PERCEPTION OF SEXISM IN ONLINE VIDEO GAMES AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS IN CYBERVIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Young people increasingly use digital spaces to socialize, often replicating sexist attitudes. Online video games remain androcentric environments that perpetuate gender-differentiated experiences, despite the fact that nearly half of the players are female. Young people's perceptions of the presence of violence in online environments play a crucial role in the development of strategies to address it. **Objectives:** To examine youth perception of online violence and sexism in video games, with particular focus on sociodemographic differences. **Methodology:** A stratified probability sample (N = 1,063) was employed to assess perceptions of online violence through a self-administered questionnaire, employing a quantitative approach for analysis**. Results:** The findings indicate that online violence is widespread among young people, influenced by sociodemographic and gender-related factors. Women report a higher perception of sexism in video games, suggesting a more critical view. In contrast, men perceive it to a lesser extent, reflecting a less critical attitude towards

the digital environment**. Discussion and conclusions:** Online violence and perceptions of sexism in multiplayer video games predominantly affect young women. Gender differences in perception emphasize the need for educational and social interventions to increase user awareness and promote an inclusive environment. Additionally, it is imperative to regulate interaction dynamics through measures that reduce anonymity and foster mutual respect, thus preventing the normalization of discriminatory attitudes within video games**.**

Keywords: sexism; cyber-violence; gender; multiplayer video games; young people.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of Internet access, information and communication technologies (ICT), and social media platforms has radically changed the way individuals interact and communicate in contemporary society. This transformation has not only altered the perception of the public sphere, but has also redefined how relationships are established and maintained at both the interpersonal and broader social levels. In Spain, for example, 98% of young people between the ages of 16 and 35 use the Internet daily, and 31.5% of adolescents report spending five or more hours online each day. Nearly all young people (98.5%) are registered on a social media (Instituto Nacional de Estadística[1], 2023). While digital platforms have undoubtedly eased unprecedented connectivity and access to information, they have also created an environment in which social inclusion and exclusion processes are increasingly mediated by unregulated virtual spaces. The intensive use of these platforms has sparked growing interest in educational research, particularly regarding security, privacy, and associated risks, such as addiction and control over shared content (Marín-Díaz & Cabero-Almenara, 2019). Young people generally use digital space as a means of social interaction and leisure. In this context of relationships, attitudes of hatred in general and sexism in particular are reproduced, as they continue to happen in other spheres. However, there are specific norms and manifestations adapted to the new medium, which sometimes has characteristics that perpetuate them, such as disinhibition and anonymity (Tang et al., 2020). The risk of experiencing or witnessing cyberviolence may be linked to belonging to specific groups defined by characteristics such as sex and gender-related factors, including non-heteronormative sexual orientations, with the LGTBI community often being the target of hatred and violent manifestations (Thomas et al., 2021). Compared to men, women identify as the most vulnerable group when it comes to cyberviolence. These differences highlight how the differentiated socialization of men and women from childhood creates roles and stereotypes that perpetuate and reinforce gender inequalities. Online symbolic violence, expressed through sexist and hostile discourse, can be a precursor to explicit violence against women (Silva et al., 2019). In this context, it is crucial to reexamine how social media and video games, recreational spaces for youth interaction, contribute to the normalization of aggressive attitudes and behaviors toward women.

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[1] National Institute of Statistics

Online harassment, which can manifest itself through threats, insults, and mockery, is a reality faced by many women in digital environments (Vogels, 2021). A study focusing on the experiences in video games in the Spanish context revealed that 36.4% of the women surveyed said they had been insulted while playing online, and 86.3% of female players did not consider leaving the platform despite the aggression (Santana, 2020). This highlights the need to address gender discrimination and violence in the context of video games, where stereotypical gender representations and abuse of power are factors that contribute to the perpetuation of inequality (Gestos et al., 2017).

