

Women's presence and roles in video games journalism: an analysis of newsrooms and cultural critique in Spanish specialized media

Presencia y rol de la mujer en el periodismo de videojuegos: un análisis de las redacciones y la crítica cultural de los medios especializados españoles

Manuel García-Borrego.

Universidad de Málaga / Universitat Jaume I. Spain.

manoletus@uma.es / mborrego@uji.es



Inmaculada Montes-Rodríguez.

Universidad de Málaga. Spain.

imontes@uma.es



Alberto Ruiz-Aguilar.

Universidad de Málaga. Spain.

arzaguilar@gmail.com

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RESUMEN

Introducción: El periodismo cultural destaca por su función prescriptiva, que marca la agenda al determinar cuáles son los productos que merecen recibir la atención del público. Dentro de esta área informativa se encuentran los videojuegos, una industria tradicionalmente criticada por sus marcadas desigualdades de género. Este artículo se propone describir la presencia y el papel de la mujer en los principales medios especializados españoles. **Metodología:** Se estudiaron la estructura redaccional de los portales *3DJuegos*, *AnaitGames*, *AreaJugones*, *Eurogamer*, *IGN*, *HobbyConsolas*, *Meristation*, *Nintenderos* y *Vandal*, así como todos los análisis de videojuegos publicados entre 1997 y 2022

(n=34.529). **Resultados:** Las mujeres apenas representan el 18,6% de las plantillas de las grandes revistas del sector, y su vinculación a estas se produce sobre todo por medio de la figura del colaborador externo. Su presencia en los puestos de mando es inexistente en siete de las nueve webs escogidas. Además, en los últimos 25 años apenas han firmado un 3,6% de todos los análisis publicados, si bien la cifra ha vivido un tímido pero constante crecimiento en los últimos tiempos impulsada por los cambios acometidos en *AnaitGames*, *Eurogamer* y *Meristation*. Principalmente suelen escribir sobre videojuegos musicales o aptos para todos los públicos; los juegos para adultos, violentos o de conducción se reservan por lo general a hombres. **Conclusiones:** Este trabajo pone de manifiesto la enorme brecha de género existente aún hoy en la prensa de videojuegos, y llama la atención sobre determinados estereotipos que parecen seguir perpetuándose en la prensa especializada española.

PALABRAS CLAVE: videojuegos; periodismo; mujer; estudios de género; brecha de género; medios de comunicación; feminismo.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Cultural journalism is characterized by its prescriptive function, which sets the agenda by determining which products deserve to receive public attention. Within this area of specialization is video games journalism, whose industry has traditionally been criticized for its marked gender inequalities. This article aims to describe the presence and role of women in Spanish specialized media outlets. **Methodology:** We studied the newsroom composition of the websites *3DJuegos*, *AnaitGames*, *AreaJugones*, *Eurogamer*, *IGN*, *HobbyConsolas*, *Meristation*, *Nintenderos* and *Vandal*, as well as all their reviews published between 1997 and 2022 (n=34,529). **Results:** Women barely represent 18.6% of the staff of the major magazines in the sector, and are most frequently linked to them as external collaborators. Their presence in managerial tasks is non-existent in seven of the nine outlets. In addition, in the last 25 years they have only signed 3.6% of all the reviews, although the figure has experienced a timid but constant growth in recent years, driven by the changes made in *AnaitGames*, *Eurogamer* and *Meristation*. They usually write about musical videogames, as well as those suitable for all audiences, while adult, violent or driving games are generally reserved for men. **Conclusions:** This work highlights the enormous gender gap that still exists today in video games press, and draws the attention to certain stereotypes that continue to perpetuate in Spanish specialized press.

KEYWORDS: video games; journalism; women; gender studies; gender gap; media; communication.

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Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

The video game industry, which in 2019 was already the most buoyant in audiovisual entertainment in Spain, surpassing the joint results of cinema and music (AEVI, 2020), continues to break billing records year after year. According to the most recent yearbook of the Spanish Video Game Association, its revenue volume grew by 18% in the last year alone (AEVI, 2021), with which Spain establishes itself in the top 10 of the main world markets, above what would correspond to it in terms of GDP (DEV, 2021).

Parallel to the consolidation of the industry, video game journalism has been developed, which is receiving more and more attention from academia (Bigl and Schlegelmilch, 2021; Braithwaite, 2016; Estanyol et al., 2018; López-Redondo, 2021; Paredes-Otero, 2021; Patridge, 2018). The role of the media, and in particular of specialized information, is not minor in this sense: cultural journalism stands out above the rest of the areas due to its prescriptive function, through which professionals, based on their expert criteria, decide which are the products that deserve to receive public attention. This is what has been called "cultural intermediation" (Barei, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984; Janssen and Verboord, 2015).

The quintessential genre of cultural journalism is criticism —commonly called analysis in the field of video games—, which sublimates the prescriptive function insofar as specialists are expressly responsible for selecting, evaluating, and ranking the huge volume of works available to guide consumers in their decision making. In other words, through the exercise of prescription, specialized journalists end up setting the cultural agenda (Garbisu and Blanco, 2019; Rivera, 1995; Rodríguez-Pastoriza, 2006; Tubau, 1982).

Within this area of specialization, video games have traditionally occupied a minor position, affected by the historical division between high culture (to which literature or painting belong) and popular or mass culture (film, music, and, in recent times, video games), as well as due to doubts about its status as a cultural artifact. The first debate seems increasingly outdated, and many of the authors agree that the borders between both forms of cultural journalism have ended up being diluted (Jurado-Martín, 2019; Kristensen and From, 2015; Riegert et al., 2009). Regarding the second point, video games also seem to have long since achieved the necessary intellectual legitimacy to become part of what is understood as culture, to which the existence of a journalistic ecosystem has contributed to procuring that treatment (Daniel and Garry, 2018; Styhre et al., 2018). Where perhaps they still have a long way to go is in the incorporation and recognition of women in the different phases of video game life—from its development to its consumption, passing through criticism as a necessary intermediary between both worlds—, where the available studies tend to show, at least for now, more errors than successes.

1.1. Women in the video game industry

Despite having experienced a gradual breakdown of gender stereotypes in recent years, the video game sector has been a strongly masculinized space since its inception, in which the gap between men and women in the industry persists at different levels. Various studies have associated the low presence of women with various reasons, such as the digital gap in knowledge and the incorporation of women into strategic ICT sectors (Gil-Juárez and Feliu, 2017; Gil-Juárez et al., 2010; Moldes-Farelo, 2019), the lack of female role models in the video game industry (Fernández-Vara, 2014; Rubio-Méndez and Cabañes-Martínez, 2012; Santana-Rodríguez, 2020), the hypersexualization of the female protagonists of the games (Boris, 2018; Caro-Rodríguez, 2019; Paredes-Otero, 2018; Pérez, 2018), the inequalities and gender stereotypes perpetuated in the sector at all levels (Afonso-Noda and Aguilera-Ávila, 2021; Maclean, 2016; Xuejing-Yao et al., 2022), or the sexism, harassment, and discrimination received

by both female players and specialized journalists (Buukozturk, 2021; Kuss et al., 2022; Manzano-Zambruno and Paredes-Otero, 2020). In this paper, the focus of the theoretical review will be placed on two fundamental aspects to understand the relevance of the media in the described phenomenon: the role of women as players —and, by extension, as the target audience of the specialized press— and as video game critics.

