



The *Enredo* Game-Installation: A Proposal to Counter Hate Speech Online

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Abstract. In this article we encourage conflict sensitive attitudes and multicultural awareness based on the potential for creative responses. Through digital media art and serious games strategies we seek to create safe areas for dialogue, debate, and awareness of hate speech. These solutions will be even more effective if they are based on the understanding of how different forms of expression emerge, interact, and potentially dissipate in the virtual environment.

Grounded on the possibilities of digital media art, through a practice-based research methodology, we explore the process of creating a gamified counter-narrative, designed with the objective of responding to hate speech, and, at the same time, capable of providing an experience of aesthetic enjoyment.

Foreseeing the establishment of a collaborative network with the educational community and the non-specialized public (parents, youth, associations, educators), this project is also based on the key concepts of media and information literacy, which are important not only to understand and analyze the phenomenon of online hate speech, but also to develop strategies and tools that allow the containment of this type of speech.

Keywords: Online hate speech · Media literacy · Digital games

1 Introduction

In this article, we seek to analyze the definitions of online hate speech and the way in which it manifests in videogames and game's platforms, to outline counter-acting strategies, namely, a game-installation allowing for the understanding of the phenomenon.

Exploring the boundaries between videogames, namely serious games, used for educational purposes, and digital media art, we consider the role of art and technology in the creation and dissemination of digital artifacts. The relationship between games and contemporaneity is increasingly intertwined, with the breaking of barriers between them, enabling new modes of creation and interaction between spectator and work. The contiguity between video games and digital art can be realized through new forms of interactivity and experimentation with technologies, but also through the narrative and poetic context of the works.

Digital games can work as learning tools that allow the development of physical and emotional skills through immersive narratives, puzzles, or logical and deductive problems. However, in order to become fully accepted as a teaching/learning tool in both formal and informal contexts, game technology has to overcome some challenges. One of the main issues is how to measure their actual learning effects. In this field some studies (Backlund and Hendrix 2013) while evaluating the effectiveness of game-based learning concluded that among the several studies analyzed, serious games had shown a positive effect on learning. The results of such studies are important to overcome a second difficulty related with the acceptance of these teaching tools by teachers, students and parents. By creating united communities around the development of counter-narratives, we see the creator at the center of a political and social movement with possible repercussions for the audience.

In this article, we start from the study of the state of the art of online hate speech, especially in digital games, we analyze the possible approaches between media literacy and the problem of online hate speech, and then we propose a methodology to produce a game installation to curb online hate speech.

2 Online Hate Speech

Online Hate Speech, also known as cyber hate, toxic online behavior or virtual disinhibition (Kwak and Blackburn 2015; Suler 2004), is defined by European Union law “as public incitement to violence or hatred directed at groups or individuals based on certain characteristics, including race, color, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin” (EUR-lex 2008).

At the end of the last decade, academic interest in hate speech has seen an important increase, reflected, for example, in the volume of production indexed to the Web of Science (WoS), which increased from 42 to 162 between 2013 and 2018 (Paz et al. 2020). The researchers describe online hate speech as a set of behaviors that categorize themselves as toxic in terms of constantly renegotiating and evolving social norms. It is possible to identify different types of online hate expression motivated by gender, sexual identity, nationality, historical events, or religious beliefs (Paz et al. 2020; Blaya 2019; Agustina et al. 2020; Deslauriers et al. 2020). The HateBase platform, a web application that collects examples of online hate speech around the world, indicated in 2019 that most cases target individuals based on ethnicity and nationality, but incitement to hate centered on religion and social class have also been increasing (Quinn 2019).

In order to stop the spread of illegal hate speech, on May 31, 2016, the European Commission, together with Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Microsoft, agreed on a Code of Conduct to combat this phenomenon “in the effort to respond to the challenge of ensuring that online platforms do not offer opportunities for illegal online hate speech to spread virally” (European Commission 2016). The latest assessment of this Code of Conduct, published in June 2021 and carried out by the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers 2021), concluded that sexual orientation is the most reported reason for hate speech (33.1%) followed by xenophobia, including hatred of migrants (15%).

Experiences with online hate speech happen in three ways: exposure, victimization and aggression (Machackova et al. 2020). Wachs et al. (2021) found a link between contact with unknown people online, excessive Internet use, sensation seeking, and cyberhate perpetration, as well as impaired self-control, greater irritability, social conflicts, social consequences, and aggressive behaviour.

