

Videogames and Critical Media Literacy in Family Contexts in Norway

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FOREWORD

This research project: ‘Videogames and Critical Media Literacy in Family Contexts in Norway (2021 to 2023)’ explores not only how youth and parents in Norway understand critical media literacy, but also how they apply it in their day to day lives. While critical to socio-cultural and technological implications of video gaming in family contexts, the study reveals that both target groups manifest limited critical media literacy on certain aspects of video games such as the political economy of video games, particularly on algorithms and the production and marketing side of video games. The project has therefore developed resources and tools that can help relevant actors to improve their critical media literacies.

Our gratitude goes to the Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet) and Rådet for Anvendt Medieforskning (RAM) who through financial support made this investigation possible. We also wish to thank the youth and parents who participated in the investigations by giving us access to their insights and who graciously responded to our questions and activities. Further, we are grateful to our collaborating partners from NOMKUS, Arendal Voksenopplæring and NDLA for their invaluable support and engagement.

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SAMMENDRAG

Hovedmålet med dette forsknings- og utviklingsprosjektet var å få frembringe ny kunnskap om kritisk medieforståelse i familiekontekster i Norge, både blant de unge og blant deres foreldre. De konkrete målene var å:

- a) utforske unges og foreldres sosiokulturelle og teknologiske mediekompetanse, med fokus på dataspill.
- b) utvikle verktøy og ressurser for å styrke barns kritiske medieforståelse og foreldres evne til å regulere dataspilling.
- c) legge til rette for at barn, foreldre og fagfolk deltar i forskningsprosessen rundt dette.
- d) bidra til utvikling av et konseptuelt og metodisk rammeverk for kritisk medieforståelse.

Vi bruker en tverrfaglig tilnærming i studien, med perspektiver fra medievitenskap, forbruksforskning, ungdomsforskning, livssynsteori og mediekompetanse-feltet. Vi henter vår forståelse av begrepet mediekompetanse fra Medietilsynets definisjon av kritisk medieforståelse, nemlig «ferdigheter og kunnskap som folk trenger for å ta velinformerte valg om medieinnhold som de konsumerer, skaper eller deler»¹.

Prosjektets hovedmålgrupper er barn og unge i alderen 10-19 år, samt foreldre. Konteksten er familiers hverdagserfaringer når det gjelder ferdigheter og bruk av dataspill, og informantene kommer fra både etnisk norsk bakgrunn, fra blandede familier og fra familier med innvandrerbakgrunn. Prosjektet benytter deltakende aksjonsforskning som metodisk tilnærming, både fokusgruppeintervjuer og workshops. I tillegg går prosjektet i dialog med relevante aktører i bransjen. Prosjektets ambisjon er å frembringe ny kunnskap om mediekompetanse og å utvikle målrettede verktøy og ressurser for barn og foreldre i familiekonteksten, samt til bruk i skole, fritidssektoren og på andre aktuelle arenaer.

Prosjektet er basert på resultater fra tidligere prosjekter, finansiert av Medietilsynet (RAM)^{2,3}. Disse handler om temaer som dataspill, mediebruk, regulering og problematisk spillforebygging, med søkelys på barn og unge i familiesammenheng. Prosjektene har blant annet satt søkelys på dataspillvaner, identitet og tilhørighet, kjønn, konflikt og dataspillregulering. Videre berører studiene hvordan familier forhandler og samhandler med de kommersielle sidene av videospill. I dette prosjektet går vi et skritt videre, ved å utforske unges og foreldres kritiske mediekompetanse. Dette inkluderer både spillferdigheter og spillkunnskap, i tillegg til holdninger til komplekse sosio-teknologiske og kulturelle sider av de daglige spillopplevelsene deres.

Følgende funn har kommet frem:

- a) Barn og foreldre engasjerer seg i dataspill som en måte å knytte familieband og som en sosial aktivitet. Dette skjer likevel som regel når barna er noe yngre. Når unge

¹ <https://www.medietilsynet.no/digitale-medier/kritisk-medieforstaelse/dette-er-kritisk-medieforstaelse/>

² <https://www.vestforsk.no/nn/project/en-studie-av-forhold-til-dataspill-blant-minoritetsungdom-i-norge>

³ <https://www.vestforsk.no/nn/project/ungdom-dataspill-konflikt-og-regulering-fra-et-familieperspektiv>

⁴ <https://www.nla.no/nyheter/2019/juli/dataspillforskning/>

engasjerer seg i spill som en fellesaktivitet sammen med foreldrene, blir samhandling og dialog, kunnskapsutveksling, læring og "kritiske medieferdigheter" oppnådd enklere og mer uanstrengt. Når foreldrene deltar, blir det også mulig for dem å forstå hvordan videospill fungerer, noe som også bidrar til mindre konflikt når det gjelder regulering av spillingen.

- b) Foreldre oppfatter videospill som tidkrevende og trengte derfor innspill for å kunne utøve rollen som regulatorer tydeligere. Noen av foreldrene var også opptatt av vulgær språkbruk, aldersgrense og upassende innhold. Denne opplevelsen og forståelsen av videospill hadde resultert i ulike strategier for å løse utfordringene. Noen hadde valgt dialog, andre mer autoritære og ovenfra-ned tilnærminger, som å slå av internett eller forby lek, mens andre igjen hadde bestemt seg for å bruke filtre, regler og så videre. I disse tilfellene ble det vanskelig å oppnå kritisk medieforståelse.

Vi fant også ut at noen foreldre, særlig nyankomne innvandrere - og da gjerne på grunn av manglende norskkunnskap eller kjennskap til systemene i Norge, begrenset spillingen eller koblet seg fra problemet. Det nye scenariet med dataspill ble ansett som skummelt. Dette handler om å lære om, og regulere, det ukjente. I slike scenarier var det ikke rom for kritisk mediekunnskap.

Til tross for utfordringene ovenfor oppfattet flere foreldre, dataspill som en positiv faktor i barnas og familiens sosiale liv. Perspektiver på positive forståelser av videospill, oppnådd gjennom erfaring, kunne være: familie- og ungdomssosialisering, barns velvære og mentale helse, godt dokumenterte positive faktorer som samarbeid, det å få venner og å lære seg nye ferdigheter, strategisk tenkning og så videre. Men selv om aspekter som disse var tydelige for foreldrene, viste de begrenset leseferdighet på enkelte spørsmål, særlig om den politiske økonomien til videospill, algoritmer og hvordan dette påvirker hverdagens videospillopplevelser.

- c) Lignende begrenset forståelse av enkelte spørsmål og erfaringer rundt spill, ble funnet hos de unge. De hadde god forståelse av fordeler og ulemper med videospill, men begrenset innsikt i rollen og betydningen av den politiske økonomien til videospill. Blant de positive forståelsene var rollen videospill har i sosialisering, vennerelasjoner, læring og identitetsdannelse. Blant negative aspekter nevnte ungdom at dataspill var tidkrevende og også at foreldre ikke forsto dataspill og at de var unødvendig strenge. Som en generell observasjon, opplevde vi at forskningsprosessen i seg selv skapte en betydelig mulighet for kritisk mediekunnskap for både foreldrene og de unge fordi de gjennom spørsmål og dialog ble utfordret til å tenke og reflektere kritisk om disse temaene.