The debate on sexism in online video games has become a relevant topic in academic research because these virtual spaces reflect and often amplify the gender inequalities present in society. From an educational perspective, media approaches seek to understand the social impact of video games by considering how information and experiences in these symbolic environments affect users (Moreno-López et al., 2021). The convergence of cultural interpretations and the use of technological platforms enables the creation of meaningful structures that can both challenge and perpetuate stereotypes. One of the reasons why increasing digitization is positioned as the future of communication is that most consumers of audiovisual content on social media or video games belong, with special emphasis on Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z (Turner, 2015). These generations increasingly demand multimedia content that provides greater levels of interactivity and they also have experienced digitization as an established reality and cannot conceive of an environment without the interconnection that these technologies offer in all aspects of their lives (Caerols Mateo et al., 2020). This has led to a boom in gamification techniques in different fields, ranging from education to certain work environments, especially with large technology companies at the forefront. In this way, motivation is both a facilitator and a challenge when it comes to promoting learning, productivity, and social relationships (Barrientos-Báez & Caldevilla-Domínguez, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, it is crucial to analyze how young people develop their identities and establish relationships in environments where online violence manifests itself in various forms, such as cyberbullying and cyber misogyny. Online violence is defined as any type of communication that endangers people's safety, whether through offensive messages involving verbal abuse, the dissemination of personal content without consent, sextortion, or trolling (Ging & Shapiera, 2021). This phenomenon is not only visible, but can also be subtle and is often rooted in cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Silva et al., 2019).

Despite their potential for positive social interaction, online multiplayer games can also be spaces where discrimination is reproduced (Vergel et al., 2023). The representation of women in video games is often characterized by hypersexualization, with 90% of female main characters designed with attractive, stereotypical bodies (Melzer, 2018). Harassment and intimidation in online video games perpetuate an exclusionary culture based on male stereotypes, denigrating the identities of female players and often forcing them to hide their gender (Arroyo-López et al., 2021; Kuss et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2020; Vossen, 2018). This phenomenon reflects the traditional exclusion of women from the public sphere, which has been transferred to the realm of video

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games (Calderón-Gómez & Gómez-Miguel, 2023). The industry maintains a contradictory narrative between inclusion and the persistence of sexism, which hinders women's equal participation in digital spaces (Cote, 2020). This objectification affects not only players' perceptions of women but also men's beliefs about gender and violence. Identifying with male characters in violent video games has been shown to mitigate the effects of exposure to sexist content by increasing male beliefs and reducing empathy toward female victims of violence (Gabbiadini et al., 2016). Additionally, the online multiplayer video game (OMVG) environment has evolved with a significant increase in women's participation; they now represent approximately half of all players (Paaßen et al., 2017). However, despite this growing presence, sexist experiences and harassment remain common. This suggests that the inclusion of women in these spaces has not eliminated gender stereotypes or the violence associated with them, as these spaces remain androcentric (Fox & Tang, 2017).

Analyzing the impact of the Internet and video games on gender identity formation and online violence dynamics is a crucial field of study. Sexism in video games encompasses not only explicit violence but also symbolic violence and harassment. These are manifestations of cyber misogyny and cyberbullying (Donoso Vázquez et al., 2018; Linares et al., 2019).

Situations of harassment and bullying in online entertainment spaces are the subject of growing interest in recent research (Aghazadeh et al., 2018; Calderón-Gómez & Gómez-Miguel, 2022; Tang et al., 2020). Online violence in the context of video games, in particular, impacts not only women but also has broader social implications, most often affecting groups considered vulnerable (Melović et al., 2020). Various studies have shown that interaction between players in online video games can lead to tense situations and antisocial behavior, as evidenced by the use of insults and offensive language (Kwak & Blackburn, 2015; Tang et al., 2020). These dynamics include expressions of hatred directed at certain groups based on characteristics such as gender, race, or sexual orientation, thereby increasing the risks in these spaces. Ethnographic studies, such as Shaw's (2014) study, have shown that the social representation of gender, along with other identity factors, influences players' experiences, promoting inequality and exclusion.

Over the last few decades, the relationship between violence and video games has been a topic of public debate, sparking controversy over their impact and the dynamics reproduced in these environments. Consequently, video games are being analyzed as not only spaces for leisure but also environments where hate, violence, and harassment can emerge and affect the players' gaming experience, particularly female players (Calderón-Gómez & Gómez-Miguel, 2023).

Research should continue exploring the complexities of social interactions in these spaces and their effects on young people. Education and awareness are fundamental tools for challenging narratives that perpetuate violence and discrimination and for creating a more inclusive and respectful environment for all Internet and video game users. This evidence underscores the urgent need to address sexism in video games, an environment where stereotypical gender representations and abuse of power are common (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019).

