essential to understand and address the ways in which such portrayals can influence perceptions and behaviour. It is also worth noting that online racism can have a significant impact on the mental health of people from racial minority groups. Media coverage reflects concerns about addiction and social responsibility. Furthermore, personality may have a greater impact on radicalisation than propaganda, suggesting the need for personalised approaches to intervention.

Ferguson et al. (2020) concluded that exposure to sexualised content does not necessarily lead to an increase in sexist attitudes. Meanwhile, TaeHyuk Keum and Hearns (2022) examined the impact of online racism, which adversely affects the mental health of gamers from racial minority backgrounds. Zhao and Liu (2023) analysed media coverage in Chinese newspapers and found a shift towards social concerns and video game addiction, which is reflected in greater responsibility being attributed to multiple stakeholders. The Gamergate phenomenon illustrates how online platforms can facilitate abuse and highlights the need to address technological rationality to mitigate these issues (M. Salter, 2018).

Advergames with prosocial narratives can positively influence attitudes towards gaming and game companies, with the interaction between game narratives and brand placement playing a key role (Sung & Lee, 2020). Personality, and aggression in particular, may be more influential than exposure to extremist propaganda in the development of extremist cognitions (Shortland et al., 2022), suggesting that interventions should take personality factors into account.

3.6. Educational Potential

Serious video games have also proven to be valuable educational tools. Mason and Turner (2018) developed a video game to train healthcare providers on domestic violence, filling an important knowledge gap. Gilbert

et al. (2018) observed that certain genres of video games, such as sports games, are associated with risk-taking behaviours influenced by masculinity ideologies, while online games are negatively associated with substance use. This suggests a complex relationship between video games and risk-taking behaviours.

Khalid and El-Maliki (2020) highlighted the role of educational videos in raising awareness and encouraging behavioural change. In terms of moral development, Hodge et al. (2019, 2020) show that different genres of video games can influence moral reasoning, although other factors such as game content are also determining factors. Wearing et al. (2022) considered gaming to be a leisure experience that contributes to the formation of self-identity in adolescents.

Finally, domestic legislation, such as the new youth protection law in Switzerland, is beginning to address the protection of young players from the negative consequences of video games, including hate speech and violent content (Lischer et al., 2022; Shinohara, 2024). These laws impose age and content restrictions and are an important step towards creating a safer and more responsible gaming environment.

4. Discussion

Overall, the reviewed research demonstrates a clear link between exposure to violent video games and aggressive behaviour, with anger and beliefs about aggression playing mediating roles. However, it is important to note some contradictory findings that highlight certain nuances. While some studies suggest that violent video games increase aggression (e.g., findings from the General Aggression Model), others argue that factors such as competitiveness or moral disengagement mediate these effects rather than violence itself (Aleissa et al., 2022; Olejarnik & Romano, 2023). In this sense, personal factors such as individual traits, motivations, and game type influence the effects of gaming on well-being. Addiction and mental health are key concerns, especially for university students. Sociocultural factors such as family background and gender shape gaming behaviour. While video games can affect sociopolitical attitudes and extremism, there is no evidence of organised recruitment through gaming. Hate speech is common in games such as Free Fire, highlighting a need for better moderation and awareness. Additionally, online racism has a significant impact on the mental health of minority groups, and careful attention should be given to sexualised content in games due to its potential influence on behaviour.

Research also suggests that interventions using video games can be effective in preventing hate violence, not only by reducing support for violent narratives, but also by promoting changes in gender dynamics and female representation in contexts of violence. Often these representations are subject to violence or are based on stereotypes. For video games to become an effective tool against hate and violence, they need to be designed from a perspective that reflects the experiences of other marginalised groups. It is important to consider that technologically mediated education seeks to understand how exposure to information in symbolic social spaces, such as social networks, affects individuals' learning processes (Moreno-López et al., 2021).

Despite the risks associated with violent video games, several studies suggest that they can also serve as an educational and preventive tool (Cipagauta & Gómez, 2019; Miranda-Palma et al., 2023). Video games provide a safe space where young people can explore identities, learn conflict resolution skills, and develop social and emotional skills (Gurlesin et al., 2020). Furthermore, their ability to promote empathy and cooperation can help to reduce prejudice and foster prosocial behaviour. Breves (2020) showed that

interactions with characters from different cultural backgrounds in video games can improve attitudes towards other social groups, promoting inclusion and diversity. Another important aspect is the potential of video games for building resilience and enhancing psychological well-being. Video games that cultivate skills such as decision-making, empathy, and conflict resolution can serve as preventive tools. Recent research indicates that educational video games improve digital resilience and critical thinking (Lippe et al., 2022). Moreover, Pusey et al. (2022) suggest that video games contribute to affective well-being by fulfilling the need for autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relationships.