Metodikken for skreddersydde verkstedaktiviteter var spesielt fruktbar for ungdommene, som opplevde disse som en mulighet for bevisstgjøring. Oppgavene og de påfølgende plenumsøktene bidro til praktisk forståelse av viktige temaer, som algoritmer, personvern, produksjonsaspekter ved videospill med mer. Aktivitetene fikk dem til å tenke på ting som de rutinemessig gjorde, men ikke reflektere over.

Kunnskapshullene hos målgruppene har ført til utvikling av ressurser og verktøy for foreldre, barn og unge samt andre relevante aktører. Disse inkluderer:

- a) Veiledning for foreldre, lærere og andre med trinnvise instruksjoner og aktiviteter om hvordan man kan fremme kritisk medieforståelse og spill kompetanse, med søkelys på videospill.
- b) VR 360/Escape Room for ungdom, med oppgaver rettet mot å teste og utfordre unge til å tenke kritisk på problemstillinger som algoritmer, teknologi, personvern med mer. Det virtuelle rommet er utarbeidet av prosjektpartnerne Nasjonal digital læringsarena (NDLA) og har fokus på kritisk mediekunnskap i videospill så vel som i sosiale medier.
- c)) Prosjektet har eller er i gang med å gjennomføre flere formidlingsaktiviteter, bestående av blant annet vitenskapelige artikler og konferanseinnlegg.

SUMMARY

The main aim of this research and development project was to generate new knowledge about the critical media understanding among young people, parents and in family contexts in Norway. The specific aims were to:

- a. explore young people's and parents' socio-cultural and technological media competence with a focus on computer games.
- b. develop tools/resources to strengthen children's critical media understanding and parents' ability to regulate computer gaming
- c. facilitate the participation of children, parents, and subject experts in the research process
- d. contribute to the development of a conceptual and methodological framework for critical media understanding

An interdisciplinary approach is pursued in this study with perspectives from media science, consumption research, youth research, worldview theory and the New Literacies field. The project's understanding of media competence is taken from the Norwegian Media Authority's definition of critical media as "skills and knowledge that people need to make well-informed choices about media content that they consume, create or share".⁵

The project's main target groups are children and young people aged 10-19 as well as parents. The context is family everyday experiences regarding video game literacies, and the informants come from both ethnic Norwegian backgrounds, blended families and families with immigrant backgrounds. The project uses a participatory action research methodological approach consisting of focus group interviews and workshops. In addition, the project engages in dialogue with relevant players in the industry. The project's ambition is to build new knowledge about media competence and to develop targeted tools and resources for children and parents in the family context, as well as being relevant for the leisure sector and other arenas.

The project is based on results from relevant previous projects, funded by The Norwegian Media Authority (RAM), on the subject of video gaming, media use, regulation and problematic gaming prevention as the focus is on children and young people and in family contexts. These previous projects have focused on, among other things, video game habits, identity construction and belonging, gender issues, conflict and video game regulation. The studies also touch on how families negotiate and interact with commercial aspects of video games. In this project, we go a step further by exploring state of young people's and parents' critical media competence that includes skills-sets, knowledge and attitudes towards the complex socio-technical and cultural dimensions of their everyday video games experiences.

The following findings have emerged from the study:

- a. Youth and parents participated in video gaming as a family bonding and social activity in several families. This occurred mostly when the children were younger. During

⁵ <https://www.medietilsynet.no/digitale-medier/kritisk-medieforstaelse/dette-er-kritisk-medieforstaelse/>

such occasions, interactions and dialogue, knowledge exchange, learning and ‘critical media literacies’ were gained easier and more effortless. The parental participation enabled parents to understand the workings of video games which also contributed to less conflict when it comes to regulation.

- b. As parents, the perception of video games as time-consuming and therefore needing their input as regulators was evident. Some of the parents were also concerned with issues such as vulgar language, age-limit and inappropriate content. This understanding resulted into different ways of solving the problem, with some choosing dialogue, others choosing more authoritarian and top-down approaches like switching off the internet or forbidding play, while others decided to use filters, rules, and so on. In such cases avenues for critical media literacy were shut down.

We also learnt that some parents, particularly newcomers with immigrant backgrounds, due to lack of language skills or knowledge about systems in Norway, often restricted video gaming or disengaged from the issues. The new scenario with video games (learning about and regulating the unknown) was considered scary. In such scenarios, there was no room for critical media literacy.

Despite the challenges above, several parents experienced video games as positive activities in their children’s and their family’s social life. Perspectives on positive understandings of video games obtained through experiences included: family and youth socialization, children’s well-being and mental health, as well as the well documented positive factors such as collaboration, making friends, learning new skills, strategic thinking and more. But while these new literacies were evident for parents, they showed limited literacy on issues particularly related to the political economy of video games, algorithms and how that affects everyday video game experiences.

- c. Regarding youth, similar experiences as parents on literacies were observed. The youth showed an understanding of the pros and cons of video gaming but limited insights into the role and importance of political-economy of video games. Among the positive understandings was the role of the video games regarding socialization, making friends, escaping everyday challenges and being good at something (mastery) as well as the possibility to experiment with identity and belonging. The negative understandings included the fact that video games were time-consuming and also that some parents did not understand video games and were unnecessarily strict.
- d. As a general observation, the research process engendering participatory approaches was experienced as a significant critical media literacy opportunity for both parents and youth because through the questioning and dialogue, they were forced to think and reflect critically about these topics. The methodology on specifically tailored

workshop activities was particularly fruitful for the youth, who experienced these as an opportunity to raise their awareness. Through the tasks and plenary sessions afterwards, they were able to gain practical understandings of important topics such as algorithms, privacy, production aspects of video games and more. Much of this knowledge was either taken for granted or not thought about.

The knowledge gaps among the target groups led to the development of resources and tools for parents and youth as well as other relevant stakeholders. These include:

- a. Guide for parents, teachers and others with step-by-step instructions and activities on how to promote critical media/game literacy with a focus on video games.
- b. VR 360/Escape Room for youth with tasks aimed at testing and challenging young people to think critically on issues such as algorithms, technology, privacy and more. The virtual room was prepared by the project partners Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena (NDLA) and has a focus on critical media literacy in video games as well as social media contexts.
- c. The project contains a range of dissemination activities from scientific publication of results to conference presentation and popular versions of disseminating research findings as indicated in this report.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Video games as a media form are significant in the everyday life of Norwegian children and young people. According to EU Kids Online (2020), 80% of children in Norway between the ages of 9-16 are online every day for approx. 3.5 hours (Smahel et al. 2020). According to the Norwegian Media Authority, nine out of ten children aged 9 to 18 use one or more social media, and among 12-year-old girls and 14-year-old boys, almost everyone uses social media. A survey by the Danish Media Authority shows that 96% of boys and 63% of girls aged 9-18 play online games, either on PCs, PlayStation consoles, mobile phones or tablets (Norwegian Media Authority, 2018). Figures from 2020 show stable figures for boys but an increase from 63% to 73% of girls who play video games (Medietilsynet 2020). There is an increasing need for children and young people for tools for critical analysis to gain a deeper perspective of the rapidly changing media environment, their role as consumers, and how to best participate in it.