Companies and platforms also play an important role in mediating these situations to prevent them from arising and escalating. Addressing these issues, it is crucial to adopt approaches that recognize gender oppression and promote equality in gaming representations and experiences.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study's primary objective is to understand young people's perceptions and attitudes toward online violence (cyberviolence). A comparative perspective is applied by analyzing sociodemographic variables.

The second objective is to explore gender differences regarding perceptions of sexism, discrimination, and stereotypical images of women in massively multiplayer online (MMO) video games.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

A sample of 1,063 participants from across Spain is available. It is stratified by age range and autonomous communities (confidence level = 95% and error = +/-2.5). The sample is made up of young people between the ages of 16 and 29 who claim to be social media users and use it on a daily basis. In terms of composition, 55.3% identify as male, 43.6% identify as female, 0.8% identify as other options, and 0.4% did not answer. The average age is 23.45 years old (±3.38). Regarding sexual orientation, 14.86% identify as bisexual, 81.16% as heterosexual, and 3.99% as homosexual.

For the analyses corresponding to objective two, the part of the sample that claims to play multiplayer online video games will be taken into account. Of the total sample, 879 participants (83%) play online with other people.

3.2. Instrument

The Attitudes toward Online Violence questionnaire was used as an instrument. It was translated into Spanish and validated in a study by Melović et al. (2020). The final version of the questionnaire contains 20 questions, which are divided into four sections. The first group included multiple-choice questions about the participants' sociodemographic characteristics: gender, age, sexual orientation, and level of education. The second group consisted of questions about the respondents' perception of online violence in general (including the first 12 questions in the questionnaire). This block forms the basis for the main analysis of the results presented in this paper and takes into account the statistical reliability obtained in the tests for the analyses conducted. The tool included a third section on the presence and experience of online violence, as well as attitudes toward it. A final section was added to the questionnaire for those who claimed they played online video games, exploring the presence of sexism in the in online video games.

Attitudes were measured by using a multiple-choice questionnaire and a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated a strong disagreement and 5 a strong agreement with the statements provided. The purpose of these questions was to identify the forms that online violence usually takes, the media on which it is mainly based, and knowledge about perceptions of the presence of sexism in online media videos (OMVs) and its manifestations.

3.3. Collection and analysis procedure

The self-managed questionnaires were completed online in an estimated time of 10 to 15 minutes via a link accessible through a QR code. Informed consentft was obtained from participants to ensure their voluntary participation, and current legislation on personal data protection was complied with. Additionally, the 2001 International Sociological Association (ISA) Code of Ethics was applied to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected information. Participants were informed of the research's objectives and purposes and were offered the option to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished.

Regarding the information processing work, statistical analyses were applied to explore the relationships between the examined variables using IBM SPSS Statistics V. 29.0.1.0 software to process the information. First, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify underlying patterns among the questionnaire items. Then, two factors explaining approximately half of the total variance were selected by grouping the items. A multivariate logistic (logit) model was applied to the sample as a whole to determine the sociodemographic factors influencing the perception of online violence frequency in Spain. This allowed to identify significant patterns in the collected data. Finally, a frequency analysis by gender was applied to the section on sexism in video games.

Thus, gender and sexual orientation are configured as two variables that are the direct object of analysis for the results presented. The starting point was the hypothesis that certain groups, in relation to sociodemographic variables, are more exposed to online violence than others (Melović et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). The second hypothesis was that the perception of sexism in video games differs between men and women due to gender determinants (Bustos-Ortega et al., 2024).

4. RESULTS

To meet the objectives set out in this study, the presentation of the results is divided into two sections. First, the results of the correlational analyses of the sample's perception of online violence and the differences among groups are presented. So as to investigate one of these specific manifestations of violence in the online environment, the second section explores the results and differences in perception of sexism in video games by analyzing them by gender.

4.1. Exploratory factor analysis in relation to sociocultural factors and perceptions of violence

To determine participants' attitudes toward online violence, several statistical tests were applied to assess the suitability of the data and simplify the observed variables by grouping the most robust ones together.