1.1.1. Women as players and consumers of specialized press

According to the data collected by the AEVI (2021), 45.9% of people who play video games are women (more than 7.3 million out of a total of 15.9 in Spain), figures not far from those of men (54.1%) and similar to those of Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (47% compared to 53% as a whole). However, according to a joint study by the AEVI and the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE), the difference widens when computing the income generated in the industry by one and the other —women contribute 38% of the billing of the main European markets compared to 62% of men (AEVI and ISFE, 2021)—and it is further expanded at the professional level due to the lack of female creatives, developers, programmers, translators, or managers (Alvarado, 2018; Méndez-Martínez, 2017; Tur, 2018). According to the numbers of the AEVI report (2021), only 18.5% of the people who work in the sector are women, which in Spain has more than 650 companies or studios and more than 15,000 jobs.

The differences between genders are also expressed in the type of video games consumed: numerous research works have associated the consumption of action games, sports games, or aggressive and violent content (warfare, combat, etc.) with men, while female players tend to prefer those with “kinder” themes (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2004, p. 91) such as adventure, simulation, strategy, or general topics (Afonso-Noda and Aguilera-Ávila, 2021; Klevjer and Hovden, 2017; López-Fernández et al., 2019; Ricoy and Ameneiros, 2016). These predilections are marked by multiple factors, among which the masculinization of the sector itself in the development and creation phases of video games stands out, which gives rise to “predictably less attractive content for female players”. In this way, “a sexist and patriarchal vision of society” is offered that underrepresents women and shows them embodied in “weak, sensitive, sentimental female characters, without initiative and who generate constant problems for male characters”, or tending “to hypersexualization and infantilization (...), which plays against their power, authority, and respectability” (Méndez-Martínez, 2017, pp. 548-550).

Aspects related to the consumption of video games such as the social context, the distribution of spaces, or the access device also have an influence. The literature has pointed out that the public spaces or social circles of video games (arcades, clubs, or specialized stores) are considered to be masculine territory, while women are displaced “to leisure in individual environments, where they are not under the critical view of other social agents” (Méndez-Martínez, 2017, p. 552), which is why they develop their hobby in the domestic and private sphere through secondary devices such as mobile phones (Afonso-Noda and Aguilera-Ávila, 2021; Ricoy and Ameneiros, 2016):

Companies are aware of both aspects (available time and leisure preferences) and offer games specifically designed in those terms: games like Tetris or The Sims are easy to master, without too much investment of time, and allow, if desired, to play just for a while, without requiring much dedication. Games with an “interstitial” character that provide the possibility of a pleasant experience of leisure time or downtime between “productive” activities, without having to invest a lot of time in mastering the technological aspect (Gil-Juárez et al., 2010, p. 215).

Another aspect to highlight among the factors that would mark female predilections is the fragmentation of the market itself, “specifically aimed at the female audience under the color pink” or “based on

topics such as fashion, beauty, and cosmetics" (Márquez, 2013, pp. 108-109), as well as marketing and advertising in the specialized media, which exaggerate gender roles and stereotypes as a claim (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 1998; Taylor, 2008). Gómez (a) (2018, pp. 269-270) points out that women began to feel represented "in a natural way (or at least not sexualized)" following the launch of the Nintendo DS console and games like *Brain Training*, *Nintendogs*, or the *Imagine...* series, although they also maintain opposites between genders: men are associated with the color blue and high-ranking jobs; women are associated with pink and "care work, aesthetic development, and prestigious ambitions related to femininity", assuming that "they can only enjoy a game if it involves a simulation of peaceful life or in which social or work aspirations are developed".

All this has led to the conviction that "games for girls only exist as a small niche, a concession from the industry to female players that allows them to temporarily interfere in an area that, deep down, does not belong to them" (García, 2018), an idea also supported by Méndez-Martínez (2017, p. 548). Gómez (a) (2018, p. 269) considers that through this differentiation "gender roles typical of boy/girl stereotypes are perpetuated". In short, companies and developers have been marking a certain gender bias in the creation of video games that directs most of their products to the male audience, which could explain why, although the numbers of players are even, women dedicate less time to video games, enjoy them less, and, above all, feel that they are less made for them (AEVI and ISFE, 2021).

The figure of the video game women player is key when it comes to analyzing the specialized press in this field, insofar as it makes up, together with its male counterpart, the target audience of these titles and the main consumers of their content. This press has been, for years, focused mainly on a male audience, not only because of its coverage but also because of the type of advertising shown or the claims used for its sale, supported by sexist and gender stereotypes and male overrepresentation (Díez- Gutiérrez, 2004; Gómez (a), 2018). Not only is there not an abundance of female presence in the promotional images of video games, ads, and the covers of specialized magazines, but in the cases in which they are shown, they appear in the background, as comic relief, as a sexual object—with suggestive poses, hypersexualized bodies, and provocative clothing—or as an aesthetic complement, when not only to praise the player (Gómez (a), 2018). All this favors the disinterest of women in video games and their specialized press:

The first impression about video games for young girls through advertising is that it was not a product for them: they had no place in the fun between boys and games, nor did they have anything that, *a priori*, could interest them (...) advertising in the specialized press put all its creativity to work at the service of its target audience: white, heterosexual, young men, with a certain purchasing power, and with tastes very focused on pop culture (Gómez (a), 2018, pp. 259-261).

1.1.2. The female journalist as a critic specializing in video games

The journalistic profession also suffers from the lack of women in offices, according to the testimonies of the professionals in the sector (Trivi, 2018). Although there are no censuses of the editorial staff of magazines, there is a general consensus that women journalists specializing in video games continue to be underrepresented in most of the headers, although their number seems to have increased in the last decade both globally and nationally (Trivi, 2018). Even so, Gómez (b) (2018, p. 79) places the Spanish press "at the tail of the international media":

The veterans of the industry can be counted on one hand, especially if we think of content with a gender perspective (...). Although there is an increasingly large group of women in video game journalism, in Spain, they are not highly valued, their contributions seem almost anecdotal to

the common user, and it is unthinkable that they make a living by writing because their working conditions are more precarious than those of their male counterparts (...) many of the women who work in the media do not even appear accredited, so we remain installed in a loop of invisibility and almost total absence of references (Gómez (b), 2018, pp. 79-80).

Together with the small presence of women dedicated to this area, the differences in the functions assigned to them in the editorial field are revealing, on a qualitative level. On the one hand, they usually deal with minor tasks such as broadcasting, presenting videos, or adapting press releases, while it is more common for men to hold senior and managerial positions, regardless of the platform (press, radio, and television). In essence, the female presence in the main businesses or work teams is a minority and is relegated to support positions such as editors or collaborators (Kerr, 2017; Trivi, 2018).