The impact of these and other sexist actions by gamers has sparked numerous discussions about the hostility of this environment towards women (A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). For many women, this hostility has caused them to feel less confident and secure in their gaming abilities compared to men (Kaye & Pennington, 2016). Madden et al. (2021) identified gender bias in e-sports that stems from stereotypical gender roles, such as the idea that girls dislike violence and boys are naturally competitive. While gender segregation in e-sports can help female players find role models and increase their confidence, it also perpetuates these stereotypes. In this sense, it would be interesting to explore this area in greater depth using tools such as the Sexism Against Women Gamers Scale (SAWGS), an eight-item instrument that measures sexism in the gaming community. Findings suggest that the SAWGS can help develop programmes to eradicate sexism and mitigate its negative effects on female gamers (Bustos-Ortega et al., 2023).

To maximise the potential of video games as a preventive tool against violence, there is a need for a systematic approach that integrates the representation of diversity. This will make a more effective contribution to combating hatred and promoting a fairer and prejudice-free society. Further research is needed on how to design video games that maximise this potential and effectively address gender issues and the power dynamics that perpetuate hate violence.

5. Conclusions

Research on video games brings to light both risks, such as addiction, racism, and their influence on moral development, as well as potential benefits, such as improvements in social and personal well-being. Individual motivations and sociocultural contexts are essential when assessing the effects of gaming. While video games can have a negative impact on behaviour, they also offer opportunities for education and self-reflection. Overall, the analysed studies were of good methodological quality. More research is needed to fill knowledge gaps and to develop educational strategies that maximise benefits while minimising risks, especially through interventions tailored to age, gender, and culture. Effective tools, such as content warnings and educational programmes, are crucial to address the risks associated with violent and antisocial media.

Educational games are often hampered by barriers such as a lack of inclusive design, which limits accessibility for diverse learners. It is also a challenge to strike a balance between entertainment and educational objectives, as overly entertaining elements may distract from learning, while an overly didactic approach risks disengaging players. This study suggests implementing better control strategies, in the form of stricter age verification for violent games and parental controls to mitigate the risks for younger players. Game developers should also incorporate prosocial narratives and diverse character representations to combat hate speech and discrimination. There should also be greater collaboration between researchers, educators, and policymakers when designing inclusive educational games.

The study has several limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, while it establishes a link between violent video games and aggressive behaviour, it does not thoroughly explore how individual traits and sociocultural factors, such as family background and gender, may influence this relationship. This limits the generalisability of its findings. In addition, the research recognises the potential of video games as educational tools but lacks a comprehensive analysis of how these games can be effectively designed to maximise their potential to prevent violence. Furthermore, the study highlights the prevalence of hate speech in games but does not provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of moderation strategies in mitigating such content. Lastly, while the methodological quality of the studies analysed is considered to be good, there is a need for further research to address existing knowledge gaps and to develop tailored interventions that take into account age, gender, and cultural contexts. Future studies should explore the long-term impact of serious games, particularly their effectiveness in fostering empathy and reducing prejudice. Research could also investigate how specific game design elements contribute to sustained behavioural and attitudinal changes over time and influence gaming behaviours and outcomes.

In conclusion, video games pose undeniable risks, such as promoting addiction, perpetuating hate speech, and reinforcing discriminatory behaviours. However, they also hold immense potential as tools for education, social inclusion, and reducing prejudice. To fully leverage this potential, game developers must prioritise inclusive design that reflects diverse perspectives and promotes empathy, cooperation, and critical thinking. Policymakers and educators should work together to design interventions that harness the prosocial aspects of gaming while mitigating its harmful effects. Future research should focus on developing evidence-based strategies to address gender dynamics, reduce online toxicity, and explore the long-term effects of video games on intergroup relations. By taking a holistic approach that balances risks and opportunities, video games can become a powerful medium for building a more equitable and inclusive digital society.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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