After an initial Pearson correlation analysis, which showed that all items correlated positively with each other (except for item 10). Exploratory factor analysis was then applied to the 12 items on the scale to detect synergies between them. To this end, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) test was applied, with a value of 0.845 and the Bartlett's sphericity test was similarly carried out, which also indicated a good fit. Using the principal component method, Varimax rotation, and the eigenvalue >1 criterion, four factors were obtained that explained 64.4% of the total variance. The first factor, with 36.5% of the explained variance is the most robust one; the following factors have explained variances of less than 11%. Thus, as it can be seen in Table 1, the factor loadings for factor 1 are all above 0.8 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.856). For factor 2, 3 of its 5 items load below 0.6 (Alpha = 0.782). Factors 3 and 4 are composed of 2 items each with not very high loadings (Alpha = 0.230 and 0.341, respectively).

Overall, these results confirm the appropriateness of exploratory factor analysis for the data. The analysis identified one strong main factor and three secondary factors of lesser relevance, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1.

Components and attitudes toward online violence

	Components			
	1	2	3	4
11. There is a need to raise ongoing awareness about online violence and its consequences.	0.864			
12. There is a need to raise ongoing awareness about the actions and activities that can be carried out to punish online violence.	0.848			
9. All types of online violence must be reported to the relevant institutions.	0.801			
4. Girls and women are more vulnerable to online violence than men.		0.812		
6. Men commit violence more often than women.		0.801		
5. Groups at risk of exclusion are more exposed to online violence than those that are not.		0.543		
2. The level of online violence is continuously increasing.		0.537		
1. Online violence is common in Spain today.		0.511		
7. Currently, online violence among peers is more common in Spain.			0.772	

3. The consequences of online violence are not significantly different from any other type of violence.		0.604	
10. In Spain, institutions have adequate mechanisms in place to address cases of online violence.			0.816
8. Online aggressors are often violent in real life as well.			0.613

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Therefore, to proceed with the analysis, factors 1 and 2 were used, which would explain 47.1% of the total variance. The following two grouped factors were analyzed:

- Factor 1: adds items related to awareness and reporting.
- Factor 2: reports the presence of online violence and risk groups.

As shown in Table 2, the two factors differ significantly according to sociodemographic variables, following the pattern of their respective items. It was possible to identify some limitations in factor 1 (awareness and reporting) within the analysis group according to sexual orientation, from which it can be concluded that:

Women score higher than men (medium size) and non-binary individuals (high size) on factor 1. For factor 2, women also score higher than men (medium size). In other words, women report greater awareness, identification, and presence of violence, making them the most exposed group. If the age variable in this case is added, it is possible to find some interesting data. In this regard, minors score lower than those aged 18-21 on Factor 1 (small size). For Factor 2, minors score lower than those aged 18-21 and 22-24.

In terms of sexual orientation, it is interesting to note that, in general terms, it can be noted that Factor 1 would not be significantly different in terms of awareness and reporting. However, in terms of Factor 2 (Table 2), bisexual people scored higher than heterosexuals.

Table 2.

Analysis of factors related to sociodemographic determinants

		Factor 1		F^2-statistic (p-value)	Cohen's d (IC95%)[3]
		Average	D.T.		
Gender	Man	-.35	1.15	30.164 (0.000)	M vs. H:0.554 (0.38,0.74)
	Woman	.20	.80		M vs. NB:0.899 (0.16,1.63)
	Other / Non-binary	-.69	2.11		
Age	16-17	-.21	1.18	2.555 (0.038)	15-17 vs. 18-21: -0.281 (-0.56,-.01)
	18-21	.07	.91		
	22-24	-.10	1.18		
	25-29	.07	.87		

[2] F-statistic from the unifactorial ANOVA with 2 degrees of freedom among groups for gender, sexual orientation, and educational level, and 4 degrees for age.

[3] Only d values for effects that were significant in post-hoc comparisons are shown.

Sexual orientation	Bisexual	.12	.85	2.172 (0.115)	
	Heterosexual	-.01	1.00		
	Homosexual	.31	.64		
		Factor 2		F-Statistic	Cohen's d
		Average	D.T.	(p-value)	(IC95%)
Gender	Man	-.42	1.08	38.866 (0.000)	M vs. H: 0.648 (0.47,0.82)
	Woman	.23	.87		
	Other / Non-binary	-.28	.90		
Age	16-17	-.27	1.03	3.261 (0.012)	15-17 vs. 18-21: -0.304 (-0.58, -0.02)
	18-21	.03	1.01		15-17 vs. 22-24: -0.407 (-0.77, -0.04)
	22-24	.13	.92		
	25-29	.15	.97		
Sexual orientation	Bisexual	.28	.99	5.866 (0.003)	Bi. Vs. Het.: 3.339 (0.09,0.59)
	Heterosexual	-.06	.99		
	Homosexual	.19	1.05		

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.2. Factors influencing the perception of online violence

This section analyzes the results by using a multivariate logistic (logit) model applied to the entire sample, with the aim of determining which sociodemographic factors influence perceptions of the frequent presence of online violence in Spain. To accomplish this, the Likert scale item "Online violence is very common in Spain today" is dichotomized so that values 1-2-3 were grouped together to form the "No" category and values 4-5 for the "Yes" category.