On the other hand, gender barriers are also reflected in the type of video game they usually analyze: those of lesser relevance or that require the application of the gender perspective in the texts (Gómez (b), 2018; Trivi, 2018). However, Gómez (b) (2018, p. 71) points out precisely this contribution as one of the most revolutionary aspects of the video game press, given that analyses with perspective were “until then, practically non-existent and completely invisible, seen as a niche and not as an integrative approach”.

Other forms of discrimination that these female professionals —along with female players and creators— face due to their gender are also noteworthy. Several of the reviewed studies name the two most mediatic cases of misogyny in the industry, illustrating both the hostility towards women in these environments and the debatable role of the specialized press in combating this reality: the *GamerGate* and the *Gaming Ladies* (Gómez (b), 2018; González-Sánchez, 2015; Perreault and Vos, 2016, 2020). The first of them broke out in 2014 with the cyberbullying, personal attacks, and threats campaign carried out against several women in the video game industry —developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu and journalist Anita Sarkeesian— through forums and social networks using the hashtag #*GamerGate*. The second, the *Gaming Ladies* initiative (2017), organized by the video game journalist Marina Amores as a safe space for reflection on the role of women in the *gamer world*, was boycotted due to its non-mixed event characteristics through a harassment campaign instigated by forums and social networks. Finally, it had to be canceled because the safety of its attendees could not be guaranteed.

In both cases, justified by their harassers as a crusade against “media bias and the lack of journalistic ethics of the specialized press”, they took advantage of the situation to launch “a series of sexist acts that a specific group used to persecute well-known feminists from the world of video games”, among which were the female journalists specialized in that area (González-Sánchez, 2015, pp. 355-356). The professionals of the sector consider that a good part of the specialized media maintained an equidistant attitude, responding late and without positioning themselves or condemning those who supported this harassment campaign; others even chose to avoid the controversy and did not comment on it (Blodgett, 2020; Massanari, 2017; Mortensen, 2016; Perreault and Vos, 2016). It was the coverage by the general press, together with the parallel movement on social networks, which turned both cases into topics on the media agenda. González-Sánchez (2015) points out this regard:

The fact that a process that should have had as its sole consequence the review of certain internal policies in the group of specialized media has transcended to the point of questioning the professionalism of certain female profiles in the world of videogames has resulted in greater visibility of the conditions in which working women in the sector find themselves, who are sometimes exposed to unequal treatment, harassment, and hostile atmospheres (González-Sánchez, 2015, pp. 366-367).

Along the same lines, Manzano-Zambruno and Paredes-Otero (2020) point out the existence of many other lesser-known experiences that journalists specialized in video games have gone through: paternalistic attitudes, pressures in the workplace, impostor syndrome, or self-censorship.

Women journalists specialized in video games have witnessed—and, in some cases, even personally suffered—harassment and discrimination situations through social networks. These comments are directed by the media audience or the *gamer community*, mostly men (...). A large majority recognizes that the types of insults received by men and women are different, with those directed at women having sexual connotations, allusions to their physique, questions about their knowledge of the video game sector, or their ability to exercise both the profession and interact with the video game itself (Manzano-Zambruno and Paredes-Otero, 2020, p. 95).

2. Objectives

Although the marginal position of women in the world of video games is well documented, no empirical studies have been carried out to date that allows data to prove the magnitude of the phenomenon in the field of communication and, particularly, in the field of journalism. It is for this reason that this article sets two fundamental objectives:

1. To describe the current presence of women in the editorial structure of the main Spanish magazines specializing in video games, taking into account both their representation in global terms and their position in the ranking.
2. Examine the role of women in the video game press through the journalistic genre par excellence in specialized cultural information, analysis, or criticism. To this end, attention will be paid to the historical evolution of the number of firms, their representation in each of the major Spanish media, the type and content of the video games they usually cover, or the genres with which their profile is most associated.

3. Methodology

3.1. Editorial structure of video game magazines

The first block of the methodology focused on collecting data on the editorial structure of the nine main Spanish specialized magazines, thus trying to represent as completely as possible the diversity that exists in the national media scene. Specifically, the chosen websites were:

- *3DJuegos*. Set up in 2005, it has been part of the international Webedia group since 2017, which together leads the Comscore audience ranking. They have 303,000 followers on Twitter¹.
- *AnaitGames*. A project that started in 2005, which is maintained as an independent website sustained thanks to the contributions of its subscribers on Patreon. 32,500 followers on Twitter.
- *AreaJugones*. Born in 2010, it is currently integrated into the website of the newspaper *Sport* (Prensa Ibérica). It has a total of 58,700 followers on Twitter.
- *Eurogamer.es*. Spanish version of the leading magazine in the United Kingdom launched in 2008. 256,900 followers on Twitter.
- *Hobbyconsolas*. Published for the first time in 1991, it has undergone various changes of name and ownership until today, within the structure of Axel Springer España. 323,400 followers on Twitter.

¹ All Twitter data is current as of February 10th, 2022.

- *IGN España*. Spanish delegation of the American IGN, one of the leading platforms on an international scale. Launched in 2012 on the foundations of the *Marca* video game section, it has 110,800 followers on Twitter.
- *Meristation*. Founded in 1997, it is currently part of the PRISA conglomerate and forms part of the *AS* newspaper website. It has 301,600 followers on Twitter.
- *Nintendros*. Main website in Spanish specializing in the Japanese multinational Nintendo, publishing video game reviews since 2011. First on Twitter with 401,200 followers.
- *Vandal*. Created in 1997 and since 2017 associated with *El Español*, it is the current leader in visits from the press specializing in video games in Spain. 264,400 followers on Twitter.

In the first instance, we went to the web portals of each of the magazines and tried to locate the composition of the teams in the usual tabs for this type of information — “Who we are”, “Writing”, etc.—. Once this data was collected, we wrote to the corporate directors of the magazines up to three times —or, alternatively, they were contacted through social networks— between January 25th and March 7th, 2022, to confirm the composition of the staff or correct possible errors found on the web. After three weeks after the last contact with the media outlet, the unanswered messages were considered unanswered. Subsequently, based on the available data, the multiplicity of existing hierarchies was simplified into four large categories, codifying the positions as follows:

- Command positions. The founders, directors, deputy directors, editorial directors, subdirectors, heads of current affairs, chief editors, and content heads and managers were considered as such.
- Intermediate positions. Includes art directors, podcast directors, entertainment coordinators, guides coordinators, Videogames section coordinators and managers, graphic managers, community managers, SEO managers, social media managers and editors, current affairs editors, *branding* and event editors, video editors, assistant editors, product managers, and web managers.
- Base positions. All the editors (current affairs, guides, tricks, correspondents...), public relations, Twitch and YouTube administrators, and editing, graphics, layout, and video staff belong to this group.
- External. Represents regular or occasional collaborators external to the magazine.