In recent years, several studies have highlighted the positive attributes of video games. For example, studies show how players develop friendships, complex organizational skills as well as ability to collaborate, and acquire specialized knowledge and language skills as part of the virtual game (Dralega and Corneliussen 2018; Medietilsynet 2018; Ask 2011; Børsum 2012). In other instances, video games have been described as a "magic circle" with rules that are different from reality (Huizinga 1955 (1938), where players can experiment with identity, behaviour, fantasies and more (Turkle 1996; Shaw, 2014). The ability to experiment with identity through fantasy, has been a subject of research by Dralega and Corneliussen (2018a); (2018b) in their studies on youth with immigrant backgrounds in Norway. Steinkuehler and Williams (2006), on the other hand, describe games as "a third place", a place for informal socialization and the development of social capital (Ibid.). Their research shows that media use and video gaming contribute positively to young people's everyday life. Video games could contribute positively to friendship and socialization, language proficiency, coordination, learning, etc. (Medietilsynet 2018; Dralega et. Al. 2018) in addition to contributing to strategic thinking, cooperation, problem solving and empathy, according to UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi Institute's initiative for 'Games for Learning' (UNESCO MGIEP⁶).

⁶ <https://mgiep.unesco.org/games-for-learning>

Debates about media literacy are also about the manner and purpose of participation in society. Without a democratic and critical approach to media use, the public will only be positioned as selective recipients and consumers of online information and communication (Medietilsynet 2019). The issue has been addressed in various studies about children and young people's understanding, experiences, attitudes and challenges related to social media (Medietilsynet 2018; Smahel et al. 2020; Mainsah and Dralega 2014).

Despite positive effects, the debate has also pointed out negative consequences of video games. Ask (2011), for example, shows that in the relatively short history of video games, we have been presented with conflicting visions of what video games are. Common debates relate to games as violent (Anderson and Dill 2000; Dill and Dill 1998) and as addictive (Chappell et al. 2006; Griffiths 2005). Here, time use has been a large part of the concern (Helle, 2020; Medietilsynet 2018; 2016; Nova 2018, Seddighi, Dralega, Corneliussen and Prøitz 2018). In fact, according to the time use study from the Norwegian Media Authority (2016a), 96% of boys and 76% of girls in Norway had experienced that the time-intensive form of gaming has been a source of conflict and concern. Other studies discuss this conflict from different points of view, such as little sleep (Helle, 2020), as a source of conflict among non-Western youth (Dralega et. al. 2018; 2019; 2020); Ask 2011; The Norwegian Media Authority 2016b; Linderoth and Bennerstedt 2007) and from the perspective of gender (Agdestein 2016; Dralega and Corneliussen 2018).

Hence, the rise in popularity of video games in Norway and throughout the world is followed by concerns. Already in the late 1990s and early 2000s, parents were concerned that violent computer games would cause their children to become desensitized to violence and would find it easier to resort to acts of violence in everyday life (Karlsen 2001). Although this debate occasionally appears in the news media and the like, the greater concern these days seems to dwell on use of time (Action Plan 2016-2018; Medietilsynet 2015; Frøyland et al. 2010). Many parents are concerned that their children are "caught up" in the games, which then steal time from schoolwork, friends or other (more "valuable") social activities (Helle 2020; Ask 2011; Dralega; Seddighi', Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2019). Ask (2011) finds that many parents worry that their children will become "addicted". The debate surrounding addiction discourse in both academia and the wider public has been about what criteria should be used to measure the extent to which 'addictive' patterns can be considered problematic or not. This discussion has been taken up by other studies (for example in Helle 2020; Frøyland et al. 2010; Livingston et al. 2011; Cover 2006; Medietilsynet 2016b). If the gaming leads to poorer

school performance, little sleep, less social interaction, less family time, or in other ways reduces the player's "quality of life", it is easy to see the gaming as problematic. Here, families should be able to make a move for changes.

More recently, attention has shifted towards critical media literacy and competence, especially in a "Post-truth" society characterized, among other things, by mediatization; untruth, hatred, exploitation, breach of privacy and commercialization (Medietilsynet 2019; Love 2010; Kellner and Share 2019; Freshette 2019).

One of the inspirations for this study was the gap in literature on critical media competence in relation to video games. A similar study on (social) media conducted by the Norwegian Media Authority (2019) shows that although 16-20-year olds are the most digital age group in the Norwegian population, relatively few (21% versus 43% in the general population) are considered to have a "high critical media understanding" (p.5). Twice as many in this category (21%) have "low critical media understanding", i.e. 9%, more than the general population. (ibid.). Previous research on video games and video gameregulation among non-Western young people in family contexts, for example, revealed how several of the youth in the study were uncritical about sexualization and discrimination (Dralega and Corneliusen 2018) as well as about micro transactions and spending money on video games (Dralega, Repstad, Corneliusen and Seddighi, 2020; Action Plan 2019-21). The Dralega et al. 2020 study resulted in interesting resources such as infographic materials, cartoons, brochures as well as videos produced for the target groups as a means of heightening critical media literacy – with a focus on video games and family contexts.

Even though these fragmented and relevant studies fill an important gap and contribute to the debate around critical media understanding, especially about video games, there is still a lot of consolidation work to be done related to raising media literacy among children, young people and families in Norway. In a context where ICT, the media industry, market logics and business models are constantly changing rapidly, this has become even more important. In our project, we address topics such as digital mastery, privacy, monitoring, algorithms, marketing, spending money, gender, psychological challenges, discrimination, social challenges, and cultural differences as some of the critical points for media literacy research and building.

This project takes as its starting point family contexts with children and places a particular focus on the role of media users (video game players) in a critical, democratic, multicultural society characterized by diversity of outlook and worldviews. In that sense, critical media

literacy and competence is central (Medietilsynet 2019; Kellner and Share 2019; Swertz 2016). Our project addresses the earmarked RAM call for 'applied media research' related to promoting media literacy around video games among children and young people in Norway. The increase in awareness as well as building competences was considered vital in video game regulation and prevention from abuse and exploitation. Our applied research directly addresses key RAM's concerns:

"The Norwegian Media Authority places particular emphasis on application-oriented research across mediums and on topics linked to editorial, financial and technical matters. In addition, there is one theme that is prioritized in particular each year - this year it is research into computer games."

In addition, Norwegian Media Authority Priority No. 2 earmarked funds for video games with the aim to contribute to the prevention of 'addictive problems:

"...through increased knowledge about computer games."

Further, in priority No. 8 in support for development work:

"RAM wishes to facilitate development work in the following ways: a. stimulate collaboration between practitioners and an academic environment by prioritizing collaborative projects."

The 'Action plan against problematic gaming 2019-21' is not only an important resource for this study, but also a tool for working in a targeted manner against the negative social consequences that video games can have. We will contribute by raising awareness and knowledge about potentially negative aspects of video games as well as contribute to better regulation of video games within family contexts. The study provides new insights into opportunities, challenges, socio-cultural and digital discourses around video games, in addition to which (socio-cultural and digital) recommendations seem to work best in families with youths. The goal is for video gaming and video gamers (and their families) to be aware, more critical and resilient in the face of negative aspects of video games and media use in general. As explained in the methodology section, both young people and parents or guardians were invited to navigate that landscape together with researchers and other relevant actors through reflective and participatory methodologies for empowerment.

Objectives and research questions

The main goal is to assess video game literacy and competence (and how deeply various mechanisms in/about games are understood), values and challenges around video games as a starting point for developing tools/resources in family contexts. The project addresses the following issues:

- a) What is the state of critical game media literacy (GML) and competence among families (parents and youth) in Norway?
- b) What competences and strategies do families need for a conscious, critical and safe use and regulation of video games?

