



Perception of Peruvian Gamers About Gender Approach in the Campaign “In My Skin” of Guaraná

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Abstract. The objective of this research is to analyze how the inclusion of the gender approach in video games is being perceived by Peruvian female gamers through the advertising discourse of the Guarana brand with the “In my skin” campaign. The qualitative research methodology was used through 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews applied to Peruvian women between the ages of 18 and 28 who play the MOBA, RPG and shooter categories. As a result, it was observed that the use of the gender approach in the advertising discourse of video games generates a positive perception in the participants by opposing gender roles and negative stereotypes about women. In addition, it causes greater visibility and identification with the female audience, which is growing in video games; however, they are still victims of violence and harassment by male players. In this sense, it is necessary for brands to continue using the gender approach and get involved in the problems faced by female gamers.

Keywords: Gender Approach · Video Games · Gamers · Advertising · Stereotypes

1 Introduction

Video games in the last five years have changed their consumer profile, with participants becoming younger and younger (Salas et al., 2018). Furthermore, after COVID-19, women became just as likely as men to consume more video games, demonstrating that women are increasingly a rising audience (Attanasi et al., 2021; Kuss et al., 2022). In this context, Peru has not been the exception to this growth, as shown by the existence of 11.3 million players or gamers in 2021, 64% being men and 36% women (Havas Group, 2021). However, since its inception, video games have been designed by and for men without using a gender approach as they are conditioned by a hegemonic masculinity (Costumero, 2022). Consequently, the characters, also called “avatars”, mostly follow gender stereotypes and masculine preferences (Tompkins & Martins, 2022). Some examples are the female avatars from Dark Souls (Mouriño, 2022), The Walking Dead and Life Is Strange (Butt & Dunne, 2019) that were sexualized (Bakan & Bakan, 2020). Likewise, in League of Legends and Overwatch (Song et al., 2021), female avatars prevailed roles such as healers or caretakers rather than other abilities.

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As in video games, at the advertising level within this category, the reinforcement of stereotypes is evident due to the lack of use of the gender approach, which could be used strategically to promote equality between men and women (United Nations Organization [UN], 2018). According to an analysis of 70 ads from Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony, only 35.5% showed women as the protagonists of the ads (Vollbach, 2018). One of the causes of this underrepresentation is due to the fact that video game professionals consider that men are the main consumers (Tompkins & Martins, 2022).

However, there are cases of brands that are exceptions such as Movistar and the Wonder Women Tech Foundation with the “My Game, My Name” campaign, carried out in Spain, Brazil and the US to denounce the sexism and harassing behavior of which women were victims. Female gamers (Telefonica, 2019). Renowned male gamers participated in the campaign, who experienced this type of violence just by using a nickname or user with female names (Telefonica, 2020). The second example is the “Game like a girl” campaign of the HyperX video game product brand, which sought to make visible and empower female gamers in Latin America (Cardenas, 2021). Finally, another example is Kotex’s #SoyUnNuevoCiclo campaign, which sought to destigmatize menstruation and show female gamers as an important audience that needed comfort and protection in the sanitary pads they consumed (Kotex Peru, 2022).

Based on this context and the referred research, this article focuses on analyzing how the inclusion of the gender approach in video games is being perceived by female gamers through the advertising discourse of the Guaraná brand with the “In my skin” campaign. The interest in this Peruvian case is due to the fact that the brand seeks to get involved in the problems that exist in video games by showing female avatars in a hypersexualized way (Adlatina Writing, 2022). For this reason, together with three Peruvian gamers, they designed three more real and empowered female characters (Business Zoom, 2022).

The relevance of this issue is at a psychological, social, and advertising level, because due to the violence and harassment experienced by female gamers in video games, they could also present higher levels of anxiety and use protection techniques such as hiding their identity or stopping consume them (Pasquale et al., 2021). If communications and advertising adopted a gender perspective, it would prevent women from internalizing sexist prejudices (McCullough et al., 2020).