3.2. Video game analysis

Given that this work intends to examine the role of women in cultural criticism, in a second phase it was decided to take as an object of study the video game analyses of these same magazines. To reflect the phenomenon as accurately as possible, all the reviews available on the websites of each of the media were collected. Using *data scraping tools*, it was possible to extract 34,529 different entries, published between 1997 and 2022, to which the following content analysis sheet was applied:

- Media name. Nominal variable with nine positions, one for each of the chosen headers.
- Year of publication of the analysis. Scale variable with 26 positions (between 1997 and 2022).
- Gender of the author of the analysis. Nominal variable with three positions (male, female, and other²).

² “Other” includes both the rest of the genders and unidentifiable profiles, generally the newsroom or fan aliases who, especially in the early years of video game websites, were in charge of carrying out a large part of the analysis. Although very different identities are included within this category, it was decided to group them given their low representation of the total, which prevents the crossing of variables. For the presentation of the results, the comparison between men and women will be used.

- Video game age rating. Ordinal variable with five positions (+3, +7, +12, +16, and +18), depending on the age group for which the video game content is considered appropriate, according to the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) system. To extract the values of this variable, the technical data sheets of the video games incorporated by the *Meristation* and *Vandal* magazines into their analyses were downloaded, and they were replicated in the rest of the entries that coincided with the name.
- Game content descriptors. Measured as multiple nominal variables depending on the type of content that appears in it (gambling, discrimination, drugs, foul language, fear, sex, and/or violence), according to the PEGI system. Again, the values were obtained from the data sheets of *Meristation* and *Vandal*.
- Video game genre. Nominal variable with more than a hundred positions, one for each of the genres assigned by the magazines. As in the previous variables, the data was based on the labels used by each media outlet and was applied to the rest of the entries with the same name.

Data collection was carried out between February 2nd and 10th, 2022.

4. Results

4.1. Editorial structure of video game magazines

Of the nine surveyed magazines, six expressly confirmed the composition of their staff: *3DJuegos*, *AnaitGames*, *HobbyConsolas*, *Meristation*, *Nintenderos*, and *Vandal*. *Eurogamer* and *AreaJugones* did not respond to the sent emails, and IGN alluded to the fact that they were in "the full process of restructuring", so that at the time of writing the article "there is no organization chart as such". For the first two, the information available on the web pages was used; not so with *IGN*, which only indicates the name of its director.

Chart 1 shows the ratio of women in each of the newsrooms. Globally, men make up 81.4% of the staff, and in all of them, except in *AnaitGames*, they exceed at least two-thirds, with figures that range between 69.2% in *Nintenderos* and 100% in *AreaJugones*. In this sense, *AnaitGames* differentiates from the rest as it is the only magazine that inverts the proportions: 36.4% of men compared to 63.6% of women.

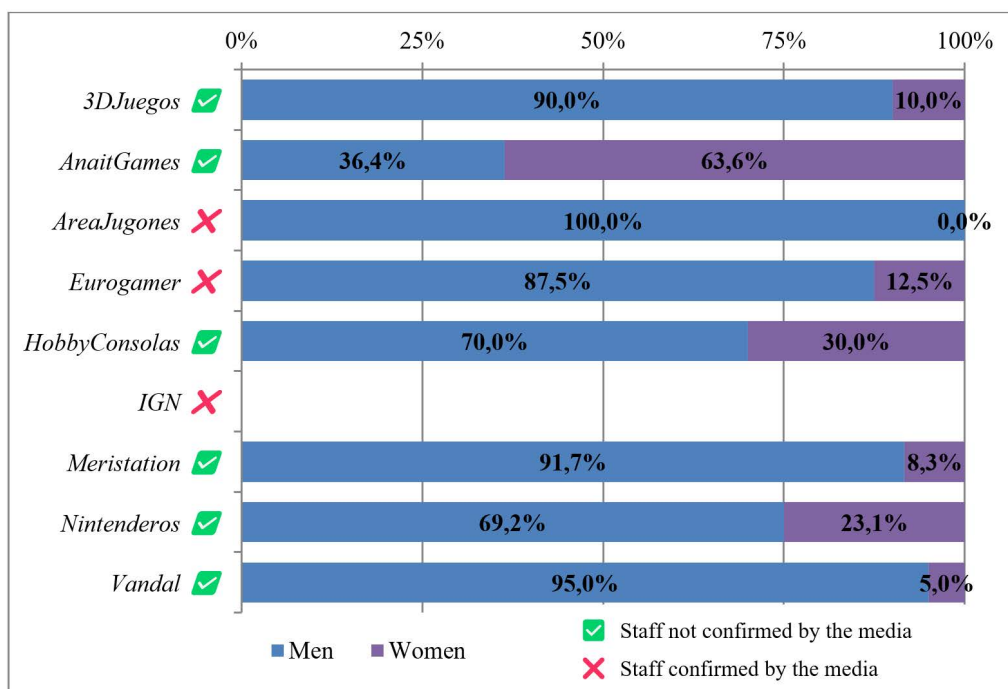


Chart 1: Staff of the main magazines, by gender.

Source: Own elaboration.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 1, women are concentrated to a greater extent in positions outside the newsroom (30.0%), that is, they work mainly as regular or occasional collaborators of the media outlets studied. In the rest of the ranks, more homogeneous proportions are observed, between 11.1% and 15.8%. In fact, there seems to be a higher percentage of women in command positions than in lower hierarchies, but this figure is explained above all by the imbalance produced by the triumvirate of *HobbyConsolas* directors, made up of two women (Mila Lavín and Sonia Herranz). Apart from this anomaly, the truth is that, of the eight available media outlets, in six the command positions are occupied entirely by men—to which a seventh should be added, the excluded *IGN*—.

Table 1: The proportion of men and women by the hierarchy in the media outlet.

| | Command position | | Intermediate positions | | Base positions | | External | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| <i>3DJuegos</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 80.0% | 20.0% |
| <i>Anait</i> | 66.7% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 14.3% | 85.7% |
| <i>ÁreaJugones</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| <i>Eurogamer</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 83.3% | 16.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| <i>HobbyConsolas</i> | 33.3% | 66.7% | 83.3% | 16.7% | 42.9% | 57.1% | 85.7% | 14.3% |
| <i>Meristation</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 75.0% | 25.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| <i>Nintenderos</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 71.4% | 28.6% | 33.3% | 33.3% |
| <i>Vandal</i> | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 83.3% | 16.7% |
| Global | 84.2% | 15.8% | 88.9% | 11.1% | 86.8% | 13.2% | 67.5% | 30.0% |

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. Video game analysis

4.2.1. Sample Description

Concerning the content analysis carried out, as can be seen in Table 2, the journal with the highest number of localized texts is *Meristation* (29.7%), given that its first reviews date back to 1997, followed by *Vandal* (22.3%), which, despite having started its activity in the same period, does not date the entries before 2002. The media outlet with the least representation is *AreaJugones*, with only 2.5% of the sample, having begun to write analysis in 2016. Regarding the other variables, there is a constant growth in the number of files published annually, with a peak of 7.2% in 2018, as well as a notable predominance of reviews of action video games (41.8%) and for all audiences (28.7%). Among the extracted content descriptors, the most frequent is that related to violence (12.3%).