The results showed a frequency of 20.5% for "No" and 79.5% for "Yes," indicating a strong perception of online violence.

The logit model expresses the probability that participants perceive frequent online violence in Spain based on different sociodemographic factors (gender, age, and sexual orientation). Therefore, the analysis detects risk factors in the perception of online violence. The validity of the final model is verified using the area under the curve (AUC) and the percentage of correct answers. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test yielded a Chi2 value of 4.283 and a p-value of 0.509 for the final model. The model has a moderate AUC value of 0.709 (95% CI [0.660–0.757]).

Table 3 shows the final resulting model in detail:

Table 3.

Multivariate logistic model. Probability that a respondent perceives the presence of online violence on a frequent basis in Spain

	B	Standard error	Wald	gl	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. to EXP(B)	
							Lower	Higher
Gender: man			42.783	2	0.000			
Gender: woman	1.302	0.200	42.239	1	0.000	3.677	2.483	5.445
Gender: others	-0.071	0.921	0.006	1	0.939	0.932	0.153	5.662
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual			8.033	3	0.045			
Sexual Orientation: Bisexual	0.953	0.396	5.802	1	0.016	2.594	1.194	5.632
Sexual Orientation Homosexual	1.038	0.651	2.544	1	0.111	2.823	0.789	10.103
Age: 16-17	-0.154	0.758	0.041	1	0.839	0.857	0.194	3.786
Age: 18-21			12.059	4	0.017			
Age: 22-24	0.600	0.246	5.935	1	0.015	1.823	1.125	2.955
Age: 25-29	0.625	0.352	3.154	1	0.076	1.868	0.937	3.723
Constant	-0.826	0.569	2.105	1	0.147	0.438	0.143	1.336

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The model includes three predictors: gender, sexual orientation, and age. This logistic model has allowed estimates to be made for different values of the independent factors. The logistic equation used corresponds to the following parameters:

$$\text{Odds} = \frac{p}{1-p} = 3.677^{\text{Gender: woman}} * 2.594^{\text{Sex. Or.: bisexual}} * 1.823^{\text{Age: 18-21}}$$

Thus, this analysis reveals a significant impact on the perception of violence, which is clearly influenced by the gender factors outlined in the introduction and hypothesis. Sex/gender and sexual orientation act as predictors of this issue. Depending on the gender, the probability of perceiving frequent online violence is multiplied by 3.677 (almost quadrupled with a moderate effect size) in women compared to men (there are no differences in risk between men and other genders). Taking sexual orientation into account, the probability of perceiving frequent online violence is multiplied by 2.594 (almost tripled, small effect size) in bisexuals compared to heterosexuals (there are no differences in risk between homosexuals and heterosexuals). In terms of age, the effect size is smaller, with the probability of experiencing frequent online violence multiplying by 1.823 (almost doubling, small effect size) in young people aged 18-21 compared to minors (there are no differences in risk among the other age groups).

Therefore, based on the results, it is possible to conclude that the profile of the respondent who experiences the most online violence in Spain is a bisexual woman between the ages of 18 and 21.

Considering that 9.1% of the sample identifies as bisexual and that 77.4% of those are bisexual women, this issue is not insignificant. Taking into account elements of intersectionality in those variables used for oppression, it is likely that we are facing a double risk factor.

4.3. Experience or presence of online violence and responses to it

Below is a summary of the main frequency analyses regarding direct data on violence (witnessed or experienced). We found a very high number of cases, confirming the presence of violence in the online environment. Of those interviewed, 29.1% had been victims of online violence at least once. Additionally, 64.7% had contact with violence, either by experiencing it or by witnessing it indirectly through knowing someone who had experienced it. Men admitted to having the least contact with online violence at 45%. Non-binary respondents admitted to experiencing the most attacks (50% suffered more than one attack, compared to 15-18% of men and women). However, the effect size is very low in this case due to the representation of this group in the sample (less than 1%). Similarly, heterosexual people report the least knowledge of online violence and experience the fewest attacks.