A report focusing on the analysis of cyber hate experiences of children aged 11 to 17 in 10 European countries found that exposure to hate speech increases with age, a trend likely to be correlated with greater global engagement with the virtual world. (Machackova et al. 2020). This trend was accentuated during the coronavirus pandemic. According to the Sustainable Development Goals 2020 Report, provided by the United Nations, during confinement and school closures, all over the world, due to the pandemic, the risk of children being exposed to cyberbullying increased (Sachs et al. 2020).

Because they violate the dignity of the other, hateful messages are being limited and controlled. Digital platforms like Facebook or Twitch have implemented mechanisms that allow the authors of such messages to be silenced, for example by blocking their participation in certain spaces for a limited time. However, despite its complexity, combating and eradicating hate speech are not the only tasks that emphasize the need to analyze and understand it in depth.

Wachs et al. (2022) developed a multidimensional “Motivations for Hate Speech Perpetration Scale” (MHATE) considering a set of six different motivations, namely revenge, power, exhilaration, ideology, group conformity, and status enhancement. In this study, the most frequently referred aspect “was revenge, followed by ideology, group conformity, status enhancement and exhilaration and then power” (Wachs et al. 2022, p. 16).

Research on this type of content also makes it possible to understand what motivates the expression of hate, where it comes from, how it arises, how it spreads on the Internet and, above all, what are the consequences for the network users who are exposed, who are victims or who are aggressors. A better understanding of the dynamics of hate speech can lead to innovative and creative responses to this problem, which allow us to go beyond solutions that undermine freedom of expression, such as repression or silencing.

2.1 Hate Speech in Digital Games

The phenomenon of online hate speech is transversal to all virtual media, however, it seems important to understand how this type of speech is manifesting itself in the specific and growing field of digital games.

Online games provide players with the thrill of true competition (Kwak and Blackburn 2015), leading to the verbal expression of blasphemies and obscenities, often tolerated as a common reaction in moments of anger and frustration (Breuer 2017; Gagliardone et al. 2015; Citron and Norton 2011). During games, chat interaction is common, and dialogue varies between praise and negative or ironic comments about game performance, personal insults based on sexual orientation or ethnicity, harassment and attacks on minorities (Uyheng and Carley 2021). Hate speech in digital games is often the result of these interactive dynamics between players, in unmoderated activities such as team building, sharing strategies and chats or live streaming on gaming platforms

and communities, which are a common means to spread this type of toxic behavior (Matamoros-Fernández 2017).

Dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchrony, minimization of status and authority, individual differences and predisposition can trigger toxic disinhibition, as defined by Suler (2004, p. 321). The author proposes that the effect of anonymity on the internet leads individuals to a feeling of freedom, which leads them to actions different from those they would have if they were face-to-face with the other. This phenomenon favors the use of hate speech, characterized by the demonstration of power or expression of frustration in the face of defeat. It is a behavior that is sometimes harmful to the physical and psychological well-being, as well as the self-esteem of aggressors and victims (Breuer 2017; Harriman et al. 2020; Arbeau et al. 2020).

As a long-term consequence, the desensitization process has been studied since the 1960s, showing that exposure to violence and hatred in the media reduces the intensity of children's and young people's emotional response. Exposure to media violence, initially induces an intense emotional reaction in viewers. Over time and with repeated exposure, however, viewers often exhibit decreasing emotional responses to the depiction of violence and injury. Over the years, different experiments have analyzed physical and psychological responses to hate, such as heartbeats, sweating, together with emotional reactions and social cognitions, allowing the construction of a theoretical framework of desensitization with effects on personality and on the way children and young people deal with the phenomenon (Brockmyer 2013; Funk et al. 2004). More recent experiences have shown the process of desensitization to online hate speech (Uyheng and Carley 2021; Soral et al. 2018), confirming that greater exposure to cyber-hate leads to indifference to this type of verbalization, also showing that there is greater insensitivity towards victims and, on the other hand, the normalization of prejudice.

2.2 Hate Speech and Media Literacy

According to the conclusions of the European Council (2016) on the development of media literacy and critical thinking through education and training, media literacy involves technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative skills that allow access, the development of a critical understanding and the interaction with both traditional and new forms of communication. It is, as defined by Rainieri and Fabbro, a "pedagogical strategy aimed at promoting critical understanding and mindful production (or use) of media" (Rainieri and Fabbro 2016, p. 109). It is, also, closely related to active involvement in democratic life, citizenship, and the ability to exercise critical and independent judgment, as well as to reflect on individual and collective actions, and can thus increase individuals' resilience in the face of extremist and disinformation messages.