2 State of Art

2.1 Gender Approach and Videogames

The gender approach or also called gender perspective is defined as a point of view of the social, academic, political or scientific reality that questions the subordination of women and seeks to develop actions that benefit women and men without perpetuating inequality (Montalvo, 2020; Blanco et al., 2019). In addition, it values the behaviors, aspirations and needs of men and women, without interfering with the traditional gender roles assigned by society (UN, 2018).

Regarding the application of the gender approach in video games, the avatars still exhibit stereotypes, especially the female ones, since they are mostly sexualized, with predominant curves, although some were defiant because they were muscular (Bakan & Bakan, 2020; Tompkins & Martins, 2022). Another analysis carried out on more than

100 Xbox, PlayStation and Nintendo avatars revealed that the males followed the role of heroes, while the women acted passively, waiting to be rescued (Bakan & Bakan, 2020).

Consequently, according to a study of 244 Overwatch players, the choice of characters negatively impacts women because they underestimate their abilities by choosing support and healing roles (Zhou et al., 2021). Violent, competitive and sexist games reinforce traditional and stereotypical masculine norms such as misogyny, aggression, dominance, harshness, importance of sex and anti-feminine attitudes (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019; McCullough et al., 2020; Kuss et al., 2022). In addition, female players are victims of sexist attacks and criticism through streaming (Afonso & Aguilera, 2021; Cabeza et al., 2021). On the contrary, another study exposed that video games require a high cognitive load and, although sexualized characters are used, they did not directly generate sexist behavior, but were generated by other social factors (Read, Lynch & Matthews, 2018; Song et al., 2020).

2.2 Advertising Discourse of Video Games

The increase in female gamers can be observed in different media such as streaming on Twitch and TikTok with which they sought to present and promote their gender identity and sexual identity which, at the same time, managed to empower other gamers (Freeman & Wohn, 2020). In this sense, a study of Brazilian gamers and streamers affirmed that women continue to build their identity by playing, even if it means being silenced by the predominant identity of men (Botelho & Neder, 2020).

Regarding modern advertising, one of the most used resources in the discourse is the stereotyped representation of gender and it influences the construction of gender identity (Paricio et al., 2021). This same picture is similar in video game advertising, according to a study of 383 ads in American console, mobile, and PC video game magazines that resulted in the underrepresentation of women and girls (Behm, 2017). Another research applied to 431 ads from Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony showed that more than half had a male character as the main character and women were underrepresented and, generating the loss of interest of this audience (Vollbach, 2018). In contrast, another study of 324 video game ads agreed that there was a greater representation of men as protagonists; however, it concluded that these did not reinforce traditional gender stereotypes linked to age, roles, types of rewards, or settings (Aramendia et al., 2020).

3 Research Method

This research was proposed according to the naturalistic or interpretative paradigm, since it seeks to understand a problem or phenomenon from the perspective of individuals in order to obtain an explanation (Norwich, 2020; Baskarada & Koronios, 2018). In addition, the qualitative approach was taken into account to collect information about their perceptions, behavior and relationships with others (Burgos et al., 2019).

The sampling technique to be able to recruit the participants was the snowball, with which individuals are asked to refer other suitable people for the study (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, for the sample, female players between the ages of 18 and 28 were considered, since in Peru, 39% of male and female players are between the ages of 16 and 24 and 30%

between 25 and 34 years of age. (Havas Group, 2021). In addition, gender stereotypes take hold between the ages of 18 and 25 (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019). In addition, the participants, being gamers, are related to technology, so they were students or graduates of careers such as Engineering, Architecture, Graphic Design or Video Game Design at the UPC, Toulouse Lautrec or UCAL. The interviewees lived in districts in zone 5 (Ate, Chaclacayo, Lurigancho, Santa Anita, San Luis, El Agustino), zone 6 (Jesús Maria, Lince, Pueblo Libre, Magdalena, San Miguel) or zone 7 (Miraflores, San Isidro, San Borja, Surco, La Molina), which are close to the universities where they study. Finally, these players should have played the video game genres known as RPG, MOBA and/or shooter for at least 8 years, since they are categories related to the campaign chosen as the case study.