Among the most frequently identified forms of violence, 79% experienced insults and threats, 76% experienced harassment (in the form of messages and calls), 28% had photos and videos taken without permission, and 20% experienced sexual harassment. There were countless combinations, with insults combined with harassment being the most frequent.

The most commonly used social media platforms for committing online violence were Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), and Facebook, in that order, consistent with the most commonly used platforms overall.

There is a significant presence of online violence among young people, whose perception is deeply influenced by sociodemographic factors, particularly those related to gender. Groups facing situations of oppression tend to perceive and experience this online violence more intensely, and these situations often coincide with established gender and sexual stereotypes.

4.4. Experience or presence of online violence and responses to it

Continuing with the analysis, the aim was to delve deeper into certain online contexts where experiences may differ according to gender. This explores whether there is a different perception of sexism in a specific area such as online video games, bearing in mind that these are the video game spaces which, together with social networks, are of greatest interest and use to young people.

Of the total number of people in the sample (N = 1,063), 82.7% regularly play online with other people (N = 879). Of these, 68.9% say they play very frequently (>=5). Among boys, this percentage rises to 76.7%, while among girls it stands at 56.3%.

Taking into account this subsample distribution, the frequencies were analyzed to determine the extent to which respondents considered video games to be sexist,

discriminatory, and/or portray a stereotypical image of women. This was measured using a Likert scale.

Thus, men are more likely to think that video games are not sexist (scoring higher in categories 1 to 4), grouping their responses as "disagree." Women, on the other hand, are more likely to think that video games are sexist (scoring higher in categories 8 to 10), grouping 42% of their responses as "strongly agree," as it can be seen in the following table:
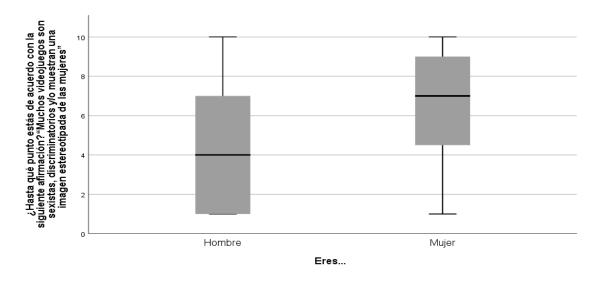
Table 4.

Perception of sexism and stereotypes in video games

		Total Frequency	Man Frequency	Woman Frequency
To what extent do you agree with the following statement? "Many video games are sexist and discriminatory and portray stereotypical images of women."	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	I strongly disagree 1	19.8%	26.5%	11.2%
	2	5.9%	7.8%	3.5%
	3	7.8%	9.7%	5.4%
	4	6.9%	8.5%	5.0%
	5	11.8%	12.8%	10.6%
	6	8.2%	8.5%	7.8%
	7	11.3%	9.7%	13.4%
	8	9.8%	7.3%	13.0%
	9	6.3%	3.1%	10.4%
	I strongly agree 10	12.2%	6.1%	19.9%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

This disparity in opinions is also evident in the average scores. The average score for men is 4.35 (±2.86), whereas the average score for women is 6.43 (±2.96) (U = 10.876, $p < 0.001$). The following figure illustrates this trend:

Figure 1.

Average perception of sexism in video games by gender

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As for the type of sexism, those who scored more than 5 on the degree of agreement with the sexism statement identified the hypersexualization of women as the greatest form of sexism. This statement was supported by 10 percentage points more among women who reported more than 90% agreement. The exclusion of female characters and their portrayal as objects of violence are also more strongly supported by women (about 10 points higher, as it can be seen in the following table, which shows the possible responses to the type of sexism being identified).

Table 5.