In fact, the resilience paradigm represents an important professional commitment to support – children and young people – creating a positive and healthy bond, giving meaning to traumatic and difficult experiences. It is, therefore, a paradigm impregnated with an affective and solidary network, with an inclusive approach, respecting singularity, and diversity, which promotes the development of new meanings for life, and helps to arouse trust, enhancing identification, acquisition and appreciation the internal resources of children, youth and adolescents.

Potter (2010) identifies four recurring themes in the definition of media literacy: the (positive and negative) effect of the media on individuals; the role of literacy as a tool to help individuals cope with the influence the media may have; media literacy as a competence not intrinsic to human beings and the multidimensional character of media literacy, involving multiple dimensions of the individual. The same author addresses different interventions capable of providing tools and skills to media users to mitigate the negative influence it can have on the individual.

Sonia Livingstone and Shenja Van der Graaf (2010) propose a knowledge-based approach to media literacy, which allows for the development of the necessary skills to critically analyze the form, content, media production and the social impact of each media message. The authors emphasize the transformative and dynamic field of digital media to underline that literacy must involve not only media reception, the public as recipient, but all its dimensions: access, understanding and content creation.

Education for digital citizenship seeks to prepare individuals for the exercise of an informed and conscious citizenship through the knowledge of rights, freedom of expression and social and civic responsibility. It is important to articulate freedom, beliefs and personal opinions with citizenship, respect for others, tolerance, and inclusion.

Technologies and social networks have brought about a profound change in the consumption and production of media by individuals: from consumers of media messages, they have become producers, creators and curators of information (Gagliardone et al. 2015), leading to the evolution of the concept of media and information literacy, amplified by the dynamics of the Internet. In their social context, new media trace new paths for the relation development between people and media, building new foundations and promoting openings for reinvention in the processes of message creation. Nowadays, reception participation configures new strategies, considering that people's spontaneous contributions interfere in the construction of new narratives.

The concern of citizenship education with hate speech is twofold: it encompasses the knowledge and skills to identify hate speech and it should provide individuals with the tools and information to be able to combat hateful messages. Media and information literacy play a key role here, as it includes the development of the technical skills necessary to use digital technologies, as well as the knowledge and skills needed to find, analyze, evaluate and interpret media texts, create messages and recognize their social and political influence, tackling issues such as the right to freedom of expression, privacy, inclusive citizenship and civic participation. Networking and promoting actions that increase the creative and multidisciplinary power of gamification can lead to greater awareness, with the aim of changing behaviors (Gagliardone et al. 2015).

According to the recommendations made by the team responsible for the study *Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe* (Tornero et al. 2009), it is imperative, in mediated societies, to create conditions for the development of media literacy in a transversal and cooperative way, protecting public interests, such as the importance of pluralism in the media, the protection of minors and consumers, and increasing media awareness and literacy.

The politics of media representation (social class, gender, race, and sexuality) can be seen as a fundamental feature of literacy, especially when conceived as a form of critical education for citizenship (Ranieri and Fabbro 2016), ensuring that they are not distorted,

by representations that sustain systems of power and inequality. This issue is particularly relevant in video games, where there is a tendency towards overrepresentation of men, whites and adults, and an underrepresentation or misrepresentation of the minorities, such as women, Hispanics, blacks, children, and the elderly (Consalvo et al. 2009; Clough 2018).

Digital literacy is one of the key elements that permeates this project, considering game culture and digital art as engines to promote democratic values and digital citizenship, promoting positive behaviors that can mitigate online hate speech. Games and gamification will then be devices that underpin the proposed counter-narrative in order to develop response skills.

3 Methodology

In this project research, we seek to study the phenomenon of online hate speech, understand the motivations and effects on children and young people, as well as analyze the use of interactive installations and digital games, as a strategy to prevent its emergence or attenuation of its effect.

The research methodology based on artistic practice can be understood as an extension rooted in the art-based research paradigm (Candy 2006). There we can find different methodological paradigms, predominantly exploratory, in which creative, communicational and expository processes allow the research to evolve. This methodology implies the dual roles of the researcher, who is at the same time an artist and a creator, who analyzes and reflects on the artistic practice and on the interaction between the public and the installation.