CHAPTER 2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the Norwegian Media Authority, media literacy involves "skills and knowledge that people need to make well-informed choices about media content that they consume, create or share" (Medietilsynet 2019). According to Common Sense Media "Media literacy is the ability to identify different types of media and understand the messages they send. Children take in an enormous amount of information from a wide range of sources, far beyond the traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers and magazines). There are text messages, memes, viral videos, social media, video games, advertising and more. But all media share one thing: Someone created it. And it was created for a reason. Understanding that reason is the foundation of media literacy"⁷.

Children having critical media competence is about learning to think critically; being a smart consumer of cultural products and information; recognizing a point of view; creating responsible media and identifying the media's role in our culture (Ibid.).

Swertz (2016: 5) elaborates the term with an approach to Game Media Literacy with the assumption that: "Critical thinking is connected to the consideration of inequalities and diversity. Important areas in the definitions of critical thinking are gender justice, people with special needs and race."

Game Media Literacy (GML) consists of a formation process in which learning is based on computer games (Gentikov 2007; Swertz 2016; Ranieri 2016). This involves a focus on learning in video games, learning about video games and learning from video games (Swertz 2016). Our approach is learning ABOUT computer games, where the focus is on critical thinking with an emphasis on digital, socio-economic and cultural contexts and actions. Critical thinking tends to increase awareness of representation, diversity, social contexts and societal structures (Kellner and Share 2007; Garcia, Segler and Share 2013, Ranieri 2016). Values in and around the game's content; rules; symbolism and other operating mechanisms in and around games must be examined in dialogue and active participation with the users. Raising critical game media literacy competence in our project is also a strategy for repositioning the media user or gamer - from passive to active, from recipient to participant and from consumer to citizen (Livingstone, 2004, p. 20).

⁷ <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/news-and-media-literacy/what-is-media-literacy-and-why-is-it-important>

In order to operationalize our approach to GML competence, David Buckingham's (2003) model serves as a starting point. Buckingham's model consists of four dimensions: production, representation, language and audience. Regarding production, the focus is on uncovering media users' understanding of the economic and political forces that govern the media industry, media production and infrastructures, nationally and internationally. Focus on the production dimension of video games includes questions such as: Who owns the companies that produce video games? What kind of technology and infrastructures are behind the games and how do they work? What kind of regulation governs the gaming industry and how are consumers' rights protected?

The representation dimension is about people's ability to uncover the life values and worldviews that are conveyed in media narratives. Focus on the representation dimension of video games includes questions such as: How realistic are the game narratives and to what extent do these narratives reflect society? How are different groups portrayed in society and to what extent are these portrayals stereotypical? How do these representations affect our view of different groups?

The language dimension deals with the linguistic means used by the media to convey their message. Focus on the language dimension of video games includes questions such as: What kind of language is used in games to convey messages? What kind of language conventions and genres are used in games and how do they operate? How is a message communicated through a combination of words, sound and images? How does technology affect what can be conveyed in games?

In the audience dimension, the focus is on the way users, and their interests and needs, are understood by the producers, how the media products are marketed, and how different groups use, interpret, and relate to the media. Focus on the audience dimension of video games includes questions such as: What forms of marketing do video game producers use and how do users relate to this marketing? What kind of ideas do video game producers have about different groups and how do they appeal to different groups? How do people use video games in their everyday lives and what kind of gaming habits do they have? What do they like or dislike about video games? What roles do gender, age, class, outlook on life and ethnic background play in the way people use, understand, and relate to games and game culture in general?

This study addresses some of these topics with critical lenses on the skills, competences, and social practices of participants regarding issues such as time and money investments, understandings of gaming platform infrastructures - privacy, surveillance, algorithms, marketing of games, social relationships and cultural representation. The project aims to use the results to develop tools and learning resources that could be used to develop critical thinking skills around video games, build understandings of video gaming industry and culture, and develop critical and resistant orientations as participants in video gaming cultures.

This study aimed to challenge the target group to identify and reflect on the most critical problems surrounding video games (the collective) (Barbazette 2006; Witkins 1995). The results are used for action (Kemmis & MacTaggart 2005; Chandler & Torbert 2003; Lewis 1964). As described in the method, through dialogue and active participation (focus groups and workshops), we map the need for a concrete recommendation (or learning tool).

The central theory underlying the analytical framework is Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory, which interprets the social world as a product of social constructions delimited by what we perceive through discourses. Discourse theory is therefore used to analyse the informants' understanding of the technological, social and cultural space they enter when they negotiate games and video game regulation. The intersectional perspective where we see how the combination of social categories works together (Orupabo 2014) will also be central. Through the analysis, the aim is to be able to establish knowledge about the negotiation, process and results around gaming and video game regulation.

CHAPTER 3. ACTION RESEARCH AND MIXED METHODS APPROACH

3.0. Introduction

The project methodology has two goals: scientific analysis as well as applied analysis and implementation. The scientific analysis (see dissemination plan) considers data from the entire project process as empirical evidence for the analysis while the applied analysis and implementation (see workshop rationale and implementation as well as resources). The sub-goals are to:

- a) involve youth (primary target group), their parents and other actors in the R&D processes.
- b) gain insight into the target group's critical thinking skills around video games and understandings of video gaming industry and culture.
- c) Through the process gather materials to develop tools and resources to develop the target group's critical thinking skills and understandings of video gaming industry and culture.

The rationale for choosing the action research approach meant that the research process would be 'hands-on' with dialogue and active participation from the target group, and that results match the 'users' needs or lack of knowledge (Cordeiro et al., 2017).

Knowledge generation about how young people understand and relate to the techno-socio-cultural universe in digital media is demanding, and requires a combined method approach, a "mixed methods approach" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Because of this we adopted a research design consisting of: Literature review, Focus group discussion and Workshops.

The selection for the focus groups and workshops involved young people between the ages of 10-19 as the primary target group and (their) parents or guardians. All together we had 14 girls and boys and 14 parents as primary informants. While challenges and potential vulnerabilities associated with video games apply to all users, they are particularly relevant for young people in their early and mid-teens (Selwyn and Pangrazio, 2018). This target group is considered some of the most avid but also vulnerable users of digital media. In line with a socio-cultural approach to media literacy, the sample in this study was selected in a way that reflects balance and diversity in ethnicity, gender, and class. The selection hence consisted of a mixture of experienced and inexperienced video gamers. The informants were recruited via our existing networks and snowball effect (See reference group and role).

3.1. Qualitative methods

3.1.1. Literature search

To assess the state-of-the-art in research and innovation related to young people's digital and media skills in Norway and globally, we carried out an extensive literature search, using the search services Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science. The search consisted of various combinations of a number of relevant search terms, including "video games", "children", "youth", "commercial strategies", "platforms», "algorithms", "cultural values in computer games", "marketing in games", "privacy", "media competence", "media literacy" and "digital competence".