On the other hand, the case study was used with the campaign “In my skin” of the Guarana brand that belongs to Backus and handles the concept of being a refreshing and unique drink (Backus, 2021). Ogilvy together with Guarana developed this initiative in which a team specialized in video game design together with three Peruvian gamers created more realistic and empowering avatars to later be used in CORE, in which there are more than 50,000 MOBA, RPG, and shooter games., careers, among others (Business Zoom, 2022). The aforementioned campaign was the product of the problem that exists in video games regarding the hypersexualization of avatars or female characters, for which reason Guarana sought to be an ally in the representation of female gamers by breaking stereotypes through a community of players. More inclusive (Adlatina Writing, 2022).

To carry out data collection, the semi-structured interview technique was applied in which depth was sought using the flexibility of adding some questions to the initial guide (Burgos et al., 2019). In this sense, the main tool was a guide that started with 15 questions, applied in an interview that lasted 45 min, which was recorded by audio and video using the Zoom platform. Additionally, a notebook was used to write key data given in the responses of the interviewees (Table 1) .

Table 1. Topics and guiding questions for in-depth interviews

Topics	Semi-structured questions
Perception of female gamers about the representation of women in video games.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about the gender approach? 2. What is your point of view on the representation of women in video game avatars? 3. How do you think this way of representing women in video games affects the players? 4. As a gamer, have you had any negative experiences interacting with other male gamers?

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Topics	Semi-structured questions
Perception of the gender approach in the advertising discourse of video games.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Do you think video game advertising is using a gender approach? 6. What elements do you think a video game advertisement should highlight in order to better represent gender equality? 7. How do you perceive that female gamers are being represented in video game advertising?
Perception of the gender approach in the advertising discourse of the campaign “In my skin” of Guarana.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. How do you consume video games as a gamer? 9. In your opinion, do you think that the “In my skin” commercial is using a gender approach? 10. What elements would you highlight from this spot that are representing women without reinforcing stereotypes? 11. What do you think about the Guarana brand after seeing this commercial? 12. How would you describe the skins designed by Guarana? 13. Would you like to use these new characters or skins? 14. How would you describe the female gamers that appear in the commercial? 15. Do you feel identified and represented with these gamers?

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Perception of Female Gamers About the Representation of Women in Video Games

All the interviewees perceived the gender approach positively, associating it with a change in the mentality of the new generations that promotes gender equality and opposition to gender roles and negative stereotypes. For the most part, they affirmed that video games were by and for the male public; however, in recent years, they perceived that women were represented less sexualized and with defiant attitudes, although others still showed beauty standards. This coincides with the studies that maintain that female avatars are less and less stereotyped (Bakan & Bakan, 2020; Hodges & Buckley, 2018).

All the gamers agreed that if the gender approach continues to be applied in video games, it would generate greater representation and identification with the female audience and, at the same time, empower them (Vega & Macharia, 2019). However, they also claimed to have seen or been victims of negative experiences such as verbal violence and harassment by male players, which is consistent with previous research on the negative

experiences that women experience when playing (Afonso & Aguilera, 2021; Cabeza et al., 2021).

Consequently, some players indicated that they hid their identity and preferred not to use the microphone, camera or chat, because otherwise highly negative consequences would be generated in their mental and emotional health (Costumero, 2022; Kuss et al., 2022; McLean & Griffiths, 2019). However, contrary opinions were observed about whether video games cause this behavior or other external factors.

4.2 Gender Approach in the Advertising Discourse of Video Games

Most of the interviewees denied that the gender approach was used by the brands and only a few remembered some campaigns that do make the players visible, such as Pilsen, Phantom, Movistar and EPIC. For the most part, they pointed to positive aspects of gender-sensitive advertising such as generating more audiences and countering the stigma that video games are only for men.

With respect to the elements to generate a better representation of gender equality in video game advertising, most of the interviewees highlighted the role of women with variety or neutrality in their body image and personality and avoiding sexualization and negative stereotypes linked only to femininity. Additionally, they mentioned changes and needs that brands could consider, such as promoting the participation of women in e-games and acting to reduce violence against women in gaming communities. For this reason, it is important to promote the safety and visibility of women who are more frequent users (Galdino & Silva, 2020; Paassen et al., 2017).