As an alternative methodology to traditional quantitative and qualitative methods, research based on artistic practice is grounded on a basic concept: research and practice are interdependent and complementary processes, in which the research questions themselves arise from practice. This emerging paradigm adapts the principles of the creative arts in order to approach research questions in a holistic and engaged way, in which theory and practice are intertwined (Leavy 2009).

In research based on artistic practice, the creative practice itself is understood as generating knowledge and complementary innovations with other research methods, guided by a flexible approach, capable of incorporating a variety of methodologies within its limits. Patricia Leavy (2009) argues that practice-based research is particularly suited to projects that aim to describe, explore, discover or disturb, highlighting the ability of the arts to access the process. In addition to this characteristic, the same author emphasizes the six strengths of arts-based research practices: it allows for problem-centered research; has holistic characteristics; allows establishing connections at micro and macro level; it is evocative and provocative; it allows creating critical awareness, destabilizing stereotypes, challenging dominant ideologies, amplifying marginalized voices and perspectives; has a participatory and engaging nature, promoting dialogue; it allows the emergence of meanings, democratizes knowledge and promotes social justice.

Based on the concept of convergence culture (Jenkins 2008), which defines the technological, economic, cultural and social transformations perceived in the contemporary media scenario, we propose a participatory approach, considering it the most effective

in terms of capacity building tools for change. Within this scenery of a convergence culture, *spreadability* becomes evident considering the creation of an environment in which interactivity and individual participation are the most emphasized references. According to Jenkins, *spreadability* is related to content dislocation, such as adherence models that circulate through interactivity between people in communication processes. On the other hand, the participatory action-research approach (Gubrium and Harper 2013) asserts itself as an effective path to mutual understanding, typical of tolerant and inclusive communities, aiming to promote democratic and cultural values and digital citizenship in school communities, where violence has found fertile ground for conflict and aggression.

According to the OCDE, the Portuguese school reality must adapt to the needs of students, and for this, it is necessary to provide educational agents with tools that allow them to fit into the technological plan, ensuring the participation of young people and the involvement of educators, to whom it is important to offer means to work with the new reality of schools, inclusive education and training for active citizenship, provided for by the National Initiative Digital Competencies, Portugal INCoDe.2030, implemented in 2017 (INCoDe.2030, na). Situations such as cyberbullying and cyberracism, associated with hate speech, are realities among young people with harmful consequences for their development and self-esteem.

This project benefits from the combination of various tools and techniques for collecting data, such as questionnaires, by survey and by interview (according to the ethical procedures of the General Directorate of Education) to assess the impact of the artifact on reflection, identification and provision of tools and strategies to deal with the phenomenon. In this empirical study, the analysis of data from the questionnaire and focus group surveys, both quantitative and qualitative, will allow validating or refuting the hypotheses raised during the research and it will be possible to reach conclusions on the contribution of the installation and games in the prevention and mitigation of the impact of the hate speech in the identity development of youth.

The narrative approach, namely fiction-based research, can cause changes in the way individuals relate to themselves and others (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007), since the research developed is more truthful, meaningful, useful, accessible, and humane (Leavy 2009). The narrative, through a reflective, participatory and aesthetic process (Leavy 2009), is assumed here as multidisciplinary and is considered an extension of interpretive approaches in the social sciences (Riessman 1993). Using the metaphor of history, this methodology analyzes the way individuals or groups position themselves in the face of events and actions, making it possible to capture processes of social representation, such as feelings, images and time. As recommended by Gill (2001), this approach should be complemented with other methodologies that allow overcoming some limitations inherent to the subjectivity of the narrative, namely quantitative methods.

Patricia Leavy (2009) highlights the educational, transformative, and emancipatory character that this type of research can assume. On the other hand, aspects related to science communication are also highlighted: research results must be disseminated, not only within the academy, but must be accessible to various audiences, through appropriate channels and forms. In this sense, the objective of this project is to occupy a place as a political and social influencer within a community.

4 The *Enredo* Project

Enredo is the name of the game-installation, developed as a digital medium-art product and as a game. It seeks to provide aesthetic fulfillment, and at the same time a reflective experience around the theme of hate speech present in online video games and gaming communities, in social networks and digital platforms.

Currently, children and youth are increasingly becoming consumers and producers of media, and there is an urgent need to provide knowledge and skills that enable them to have a more informed level of consumption and media literacy.

The study of the impact of videogames on education and the possible contributions of information and media literacy on behavior is the starting point of the project. It is intended that the installation-game can generate learning and behavioral changes.