3.1.2. Focus group discussions

In the first phase, the project wanted to map out status on GML and which competences the young people and parents had and used in their everyday use and encounters with video games. For this phase, the researchers conducted several focus groups - two with the youth and four with parents. The purpose was to gain a broad and thorough insight into young people's and parents' understanding, experiences, attitudes, and challenges related to video games. The conversations in the focus groups (Gill et al. 2008) with the informants addressed topics such as habits and attitudes on video games in everyday lives, attitudes towards conflict and video game regulation, privacy, surveillance, algorithms, marketing, spending money, friendship, gender, psychological challenges and benefits, discrimination, social challenges, and cultural differences. The conversations with the parents focused on their digital competence and challenges regarding regulating the children's video gaming. The focus groups sprung from flexible and open-ended questions – aided by semi-structured interview guides, so that the answers were less thought out and in that way it was easier to gain access to the participants' views, opinions and understanding (Bryman 2016). One of the focus group discussions took place in Kristiansand, face to face, whereas three were undertaken online.

3.1.3. Workshops

The second phase of the research was aimed at exploring new ways of understanding, reflecting on and deepening the participants' (youth) knowledge of technical, social, cultural and ethical aspects of their use of video games. In this phase, the project employed workshops as a method (Tarr et al. 2018). We carried out two workshops, one in Kristiansand and one in Oslo during Autumn 2021 with a total of eight participants. Each workshop took approximately two hours. The participants in the workshops were mainly recruited from the

same selection that participated in the focus groups as well as randomly from existing networks in Oslo and Kristiansand. The workshops consisted of the following activities:

Drawing

As visual artefact drawings can act as a map of the participant's perception and experiences, enrich dialogue, and offer prompts that the researcher can take up to probe them (Bravington & King, 2019). For this task, the participants were divided into groups and asked to draw on a sheet of paper a timeline (or a map) of the digital everyday life of a typical person of their age. Drawings could contain, for example, what this person does in video games, who they communicate with, what kind of content they share, what kind of data and information was collected about this person, etc. Subsequently, the technical, social, cultural, and ethical aspects of each drawing was discussed in plenary.

Searching

In this activity, the participants were also divided into groups and asked to solve a series of tasks to explore, strengthen and increase reflection on their knowledge of the technology and user culture related to video games. Examples of tasks in this session included for instance: "Log on to the internet and find out who owns your favourite game and how much the company is worth", "Log on and find an advertisement about your favourite game; say what strategies/techniques are used to lure you to buy a game of items within the game; what is the pitch?" or "Go to your favourite game and find out what kind of information is collected about you". For this activity, the participants received technical aids and guidance from the project researchers who also brought with them to the workshop arena a PlayStation platform and some video games.

Brainstorming and prototyping

In this activity, participants were asked to design either a machine, a service, or a tool that could either raise awareness, generate debate, or teach people about a specific issue related to video games. The design had to be drawn on a sheet of paper.

The activities and tasks for the workshops had to be adapted based on the participants' age and digital competence. Research data from the workshops consisted of the material objects created by the participants and transcribed audio recordings of group discussions along the way.

3.1.4. Dialogue

Dialog between the researchers and developers (staff at NDLA) from the reference group, were invited to a dialogue after the collected data (literature, focus groups and workshops) had been analysed and summarized to specify measures for development. The aim was to capture input from the industry or the field (to be able to incorporate it into the measures), as well as to test the results/plans and get feedback so that they can be reworked in line with an action research approach (Berg, Lune and Lune, 2004; Curry et al. 2003). The hope was to make the results relevant to more than just the target groups in the study. (See resources below).

As mentioned in the previous section, Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory is applied in the analysis of the findings. The theory guides on how the social world can be interpreted as a product of social construction, in the case of this study, explore the informants' interpretation of their socio-cultural and technological realities surrounding video game literacy.

The research followed the ethical guidelines from the Norwegian Research Ethics board (SIKT) (Nesh 2019). In the analysis, we experimented with three different formats of anonymity: omission all references to the informants (i.e. youth perspectives from Focus Groups); make general references to informants (i.e. perspectives from parents in which references are male or female discussants) and tags and associations given to informants (i.e. participants in the Workshops).

3.2. Applicability – aim to develop learning tool and resources

In order to strengthen the applicability of the project, we used the project's results as a starting point to develop a package of teaching and learning material (See information on Guide and VR 360/Escape room below) that can be used at home, at school and in different leisure activities. We envision that these materials in the form of clear instructions, discussion plans, practical tasks/activities, games, and links to relevant resources will promote critical game/media literacy beyond the project phase. The Guide and accompanying tasks and activities were developed by the research team.

For the Escape room, ideas on video games were extracted and developed by the project partners and experts at NDLA in dialogue together with the researchers. These were then incorporated into the VR 360 package featuring other media literacies and exercises aimed to promote critical media literacy.

Out project aim with the collaboration was to offer this as a 'tailor-made' resource that can be used by the children themselves and others (parents, teachers) to strengthen the critical media skills in video games.

3.4. Note about the research partners

The researchers

The project was carried out by four highly experienced researchers; Henry Mainsah (PhD), Carol Azungi Dralega (PhD) (Coordinator), Margunn Serigstad Dahle (Assoc. Professor) and Håkon Repstad (MA). The researchers come from two research environments: NLA University College in Kristiansand, and Oslo Metropolitan University. They have experience from the overlapping fields of media and technology research, such as research on media and worldview formation, children and media use, computer game, gender and identity as well as migration research. The researchers have both a Norwegian background and an immigrant background, two are men and two are women, with a varied age composition.

The reference group

The reference group consisted of i) Norway's Multicultural Centre (NOMKUS), which primarily works with youth and immigrants (families), ii) Arendal Adult Education (Arendal Voksenopplæring) and iii) the National Digital Learning Arena (NDLA) on behalf of their nationwide network of media educators, schools and actors, who accepted to participate as partners in the project. The role of the reference group was to help with the recruitment of informants for the study (focus groups, workshops), and to develop (test and give feedback on) resources/tools in dialogue with the researchers. They were also supposed to serve as partners in the dissemination of the results/tools/resources produced in the project. The partners were selected on the basis that they have access to the target group, they are interested in the issue and had the relevant competences to consolidate the project output.

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0. Introduction

In this section we present the key findings from the research whose overall goal was to generate knowledge the social practices competences and strategies that children and parents need for a conscious, critical and safe use and regulation of video games.

The section is divided into three sub-parts. These include perspectives from parents; perspectives from the youth obtained through focus group discussions and hands-on youth perspectives and activities from workshops.

4.1. Parental perspectives

Parents' understandings of video games and views children's gaming practices

Country background	Number	Gender
Norway	5	4 F / 1 M
Somalia	1	M
Palestine	2	F / M
Turkey	1	F
China	1	F
India	1	F
Syria	1	F
Eritrea	1	F
Philippines	1	F

For the study, fourteen parents were recruited, originally from 9 countries: Norway (5), Somalia (1), Palestine (2), Turkey (1). Kina (1). India (1), Syria (1). Eritrea (1) and the Philippines (1). These were parents to boys and girls aged 10 to 19 years of age. Apart from the ethnic Norwegian families, the families with immigrant background had lived in Norway between 6 years and 25 years. The parents were recruited through existing networks and snowball effect. Altogether, there were 3 males and 11 females among this group of informants. Four Focus Group Discussions were undertaken on 12.01.22 (ZOOM), 13.01.2022 (ZOOM), 13.01.2022 (ZOOM) and 30.10.2021 in Kristiansand. The Focus group in Kristiansand took a whole day as this was combined with workshop activities for the youth. The ZOOM focus groups lasted for about one and a half hours.