Table 2: Description of the sample.

| n | 34,529 | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Media | 3DJuegos = 14,2% | | AnaitJuegos = 4,1% | | ÁreaJugones = 2,5% | | Eurogamer = 5,9% |
| | HobbyConsolas = 7,6% | | IGN = 8,5% | Meristation = 29,8% | | Nintenderos = 5,0% | HobbyConsolas = 7,6% |
| Year | 1997 = 0.3% | 1998 = 0.6% | 1999 = 0.6% | 2000 = 1.2% | 2001 = 1.4% | 2002 = 2.0% | 2003 = 2.5% |
| | 2004 = 2.6% | 2005 = 2.9% | 2006 = 3.4% | 2007 = 4.2% | 2008 = 4.3% | 2009 = 4.5% | 2010 = 4.2% |
| | 2011 = 4.1% | 2012 = 6.4% | 2013 = 6.1% | 2014 = 6.0% | 2015 = 5.9% | 2016 = 6.2% | |
| | 2017 = 6.9% | 2018 = 7.2% | 2019 = 5.7% | 2020 = 5.1% | 2021 = 4.2% | 2022 = 0.3% | |
| Genre³ | Action = 41.8% | | Arcade = 7.8% | | Adventure = 16.7% | | Driving = 5.4% |
| | Strategy = 7.5% | | FPS = 5.1% | Platforms = 7.8% | | Puzzle = 4.6% | RPG = 10.1% |
| PEGI | +3 = 28.7% | | +7 = 15.1% | | +12 = 23.0% | | +16 = 17.9% |
| Contents | Discrimination = 0.0% | | | Drugs = 0.4% | | | Gambling = 0.4% |
| | Foul language = 4.6% | | Fear = 1.2% | | Sex = 0.8% | | Violence = 12.3% |

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2.2. Women in video game reviews

Of the 34,529 analyzes found in the last 25 years of the Spanish video game press, only 1,204 have been signed by women: 3.6% of the total. In this period, 1,118 authors of different analyzes have also been detected, of which 7.6% were women (see Chart 2). In other words, men not only make up a large majority in the genre (in a ratio of 12 to 1), but they sign on average more than twice as many criticisms as their female companions: specifically, 35.3 compared to 15.8.

³ Given that we worked with more than a hundred different video game genres, in this table, as will be done in the results section, only some of the most relevant are shown.

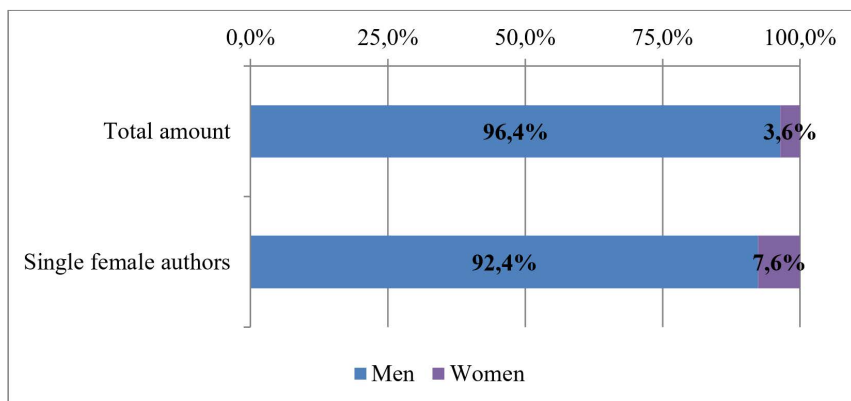


Chart 2: Signatories of the analyses by gender of the author and single authors by gender.
Source: Own elaboration.

The first factor of interest to understand the presence of women in this subarea of specialization is its historical evolution. Chart 3 shows the percentage of analyzes signed by women from 2002 to the first month of 2022. The growth in the ratios of single female authors and texts signed by them is evident in the last decade, as is their underrepresentation in all the areas: in their best years (2015, 2020, and 2021) they barely exceed 10% of the single signatories, although the total number of analyzes written by women is always below; in other words: in all the studied years, men have systematically taken on more pieces than their female peers—. The exception is found in 2022, but with only 92 texts published in January, compared to more than 2,000 on average in previous years, the data is still not very representative of the moment.

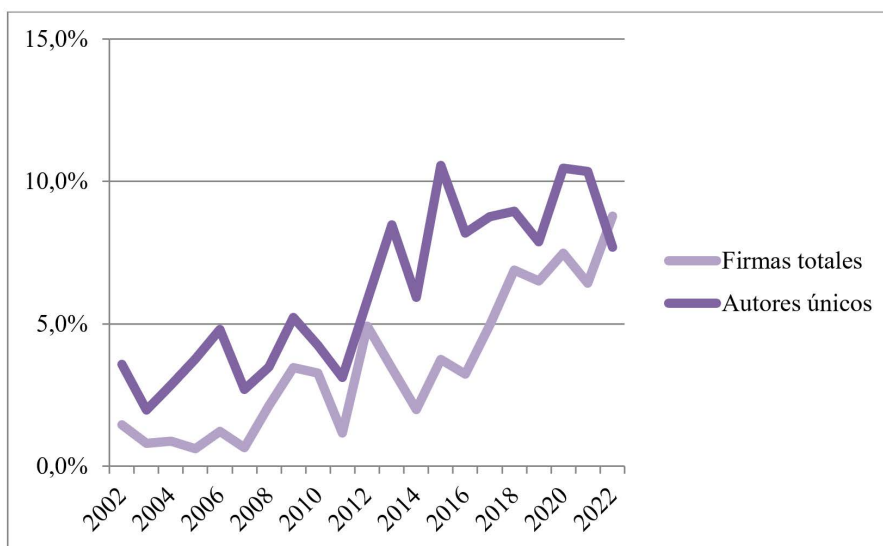


Chart 3: Total signatures of women and single female authors: historical series.
Source: Own elaboration.

The role of each media outlet in the insertion of women has been different. Charts 4 and 5 show the total signatures by each media outlet and the number of authors who have written at least once in each of them. On *AnaitGames*, the website with the *best* results, men still account for 90% of the texts,

while on *3DJuegos* women have signed, in 17 years, 5 reviews out of 4,916 (0.1% of the total, with *AreaJugones* close, with 0.5%). In terms of single female authors, *IGN* is the one with the highest figure (17.9%), while *Vandal* only reaches 2.4% —remarkably, it is also the only portal in which female professionals have written, on average, more analysis than their male peers.