Among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, we find some of the key ideas and concepts that support the project:

“to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development” (Sustainable Development Goals, nd).

Aladro-Vico et al. (2018) highlight the potential of art forms as a new educational and formative language for social transformation. The authors developed experimental prototypes with artists and young people to conclude that the creative environments generated by activist experiences humanized spaces and involved young people. Through this new language, it is possible to create learning communities, break the limits of the classroom, redefine the role of students and educators, enabling the discovery of new identities and new ways of understanding and participating in the world.

These initiatives can have a positive impact on communities by creating spaces where children and young people can ensure their voices are heard and their stories represented. From the experimentation of the installation/game by students of basic education, questionnaires will be applied by inquiry and a survey of qualitative data will be carried out through a focus group, with groups of young people and adolescents aged between 10 and 14 years, in order to assess the impact of the artifact. We intend to find a significant sample that can allow us to measure results, between 300 and 500 young people from Portuguese public schools in the Algarve region, a culturally diverse region.

4.1 The Concept

Starting from the proposals of Tuck and Silverman (2016) and Citron and Norton (2011), we combine education and the development of counter-narratives, to generate the game installation *Enredo*. This installation is designed to be an immersive space, isolated by three panels and a curtain, which invites the interactor to immerse himself in its luminous environment. Inside the cabin, it is possible to find a 13-inch screen with the announcement that the feed of a web page will be discontinued and the only access will correspond to the post-mortem, guaranteeing the documentation of the incident that

led to the decision and thanking the fans and regular visitors. The cancellation leads to questions voiced in the comments box: what happened to the authors? Why did they decide to stop writing?

When choosing to find out what happened, the interactor will be able to find the archive messages. When reading and decoding them, it will be possible to find the intensification of various types of hate messages among the followers.

4.2 Technical Features

The narrative in interactive fiction was developed in the application *Celtx* and in *Twinery* to allow the visualization of the possibilities of paths and choices. The interactor must discover the main theme of each page to identify the keyword, which allows, when writing it in the comments, to advance in level. If the interactor misses the keyword three times, a clue is provided, highlighting in yellow the place where the text that leads to the identification of the keyword is (Fig. 1).

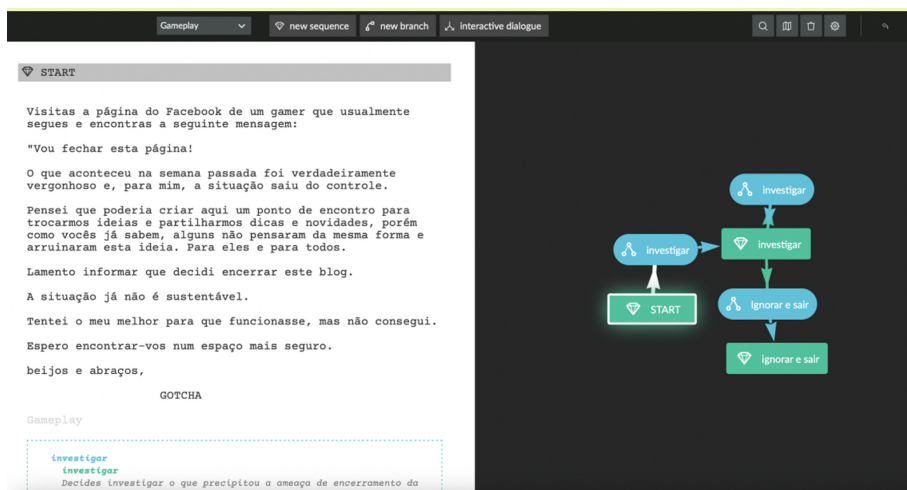


Fig. 1. Narrative construction in CELTX.

The physical dimension of the installation consists of a light cabin, measuring 1.50 x 1.50 x 2.68 m, divided into 3 panels and 1 luminous roof. It is a construction in white melamine MDF with application of 50% of the external area in self-adhesive vinyl; closed with a curtain. Lighting is provided by RGB wallwashers with transformer and motion sensor for color change (Figs. 2 and 3).