The questions discussed tackled issues on critical media literacy with the key focus on family social dynamics, parental knowledge and understanding of the status of video gaming in the

home, conflict and video game regulation, how concepts such as algorithms, marketing, privacy and issues around discrimination were perceived and negotiated also within a family context. We later asked for their recommendations which we share in this report.

Family social dynamics around video gaming

On what and how the family members spent their free time and whether they ever played video games together, we received diverse responses showing: gender preferences in gaming, some children enjoy playing with their parents; the older the children were - the lesser they include their parents in gaming and the lesser time they spend on video games; socialization as a key factor for young people's gaming. Below are some of the expressions about video games in family contexts:

Sometimes we play together. Lots of Minecraft, Fortnite, FIFA, Rocket League, Assassin's Creed. I play mostly with the boy than with the girl. (Male informants, focus group)

For the mother, who played FIFA, Rocket League, Fortnite and Minecraft, it was a positive experience playing together with the children as this made them all happy, as she elaborates here:

We have played the same games such as: FIFA and Rocket League over a long period. The new additions are Fortnite and Minecraft. They are very happy when I join the game and I enjoy showing off in the game when I have time to sit down to play. I think that is actually good (Female informant, Focus group discussion).

For another parent (father), playing video games with his children was a moment for socialization especially when the son was younger. But as his son grew older and became more skilled, this involvement has dwindled. The father says:

I played with my son a lot in the game called Overwatch. But he also played with a number of friends he has met online. When I quickly become worse, he made it known that, it wasn't very exciting for neither him nor me. I haven't been asked to play since he was 15. Before that I was asked every now and then. Now he occasionally only shows me fragments of how he does it and figures and the like (Male informant, focus group).

This father also observed that as his son weaned from playing with him, he began to socialize beyond the home, making friends virtually. Which is a subject well documented in research (Dralega et al. 2018), he states:

It's quite interesting because in the start he struggled a bit socially. He was a bit of an introvert. Then he actually found quite a few friends from all over the world who played this game. Then he really found his way. The effect of having online friends was the same as actually normal friends. He found his place in society, in class. He became a much more relaxed boy, and it got better. It was quite obvious.

Perceptions on the merits and demerits of video gaming

The parents also shared their perspectives on what they felt were positive and negative sides of everyday video gaming habits. On the positive side, the aspect of socialization came up again and the video games being a space to escape reality (Dralega and Corneliussen 2018) as shared below:

I have a 14-year-old girl who had a bit of a rough start at secondary school where she ended up a bit on the outside. It was the Covid-19 period and she couldn't quite find her place. So, it was helpful that she was able to have many friends on the platform called Discord from all over the world where they all converged and played games and chatted. Here, she actually found a very safe space in the video games. When things got better at school, she spent less time on the platform. But just when she was having a really bad time, she spent a lot of time on Discord with friends that she had had for maybe 4-5 years. So, I think it's an important place for many young people to have (Female informant, focus group).

Socialization was also associated with a sense of mastery of video games by their young ones with the same results as the previous parent in that they then played less with the parents and more with their counterparts both on (virtual friends) and offline (classmates). This was an observation made by another parent as a positive side of video gaming. According to the parent:

Yes. I introduced him to a part of the gaming world earlier on, so he has become incredibly good. Very, very good - that he often shows me how good he is. He also used to play a lot with people from all over the world but now there is a group at school that he plays with. So, in a group like that at school, the socialization happens as they play the games - they meet both physically and in games (Male informant, Focus group).

One female informant brought to light a generational introspection on how her husband's own experience with his parents when he was younger has helped him understand his own child's video gaming and how that understanding has helped him engage in dialogue with the youngster:

I'm sitting and thinking about my husband's experience... because my husband plays a lot now. He played a lot at an early age but struggled very much to gain acceptance from his parents. That has helped him adopt a conversational (dialogical) approach with his children over the role and impact of video games. (Female informant, Focus group).

The same informant shared how both she and her husband play video games with their three children and the dynamics therein:

But if you want to hear what I play with them. I'm a little unsure of what to define as parents here, because me and my husband play with the children. Me and my husband are a team. We probably think that we bring different aspects to the games for the children. He plays a lot of Minecraft with them and is very exploratory. He has linked up two PCs for each (himself and 11-year-old son) to have their own in the room. Our daughter (12-year-old) is now also integrated into the social relationship with my husband and our son. And the youngest (7) also plays some Minecraft but is not part of that community. She plays more with her 11-year-old brother. And they've been playing Minecraft quite a bit. I play Mario Kart with our daughter (12). She wins in such a way that it's great, great fun.

Adding a note about regulation, which she says is an area of contention between the couple:

And yes... I'm probably the one who, in a way, has an attitude that one should limit screen time very much. So, it's kind of tense with us.

As mentioned earlier, sometimes online socialization through video games has led to physical friendships. Another parent points out:

My son has played with a group of online friends for 4-5 years. They call themselves "the family". So, we live in town (X) and the two of those friends live in a neighbouring town (Y). So, eventually, they

became physical friends and have been together physically these years as well. (Male informant, Focus group).

This father continues:

The group consisted of people from Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Denmark, the Netherlands and live in town X and town Y... So, it was a bit of luck really. (Ibid.)

It is also part of the story that the girl from town Y has been in love with the boy from the Netherlands in town (X) for 2 years (Ibid).

One of the informants emphasized the significance of socialization especially during the corona pandemic when it was vital to socialize online since physical socialization was prohibited. She adds that in addition to socialization, through video gaming, the youth were able to cooperate, to strategize and be inclusive of others:

The fact that through video games, one can become social, cooperate and be able to strategize was good. In that sense, the youth were able to include people whom they would not otherwise include, talk to someone they might not otherwise talk to. Some of these were from their school, some from other schools. Many from football training. They meet first in the video games and then they meet at football afterwards (Female informant, Focus Group discussion).

The informant adds:

In one of our heated discussions on limiting time spend playing video games. My son protested saying:

"...but mum. It is so unfair. I have never in my life been as social as I am now. Why should I stop?" My heart melted and he was allowed to play a bit more then...

As we see from the parents' perspectives, video gaming was not only an important everyday activity for the families, it also significantly contributed to the children's wellbeing.

From a socio-cultural perspective, parents with international backgrounds liked and encouraged their children when they created or experimented with avatars with multicultural identities:

My three youngest children have a father who is not Norwegian. In relation to choosing characters.... if they can choose something that connects with the other culture, then they choose it. If they can put a flag 'from their father's country of origin' on the Rocket league, they will do it. Same sentiments apply if they can choose curly or frizzy hair rather than anything else. In fact, they would rather choose the other over the Norwegian (Female informant, Focus group).

A second mother confirms what the previous mother said:

I also have a husband who is not from Norway. He is black from the USA. They also connect that way, they choose characters that reflect multi-cultural identity for instance they choose big hair, brown skin colour, and the American flag in similar instances in the games (Female informant, focus group).

Despite the several merits of video games, these parents also experienced some demerits. One of the common not so good traits in relation to video games was that they also create conflict. In the following, we share some of these demerits and how they navigated them. One cause

for conflict is a challenge well reported in research, and this is the excessive time spent on video games (Seddighi, Dralega, Corneliussen, Prøitz 2019; Medietilsynet 2020).