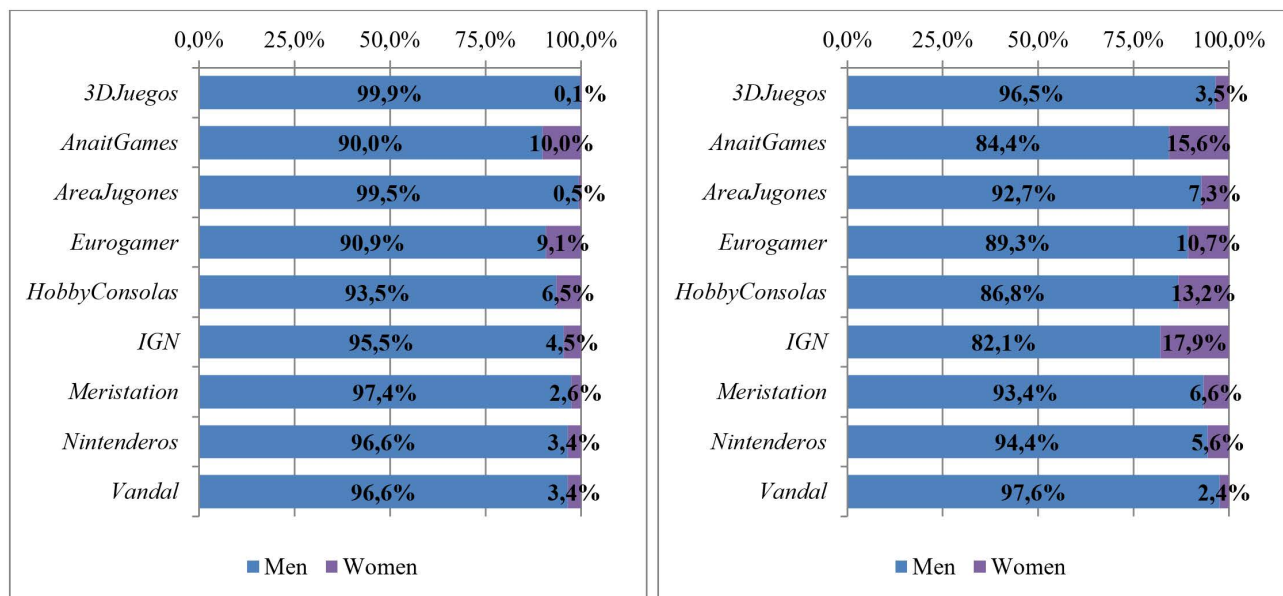


Chart 4: Total signatures by media outlet and gender. **Chart 5:** Single authors by gender and media outlet.

Source: Own elaboration.

Crossing the variables of media outlet, year, and the number of analyses signed by women shows the evolution of the phenomenon in greater detail (see Table 3). In the last decade, there has been a notable jump in several of the headers, which have progressively increased their ratios of texts written by women. *AnaitGames* has gone from not including female signatures in its first years to around 40% in the last three (the work, above all, of Marta Trivi, Paula García, and Nus Cuevas). The case of *Eurogamer* is similar, from nothing in 2013 to 29.4% in 2018, also with Paula García, Eva Cid, or Carmen Suárez as leaders —although in the last three years the quota has been gradually reduced—; as to a lesser extent that of *Meristation*: 0% in 2016 and around 10% since 2017 after the incorporation of Paula Croft, Laura Luna, and Azucena Ruiz.

Table 3: Total signatures of women by media outlet and year (1997-2021).

| | 3DJuegos | AnaitGames | AreaJugones | Eurogamer | HobbyConsolas | IGN | Meristation | Nintenderos | Vandal |
|------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|-------|-------------|-------------|--------|
| 1997 | | | | | | | 3,0% | | |
| 1998 | | | | | | | 0,0% | | |
| 1999 | | | | | | | 0,0% | | |
| 2000 | | | | | | | 0,0% | | |
| 2001 | | | | | | | 0,0% | | |
| 2002 | | | | | | | 1,7% | | 0,0% |
| 2003 | | | | | | | 1,0% | | 0,0% |
| 2004 | | | | | | | 1,3% | | 0,0% |
| 2005 | 0,0% | | | | | | 1,0% | | 0,0% |
| 2006 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | | | | 2,1% | | 0,0% |
| 2007 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | | | | 0,3% | | 1,8% |
| 2008 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 1,2% | | | 2,8% | | 3,6% |
| 2009 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 0,9% | | | 0,7% | | 11,6% |
| 2010 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 0,5% | 0,0% | | 0,3% | | 10,7% |
| 2011 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 0,0% | 0,0% | 2,9% |
| 2012 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 0,6% | 10,6% | 28,0% | 0,0% | 0,0% | 3,2% |
| 2013 | 0,9% | 0,0% | | 0,0% | 11,9% | 6,7% | 0,0% | 3,3% | 3,2% |
| 2014 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 4,3% | 8,3% | 0,3% | 0,0% | 4,8% | 1,8% |
| 2015 | 0,0% | 0,0% | | 7,6% | 6,9% | 1,4% | 0,0% | 11,5% | 6,1% |
| 2016 | 0,7% | 1,2% | 1,9% | 16,8% | 8,6% | 0,7% | 0,0% | 0,0% | 3,3% |
| 2017 | 0,0% | 3,4% | 0,0% | 13,8% | 12,5% | 2,2% | 9,5% | 0,0% | 5,6% |
| 2018 | 0,0% | 28,4% | 0,6% | 29,4% | 7,0% | 2,1% | 10,4% | 4,1% | 4,2% |
| 2019 | 0,0% | 34,9% | 0,0% | 25,7% | 0,9% | 3,2% | 10,9% | 2,7% | 3,1% |
| 2020 | 0,0% | 41,7% | 0,0% | 25,0% | 0,0% | 3,1% | 13,6% | 4,5% | 1,1% |
| 2021 | 0,0% | 37,8% | 1,5% | 18,3% | 0,0% | 1,3% | 11,2% | 4,5% | 0,0% |

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3 also reflects certain anomalies: *HobbyConsolas* goes from 10.6% of reviews signed by women in 2012 to a sustained 0% since 2020. A careful review of the data shows how different female editors begin to lose importance in the newsroom until they stop appearing as authors of analyzes: this is the case of Clara Castaño (last review in 2018), Laura Gómez (2016), Elisabeth López (2019), and Mercedes López (2015). *IGN* achieved an unprecedented 28.0% in 2012, mainly due to the contributions of Gina Tost, who said goodbye in 2013 and precipitated the fall to 0.3% in 2014, from which they have barely recovered (1.3% in 2021). *Nintenderos*, for its part, stands out with 11.5% in 2015, explained by the contributions of Elisabeth López, Paloma Abanzas, and Gemusi, who, however, did not sign a single analysis in 2016. *Vandal*, with peaks of 11.6% in 2009 and valleys of 0% in 2021, owes this fall to the loss of prominence of its female editors Macarena Mey and Sara Borondo, assumed mainly by other male colleagues who begin to publish their first analyses on the same years.

4.2.3. Characteristics of video games analyzed by women

To complete the block of results, this section describes the general characteristics of the video games analyzed by women. The first aspect to consider is the age rating recommended by the European video game agency, the aforementioned PEGI. Chart 6 shows how, as the minimum age recommended by

the authorities increases, the percentage of women who are in charge of these products decreases. The evolution follows a staggered structure (see Chart 6), and the difference between the first and the last rung is such that the ratio of video games for people over seven years of age analyzed by women doubles that of games for people over 18 (5.1 % vs. 2.4%).