The cabin has the following characteristics:

- Base in metallic structure coated with black laminate with leveling paters;
- Metal structure coated on the outside with alucobond (very light aluminum composite);
- Ceiling with opaline acrylic light box with RGB LED lighting;

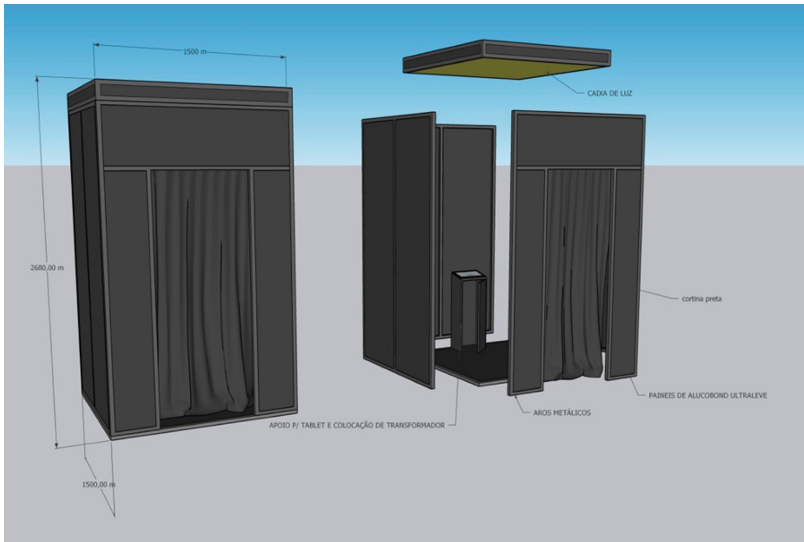


Fig. 2. Image of the cabin prototype.

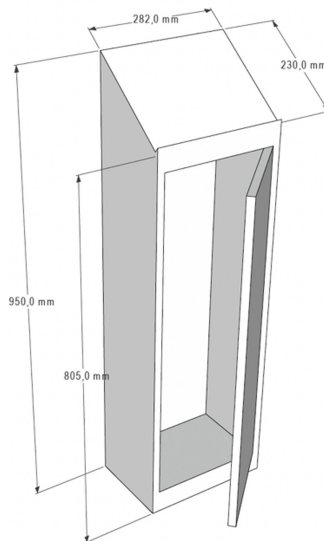


Fig. 3. Prototype image of the pulpit inside the booth.

- The door with a black flannel curtain, fireproof, easy to assemble with ties (allows you to enter and prevent the light from going out);
- The lighting will have a timer/sequencer that will be programmed for the light color to change every 30 s;

- The lighting will consider the presence of the interactor, avoiding energy waste when the cabin is empty.

4.3 Functional Aspects

Entering the cabin, the interactor is faced with an illuminated, immersive, and closed environment. On the screen is the post-mortem of a video game website. In this post-mortem the game mechanism is also presented. One of the users, in the comments, writes the following:

MetaHacker

Guys, I already found out what happened! Type “Welcome” into the search bar and find out what made them close the page...

And on the second page, you can read:

Neon

What will be the keyword to get to the next post? Tip: What is the main theme of the blog?

Based on the theme of a given entry, the interactor can advance through the site that is no longer active, discovering and experiencing the escalation of hate, in the comments. When it fails to find out what the keyword is in three tries, the game gives a clue by highlighting something that leads to that keyword.

In the school context, the main target audience of the installation-game, in addition to the enjoyment of the game inside the cabin, individual, a collective work will be proposed, based on a pedagogical itinerary that provides the orientation of a pedagogical itinerary in which students become co-authors, of the interactive installation.

5 Final Considerations

The spread of hate speech online is an evolving problem. All efforts and initiatives, individual and collective, appear to be important steps to analyze their meaning and consequences.

Online spaces offer unprecedented potential for interaction, while providing an important flow of data that generates clues to analyze and understand human behavior. The approach based on a narrative practice, which we propose here, implies that the researcher also assumes the role of interpreter. This methodological approach favors the access to a specific problem or trauma: racism, sexism, xenophobia, migrations, among other social, economic problems or politicians, represented through the construction of a character and a plot. It may allow to address aspects of aesthetic reflection with the aim of generating in users a deep cognitive and philosophical experience.

Essentially, we seek to approach the phenomenon of online hate from three points: the analysis of the problem and its expression and consequences for young users of the network; the theoretical contributions of media and information literacy, both for the analysis of hateful messages and for the creation of solutions, and, finally, the role of

videogames and serious games in the creation of a counter-narrative, which may conduct to changes in behavior.

Ultimately, the installation and presentation of the exhibition will allow accessing a new set of data, through the evaluation of the effect of the *Enredo* artifact on the public. This will be a leverage point for a new phase of the study, allowing for a review of the research questions addressed in this article.

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