Regarding the representation of female gamers in advertising, they mentioned having seen Peruvian female streamers such as Ekate, Lucy Weird, Gabu Waifu, Rizi, Umi Hyu, Antonella Aservi and the caster Nela. Likewise, the interviewees perceived that most gamers were chosen for advertising due to the number of followers and attractive physical appearance (Petryk et al., 2022). In addition, they felt more representation with organizations that involve more women in the video game industry such as Femdevs and Women Game Jam.

Women are increasingly involved in different formats of video game consumption to build their own identity (Botelho & Neder, 2020; Freeman & Wohn, 2020). For this reason, the interviewed gamers were streamers, participated in tournaments or championships, got involved in game jams or watched gameplays. Some also promoted spaces for reflection with men about violence against women in video games, although they noted that some of them justify this behavior.

4.3 “In My Skin” Case

As for the Guarana campaign, the interview participants watched the advertising spot before starting with the questions. Most of them confirmed the use of the gender approach due to the representativeness of female gamers as protagonists, and the presentation of their opinion against stereotypes and the sexualization of women in video games. This is related to Afonso and Aguilera (2021), who affirm that young gamers are more in favor of including their gender in video games.

On the other hand, they mentioned elements such as the prominence of women, the variety of styles of the gamers, the neutrality of the colors and the naturalness in terms of the environments and clothing of the players. However, regarding the problem presented in the commercial, they reiterated their opinion that the representation of women in avatars had currently improved.

Most of the interviewees perceived the brand positively for being involved with female gamers through the important message it gave, although for some Guarana's relationship with gaming was surprising. In this way, it is reaffirmed that brands generate positive responses when negative stereotypes about women are not represented (Akestam et al., 2021; Paricio et al., 2021). About the skins designed for the campaign, she was also positive as they were not perceived as idealized. Despite this, they had doubts about the use of these skins, since it was not entirely clear to everyone about how or in which games to apply them.

The participating gamers highlighted the mostly positive aspects of the campaign and its importance to increase the identification and visibility of more women in video games, which is why it exposes the importance of continuing to apply the gender approach in advertising due to the positive effects that it could generate. (Ordoñez, 2020; Vega & Macharia, 2019).

5 Conclusions

Given the research question, How do Peruvian female gamers perceive the inclusion of the gender approach in video games through the advertising discourse of the Guarana brand with the "In my skin" campaign?, it was concluded that a positive perception is generated towards the approach gender of videogames and advertising that uses it. By fostering a less stereotyped discourse and opposition to traditional gender roles about women, the gender approach causes greater visibility and identification among female gamers. Consequently, they more openly receive the messages of the brands that represent them without reinforcing negative stereotypes (Akestam et al., 2021; Ordoñez, 2020; Paricio et al., 2021; Vega & Macharia, 2019).

Regarding the advertising discourse, it was concluded that the brands still accentuate minority and stereotyped representations of female gamers. For this reason, it was necessary to apply the gender approach through elements such as the visibility of more women, the neutrality of the elements, the variety of styles and the message related to the problems that women still experience, such as violence when interacting with male players.

With respect to the Guarana campaign, there is a positive perception towards the brand and its message by exposing more female gamers, who in turn generate greater identification and closeness. However, the final action on downloading and applying the designed avatars lacked clarity.

Among other important findings, it was found that, just as women are increasingly represented in video games, the LGBTIQ+ community should also be taken into account on this issue. In addition, it was evidenced that the new generations of players are made up of a greater number of girls than in the past. Therefore, it is considered that both topics would be important for future research.

As for some limitations that arose, they were mainly complications during the recruitment of gamers to interview. However, the search through social networks and the Femdevs community were important contact channels.

Lastly, there is a wide variety of video games in different genres, so female gamers are also different from each other about what they like or prefer. Therefore, it is recommended to delve into them through techniques such as focus groups and interviews with female players of different age ranges and origins from different regions of Peru.

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