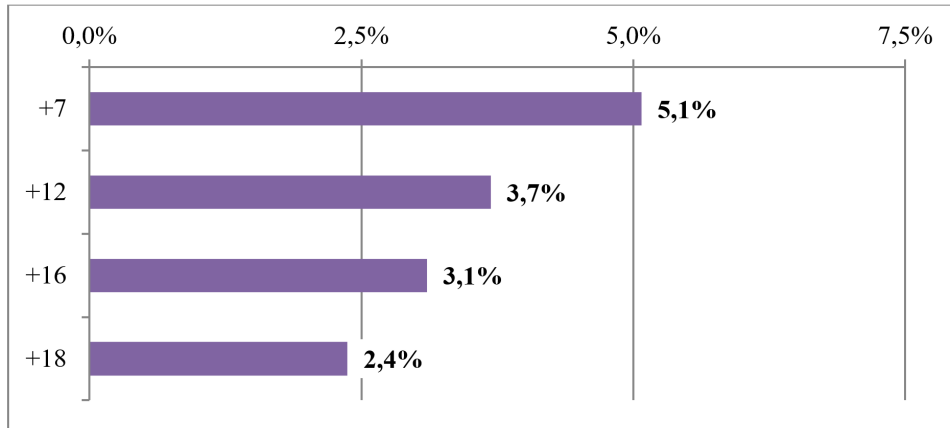


Chart 6: Total female signatures by game age rating (PEGI).

Source: Own elaboration.

There are also notable differences in terms of the content descriptors that PEGI includes (Chart 7). Women are hardly assigned videogames with violent content (4.6%) or foul language (6.3%), being more common in their criticisms those in which drugs (11.6%), gambling (10.1%), or sex (9.1%) appear.

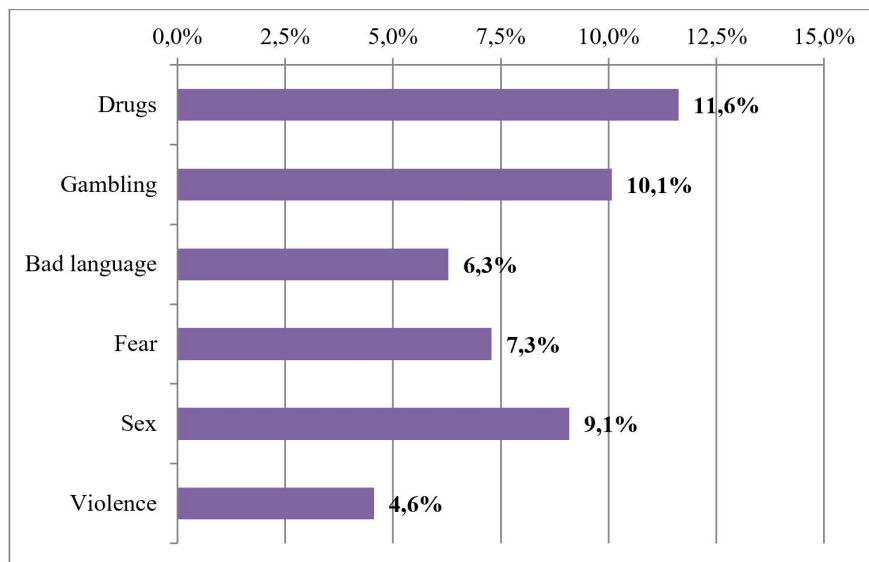


Chart 7: Total signatures of women according to game content descriptors (PEGI).

Source: Own elaboration.

More illustrative are the percentages obtained by crossing the data of authors with the genre of the video game (see Chart 8). Women write mostly about musical games (8.4%), graphic adventures (6.6%), and simulations (5.6%). On the other hand, their relationship with the genres of driving (0.7%), fighting (0.9%), or sports (1.4%) is minimal. Although these percentages are generally low, the relative differences are large: it is up to 12 times more likely to find a woman writing about a music video game than writing about a driving game.

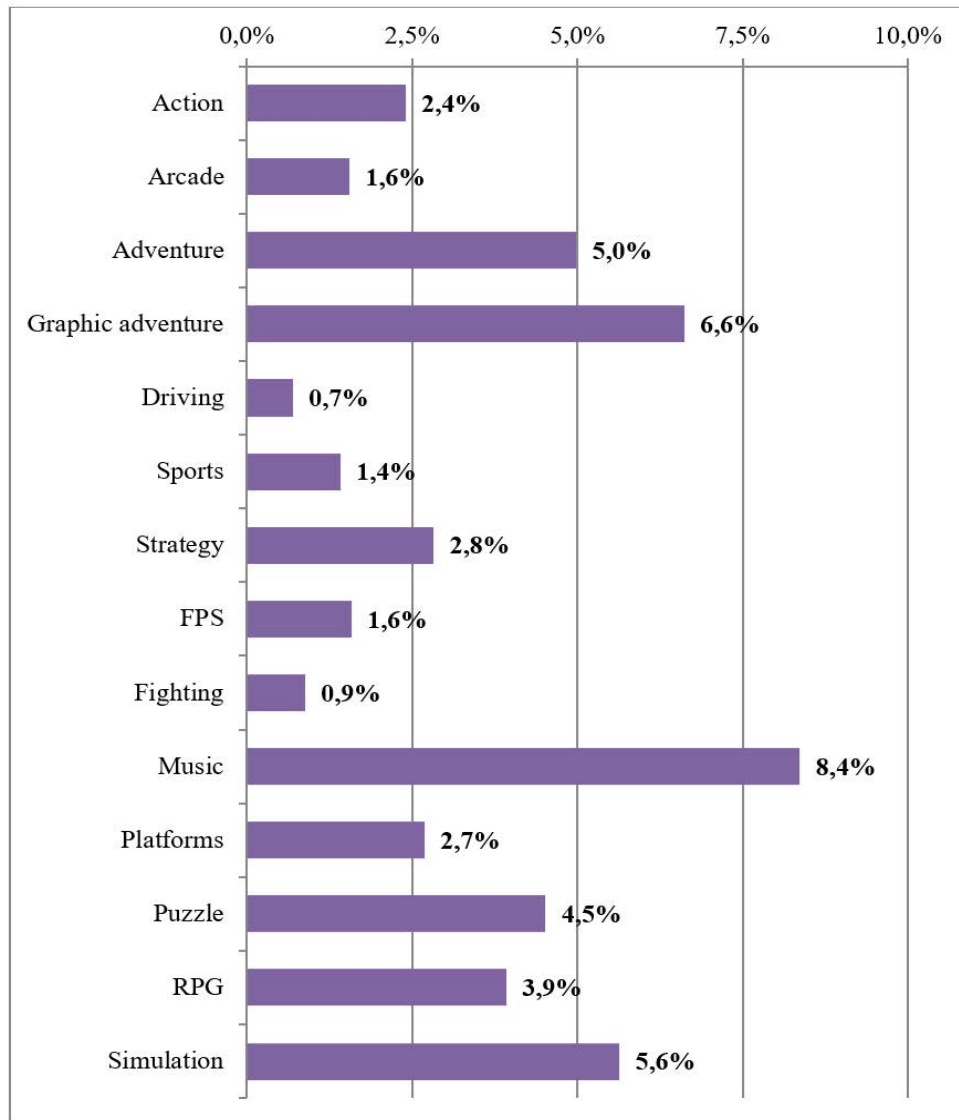


Chart 8: Total signatures of women by video game genre.