According to one of the informants, time-use and age limits were top on the conflict list:

Yeah, in terms of video games, I think it's the two things that stand out. There is the time limit dilemma. When should the games go on and when should they be stopped. And the thing with the age limit... so he (son) hasn't been allowed to play Fortnite until now. And now... the four-year-old knows everything about it... and we probably argue about this every day... (Female informant, focus group discussion).

This mother also reiterates the conflict arising from regulating video games:

What I experience as a very big problem is that it is more or less impossible to stop when adults say "stop"... and that regardless of whether you have agreements/rules whether you have agreed on things, whether you give notice in advance. So, stopping is so challenging and creates so much conflict.

She adds on how the conflict also arises with the implementation of parental guidance and age restrictions.

Another mother brings up a nuanced discussion on time-use on video games versus mobile phones arguing that girls spend more time on their phones while boys spend more time of the consoles:

This point is reiterated by the male counterpart:

Yes... it's hard to stop... an example was at Christmas, I turned off the Internet network when I went to bed around midnight and then the gaming stopped. But it often is a bit odd in relation to the daughter, who is on the phone... because they have so many gigabytes in their subscription that they can be on it as long as they want - so there was a lot of conflict with the use of time between the boy and girl and platform differences.

For another informant, time-use was made worse with the excessive use of double screens, this mother tries to make sense of it here:

The thing that they have started, looking at double-screens. The pace they are exposed to with double screen is too much – that when you try to regulate screen time and they have nothing to watch they get so restless.

Another parent had the following to say about rules at home in relation to time use:

My son has to stop using the screen at 8 p.m. (Male focus group).

The challenge of regulating age-limits and parental guidance was a source of tension for some parents, as this parent laments:

I managed to put filters for the youngest on that YouTube. This however does not work on streaming services such as Netflix where we have separate users. Lots of algorithms are left there. I have put an age limit on Netflix to try to avoid the squid game, but it's all over the place. I can't even begin to find it.

A mother ascribes to using filters which she admits are illusive as well as benefiting from older siblings helping out:

No one is allowed to watch the Squid Game, talk about it and sing the song. Once, my 12-year-old took the phone from the 4-year-old and said he was not allowed to look at the Squid game. The 12-year-old took care of it. She did what I should have done.

According to one of our informants, violence in video games was a problem associated with parental guidance on age limits. His approach was to discuss it with his child:

For my part, my son has been quite mature from a very young age. We have discussed many things we have seen together, sometimes above his age limit. Knowing that he understands the difference between what is real and what is fake. Previously, we had several discussions around this and now I feel that he has understood. I am now not too concerned about the age limit. Had I noticed that he had been violent and aggressive, I would have taken a different approach. I guess it varies from individual-to-individual yes (male, focus groups).

Understandings of algorithms and how they work

In this segment, we were interested in gaining insights about the parents' perceptions about algorithms, how they work and what they thought their children knew about them. Generally, the parents did not have much to share, but one comment suffices. This parent volunteered this:

Algorithms is about the information you leave online and what it is used for. It is linked to market forces. Reflected back to you as a consumer what you are interested in. (Male informant, Norwegian - Focus group discussion).

The understanding from the feedback or lack thereof, was that the parents may have an idea of algorithms but have not taken the time to think beyond that. We keep in mind here the parent who tried to filter YouTube and Netflix and felt defeated because the algorithms are everywhere.

Advertisement and marketing in online games

We asked the parents to reflect on the political economy of video game production, issues around in-game advertisement and marketing and whether they were critical and if that was a source of conflict in family contexts.

One parent volunteered this feedback:

It is amazing how you are pushed to pay for the free games. On a positive note, it helps to teach one the value of money. About the children, they have had to pay for video games themselves. With their pocket money, so, they can choose to use it on games or something in the real world. We tell them "You don't have unlimited resources, so you have to evaluate for yourself how you spend the limited resources you have..." (Male informant, Focus group discussion).

Another informant also laments about the ease in in-game purchasing and spending money on games unwilfully:

My card is registered in the PlayStation. My son has access and is supposed to have control over when he plays. He spent a lot of money illegally once.

A father with immigrant background explained that it is important to sit down with the children and explain the pitfalls of video games before letting them explore things for themselves.

Worldviews, values and issues of in-game discrimination

In this segment, we were interested in gaining insights on the awareness of various forms of discrimination within the videogames that the youth played and discrimination towards them through the video gaming. Subjects investigated included discrimination of any sort from gender, religious, sexual orientation, ethnicity, as well as what values they hold.

One parent chooses to look at it positively focusing on the opportunity to experiment in fantasy about identity stating:

Looking at it positively... you can be many versions of yourself... my son has played assassin's creed as a girl. I see that he can choose avatars in all colours and shapes. So, it is positive with exploration
(Male, focus group)

The issue of vulgar language in and around video games was brought up by two parents. One of the parents had this to say:

... I see this with my son who has just started playing online, with others. It is important to pay attention to what he (the youth) says and how (t)hey say things. I have observed a new language that the two younger ones are also picking up which is not so cool. For instance, when the youngest goes around says "&%#*" all the time... and he says it in the right situations...Not cool.

About stereotypes in play, one male parent had this reflection:

I noticed that there were more stereotypes in the older games. In the newer ones, one spends resources on the fact that you can change so much of yourself. Previously, there were one or two possibilities.

Another parent based his arguments on religious foundations (Islam) saying that he notices that in many games, the females were scantily dressed and these games were forbidden for their two sons based on religious basis.

Another parent, without giving details, indicated that bullying of immigrant children is an all-too-common occurrence both in video games and in the real life and it is a reality, immigrants in Norway have to live with unless authorities do something about it.

Parents with immigrant background's unique experiences

One of the parents with immigrant background (lived in Norway for 25 years) offered insights on the challenges parents with immigrant backgrounds, especially newcomers, face when it came to regulating video games and critical media literacy: He explains:

This is a terrain that is scary for most parents, especially with immigrant background. Having to deal with many unknowns can be overwhelming. Parents (new to Norway) have to learn everything by themselves which can be a lot and scary.

He adds that parents, especially the newcomers, are terrified of content and often adopt authoritarian approaches to regulation and literacy, arguing that:

often their approaches are like 'don't do this or that', you are not allowed...' etc. 'I think it's wrong to deny the kids whether it's positive or negative'.

Advice to other parents

Towards the end of the discussion, we had a round of discussions on advice to other parents on how to increase critical media understanding and below, we summarize some of the suggestions.

Participatory parenthood and dialogue

Although some of the parents were 'dictatorial' and practiced top-down approaches to video game regulation and critical media literacy, several of them acknowledged and others manifested the importance of taking the lead and practice dialogue and participation in both playing and learning together: here are a few direct quotes from some of the parents:

... as a parent, be a participant, talk about things, discuss things.

... about algorithms and their importance, explain what it is. This is very important.

... teach them to be a little critical to what they see, what they post and what one says as well as source criticism.

... about time use. Let them know what they waste away by spending a lot of time on the screen. Let them become aware of opting out of things on the screen, too.

On vulgar language, it is important to talk to them about the language and the fact that when they're sitting with a headset and a microphone and cursing loudly, the person in the physical room hears everything – which can be challenging and negative. Understanding that when mum comes in, it has to be muted. Mom does not give commands to everyone sitting at the other time.