Types of sexism and stereotypes present in online video games

	Total	Man	Woman
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
They show hypersexualized female characters or consider women as mere bodies (clothing, nudity, features).	86.5%	80.4%	90.6%
They depict female characters as dependent people who need men and appear helpless and fragile.	56.6%	52.5%	59.4%
They do not include female characters in their content and when they are included, they do include do not play a leading role.	42.4%	36.8%	46.3%
They show female characters as the object of different forms of violence (submission, mistreatment, harassment, groping, rape, torture...)	42.0%	35.8%	46.3%
Other reasons	0.2%	0.0%	0.3%
I do not know what to say	3.0%	2.9%	3.0%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In general, women seem to perceive discriminatory representations of female characters more acutely, reflecting how gender factors influence the perception of inequalities in media content.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research support and expand on the evidence from previous studies, highlighting an emerging reality clearly perceived by young people: the presence of violent attitudes in the online environment. Previous studies (Donoso Vázquez et al., 2018; Melović et al., 2020; Rodríguez & Ballesteros, 2019) have documented this phenomenon, which is particularly intense on social media. Instagram is identified as a platform where violent attitudes are most prevalent, ranking as the most used among this demographic profile.

Regarding the first objective, which was to explore different perceptions of online violence among young people with different profiles, the study provides accurate data on how the risk of experiencing and perceiving online violence increases based on certain sociodemographic characteristics, especially those related to gender. Women and individuals with bisexual or homosexual sexual orientations are more vulnerable, while men tend to have a less critical perception of this violence. This pattern is

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consistent with what occurs offline, where certain groups are also more exposed to cyberviolence due to intersectional factors that converge in this reality.

From birth, men and women are socialized differently, which contributes to the establishment of roles and stereotypes that perpetuate and reinforce gender inequalities in all areas of life, including romantic and sexual relationships. Myths and false beliefs circulating in these contexts influence the formation of patterns of violent behavior, which can lead to gender-based violence (de la Cruz Redondo & García Luque, 2022). This dynamic is also evident in the digital space, where the same power and inequality structures are reproduced.

In this way, for the second objective, which focused on analyzing perceptions of sexism, prejudice, and stereotypical images of women in online video games, it was possible to verify that there is a difference in perception. Women perceive these discriminatory representations of women to a greater extent than men do. It is crucial to understand how boys and girls deal with this reality, as it can lead to sexist incidents during gameplay mediated by these types of stereotypes, as demonstrated by studies such as those by Bustos-Ortega et al. (2024).

In the light of growing concerns about protecting young people from the risks associated with their development in an increasingly technological society, it is crucial to transmit social and egalitarian values to these new scenarios, as has been done in other contexts. Patriarchal gender relations must be radically transformed so as to foster a social sense of identification and rejection of certain forms of masculinity and patriarchal behaviors, which are often fueled by the impunity and anonymity offered by the digital environment.

Diverse gender and affective-sexual relationships constitute a space of "difference" where logics of oppression are applied, which also manifest in the online sphere. This underscores the urgent need to deconstruct heteropatriarchal masculinity, which uses violence to oppress, and to construct new models in which LGTBIQ+ identities can flourish equitably. In this effort, young people are crucial allies, capable of reflecting on and practicing new models of gender and relationships (Díaz-Aguado, 2022).

This study complements previous research by showing how technology, which plays a significant role in leisure activities, communication, and relationships among young people, becomes an instrument that reproduces the social values and attitudes that prevail outside the digital realm as well. The instrumentalization of technology use reminds us of the urgent need to educate and raise awareness in all fields, thus enabling the development of a citizens who are able to interact equitably in the digital arena (González Lizárraga et al., 2020). Evidence is growing regarding the perception of violent attitudes in the online environments, which tend to focus on social networks such as Instagram. This evidence highlights how certain sociodemographic groups, such as women and LGTBIQ+ people, are more exposed to this violence due to intersectional factors. These findings underscore the reproduction of gender inequalities in the digital spaces and highlight how stereotypes and traditional roles perpetuate violent and discriminatory behavior, even in settings such as online video

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games. The need to transform spaces designed in an androcentric manner that perpetuate inequalities is emphasized, so that these changes allow diverse identities to develop under equitable conditions. This involves young people as key agents of change. This work emphasizes the importance of educating and raising awareness about egalitarian values and including effective coping strategies in video game designs to mitigate online violence. This fosters a safe and inclusive digital environment that reflects social practices based on respect and equity.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the findings of this research highlight the urgent need to address violent attitudes online through a comprehensive approach that includes education, awareness-raising, and the promotion of egalitarian values. Only through a radical change in social structures and the adoption of new forms of interaction based on respect and equity, it will be possible to mitigate the impact of online violence and create a safer and more inclusive digital environment for all people who use it.

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