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

This work shows, for the first time based on quantitative empirical data, the role of women in cultural journalism specialized in video games in Spain. Through surveys of the nine main media outlets in the sector and systematic analysis of the texts published in the last 25 years, it is possible to glimpse the magnitude of a gap historically denounced by the literature (Afonso-Noda and Aguilera-Ávila, 2021; Gil- Juárez and Feliu, 2017; Gómez (b), 2018; Moldes-Farelo, 2019; Manzano-Zambruno and Paredes-Otero, 2020; Trivi, 2018).

The first objective (O1) of this work was to describe the current presence of women in the editorial structures of the great specialized Spanish magazines. The data offered leaves little room for interpretation: women have an anecdotal representation in the offices of the vast majority of the studied media outlets. They do not even reach the figure of one in five workers (specifically, they account for 18.6%), and there are cases of media outlets made up entirely of men (*AreaJugones*) and many others in which they comfortably exceed 90%. The exception is *AnaitGames*, where the proportions are reversed and women are the majority (almost two-thirds).

Besides being a minority, women occupy lower-ranking positions in the structure of newsrooms. In fact, they predominate in external positions, that is, those that do not imply a stable employment relationship with the environment, while their relationship with command positions is practically non-existent if *AnaitGames* and *HobbyConsolas* are excluded again: in the rest of the media outlets, the positions of maximum responsibility are monopolized by men.

The second objective (O2) proposed to examine the role of women in the journalistic genre of specialized cultural information, criticism, or analysis in the case of video games, crossing the data with the year, gender, age classification, or type of content variables. In this block, the results obtained are once again striking and illustrative of the described phenomenon.

In the first place, it is appreciated again how the role of women has been, since the origins of the video game press in Spain, practically residual; It is men who have been in charge of deciding, to a greater extent, which games are worth paying attention to. Female authors have signed only 3.6% of all the analyzes published since 1997, to which is added that each one has written, on average, fewer texts than their male colleagues. That is to say, not only is it much more difficult to find a woman writing about video games but, when they do, they lavish much less. Furthermore, several cases of women who enjoyed a relevant position in their respective media and, over time, ended up losing it, have been highlighted.

Time is precisely one of the variables of greatest interest insofar as it allows reflecting the historical evolution of the phenomenon and predicting the possible course of the sector. Although in recent decades the female presence in the analyzed texts has doubled, the figures are still far from ideal: not even in the best of years do women approach 10% of written reviews. Although they seem to be taking timid steps toward inclusion, the video game press still needs a greater push to reduce the enormous gap described in this article, especially in some media outlets in which the analyzes carried out by women are almost an eventuality (see 0.1% in *3DJuegos*). In this aspect, it is convenient to recognize the work carried out in recent years, although with different degrees of success, by *AnaitGames*, *Eurogamer*, or *Meristation*, although these two are still very far from minimally equal figures.

Regarding the types of games, it is evident how the gender roles outlined in the academic literature are reproduced (Klevjer and Hovden, 2017; López-Fernández et al., 2019; Ricoy and Ameneiros, 2016; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 1998). Women are assigned the “friendliest” games, recommended for a more general public (7 years or older), while those recommended for people over 18 are reserved for men—always within the preponderance they have over every type of product. When female journalists face video game criticism from the latter group, it is more likely that it includes drugs, gambling, or sex than violence, foul language, or fear.

Additionally, it is verified that there are favorite genres for women, such as musicals—which include dance games, among others—and graphic adventures—more focused on narrative than action—. Simulations also stand out in this section, as previous works have already highlighted (Afonso-Noda and Aguilera-Ávila, 2021; Klevjer and Hovden, 2017; Ricoy and Ameneiros, 2016). Instead, women tend to disappear from fighting, driving and even sports video games.

These crossovers of variables are shown to be in line with the preferences indicated by women in other studies: apparently, female specialized journalists deal more with the games that women tend to like more and vice versa. However, given that it is denounced how certain stereotypes and gender roles are perpetuated in the consumption of video games, the fact that the sector's own press reproduces these patterns only contributes to reinforcing the existing gap between both groups.

Perhaps this last aspect may be secondary if the extreme inequality reflected at all levels is taken into account, but it is no less important that the small number of experts and referents who rank and determine which are the main works that deserve the attention of the gamer audience, deal above all with the so-called "games for girls", that small concession of an industry that, according to García (2018) and Méndez-Martínez (2017), seems that "does not belong to them". The fact that the inequality observed in the profession does not correspond to the powerful base of female players, which in practice equals that of male players —despite feeling less identified with the idiosyncrasies of the eminently male industry— places the national media panorama, at least for now, much closer to the mechanisms that have opened that gap than to the social majority, which slowly seems to be closing a distance built based on prejudices and ideas from another time. The implementation of equality policies within these entities, among other measures, can become a facilitator of change, both when accessing this type of position and when professionally performing and developing in them with the same guarantees as any other male partner.

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AUTHOR/S:

Manuel García-Borrego

Universidad de Málaga / Universitat Jaume I

International Doctor in Education and Social Communication from the Universidad de Málaga (2020), he currently enjoys a Margarita Salas - NextGenerationEU postdoctoral contract at the Universitat Jaume I granted by the Universidad de Málaga. Accredited as Associate Professor by ANECA, he has forty publications in some of the main journals (*El Profesional de la Información, Revista Latina de Comunicación, Cuadernos.info* ...) and Spanish-speaking publishers (Tirant Lo Blanch, Gedisa, Pyramid...). He has participated in five research projects. In 2020, he received the Faculty Award from the Universidad de Málaga.

manoletus@uma.es / mborrego@uji.es

Índice H: 4

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6207-8741>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=6MOjILMAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao>

ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Manuel_Garcia-Borrego

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57214221253>

Academia.edu: <https://uma.academia.edu/ManuelGarc%C3%ADaBorrego>

Inmaculada Montes-Rodríguez

Universidad de Málaga

Graduated in Journalism from the Universidad de Málaga (2014), she is an expert in Public Communication and Dissemination of Science from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2021) and has a Master's Degree in Politics and Democracy from the UNED (2022). She is currently part of the communication team of the Publications and Scientific Dissemination Service of the Universidad de Málaga. Her main publications have addressed the media treatment of political women and the gender gap in journalism training.

imontes@uma.es

Índice H: 1

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8087-0756>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=28X51TUAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Inmaculada-Montes-Rodriguez-2141390955>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57201499132>

Alberto Ruiz-Aguilar

Universidad de Málaga

Graduated in Journalism from the Universidad de Málaga (2014) and has a Master's Degree in Professional Multimedia Journalism from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2017), he has specialized, above all, in new digital industries and computer security. He has been professionally dedicated to technological journalism for 10 years. His main research interests are journalism specialized in video games, the precariousness of the journalistic profession, and new formats on digital platforms.

arzaguiar@gmail.com