For immigrant parents – don't be afraid, get involved, have rules

The challenge faced by immigrant parents, especially newcomers, was raised by one particular male discussant who also offers advice to this target group:

... This is a terrain that is scary for most parents, especially with immigrant background. Having to deal with many unknowns can be overwhelming. For these, I suggest that they engage in dialogue as nourishment for critical media understanding and video gaming. Get into it, be open, be friends with children - talk face to face not 'top-down', talk warmly. It's all about attitude with children.

He adds:

... offer alternatives when you limit time on video gaming. Create a daily program and perhaps for the whole week and include whole families. For the family - choose games that are 'not illegal or not good and explain why/not'.

The note here is that this male informant was referring to 'sexualization of females which may challenge values in religious worldviews (Islam). This informant further adds:

... It is important to adapt to your child's life and new hobbies. Video games are part and parcel of children's lives today and it is impossible to deny them play (video games as play)

... Parents, especially the newcomers, are terrified of content and often narratives are like 'don't be allowed' etc. 'I think it's wrong to deny whether it's positive or negative'.

His approach was that:

The children are allowed to play but must take responsibility. But also raise awareness of what the consequences are.

According to this parent, parents (new to Norway) have to learn everything themselves and this can be overwhelming and scary. He argues that these parents need knowledge of the value of dialogue and knowledge of games. Hence as opposed to social control, he recommends dialogue with the whole family.

Drastic measures

Following up on the subject above, it was evident that some parents, not just immigrant parents, chose drastic measures (like forbidding certain games) to teach their young ones how to be critical when playing video games. The following parent shares what he does when the youth use vulgar language – which is a combination of dialogue and strictness:

...The vulgar language is a specific thing you can set a limit with. We have partly managed that by shutting down the platform if it became too much bad language. It was partially controlled... Also explain what are swearing words, what are bad words and what are not.... it is probably an eternal discussion... Also, a bit of what 'the other informant' talked about regarding what you lose by gaming a lot (Male, Focus Group Discussion).

Using filters, finding partnerships and social arenas

For others, filters provided them with an opportunity to expose their young ones to 'acceptable' content as this female informant explains:

... Using filters for the youngest is a good idea especially for the younger ones.

Finding support structures

Other informants emphasized the importance of finding partnerships and support structures to help them understand video games discourses better and help them with critical media

literacy. So, cooperation with the school on critical media literacy was suggested as well as establishing social arenas and groups. One parent articulated the later point as following:

The lack of language for non-Norwegian speakers can be a true challenge and when they don't know or understand something then it is easy to avoid or skip things. So, establishing social arenas to discuss such matters especially among parents who are new to Norway could be of great help (Male informant, Focus Group Discussion).

4.2. Youth's perspectives

Seven youth took part in two online focus group discussions at the height of Covid-19. The Focus groups lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. In this section, the youths' identities are completely anonymized by omission. They are identified as informants and no name tags are assigned.

The youths mostly played video games on PlayStation consoles, smartphones, and on desktop computers. The games popular among them included Minecraft, Battlefield, car games, GTA, FIFA, Rocket League, Basketball, Call of Duty and Fortunate.

The informants felt that the number of games they owned was reasonable and most of their games were received from their friends, family or obtained freely.

Time investments

For the older youth, there were indications affirmed by research that time spent playing video games had reduced, as three of our older informants affirm:

I used to play a lot before, almost all day. Now, not so much that it's not that healthy.

During the week, I play three-four days.

On school days, I do not play often. Perhaps 1 hour a day.

Another youth mentioned that during the summer he played almost everyday and all day.

Others played between 2 hours to 5 hours daily.

Socialization and learning

As observed by the parents, socialization was a feature mentioned by the youth. The socialization happened within family contexts but mostly with others virtually. From the youths' perspectives, one of them plays on the PlayStation with family, but mostly alone on the phone. While two other youth said they usually play alone, or with their siblings or friends. Several of them said they played with other young people in other countries such as Iraq and Germany.

Associated with socialization with friends was the habit of multi-tasking, also noticed and referred to as 'double-screen' habits by the parents. Multi-tasking was also common among the informants: as two of them indicated:

When I play Minecraft, we communicate a lot on facetime. Then we talk about everything possible.

I multitasked a lot especially during Corona, and then we were on facetime and "discord" a lot. It was mostly about the game and a little about life.

The issue of how much time was appropriate to spend playing video games was for some informants an issue of conflict with their parents. This was reflected in comments made by a couple of informants such as:

Mum is too strict...

Parents think games are a waste of time, they don't understand anything.

Learning through games

Reflections from the informants also indicated that the youth recognized that they learn a lot through video games. Comments from four informants reveal what they learnt about through games:

Playing basketball video games teaches about rules of the sport and sports terms.

You can learn a lot in different genres. In Minecraft you learn about architecture and building. And you get to use your creativity for anything.

Games teaches strategies. And in quiz games you learn a lot social knowledge.

Collaborating in video games is good for learning from each other and getting better at playing.

Generally, the youths agree that video games were good for learning e.g., language, strategy, cooperation, etc., experiment with identity in the fantasy world and ability to multi-task.

Negative aspects of video gaming

At the same time, the youth were introspective in their acknowledgement that video games had negative sides. One such acknowledgement was excessive time consumption. In agreement with parental concerns was the acknowledgement that video gaming was: “time consuming”, “hard to stop”, “stupid if it interferes with sleep and concentration at school”.

The negative aspect of bullying was highlighted by another youth. He had this to say:

What I like least about video games is the (online) bullying, that people are bullied for how they look/the clothes they wear and because they may not be very good at playing.

This informant adds:

If one is looking for validation and receives negative comments, then it leads to low self-esteem. While, if one receives positive feedback or if they are acknowledged as good players, then they assume higher status.

These comments are indicative of the prospects and challenges the youth must navigate in video games but also that they are quite reflective on the positives and negatives of play.

Money investments

In the area of money and expenditure on and in video games, indications were that the youth had control and were critical over purchases and in game expenditures as shown in the following quotes:

I have bank cards linked to games which I use to buy in-game merchandise, but I try to keep it cheap.

I do not spend money as a general rule.

I don't spend money on games.

My mother is strict and thinks I must not spend money on games and think it's not good. She knows nothing about my spending. Both parents are strict now.

My parents thought it was unnecessary to pay for in game merchandise. They would have reacted if I had spent money on it.

My parents are generally not into games. They are generally sceptical of a lot of time/money at stake.

Another informant however, felt that: “When everyone else buys, then I must too”, indicating that the pressure came from friends and not directly from advertising nor parents. This informant tried to "resists" it by thinking that it's not so fun or interesting. But when friends had bought merchandise and talked a lot about it, then he was influenced to also purchase the game.

Understanding of ownership structures and marketing strategies

One concern related to children and video gaming platforms is the increasing varied and sophisticated forms of marketing that are emerging, particularly new forms of advertising such as sponsorship, product placement, cross-media promotion and branding, embedded marketing and advergaming (Willett, 2018). During the focus group interviews, one informant commented that advertising that appears in-game was considered ‘deceptive’.

The question on who owns the video games the youth played received limited insights. Below are some of their responses:

I don't know anything about the owners of games.

Don't know much about it.

I know little about it.

I know about Rockstar Games.

The same sparse reflection was received on question about how the producers generate revenue. Three respondents volunteered answers saying that: it was through adverts while the others didn't know. One direct quote is shared here as an example:

I know little about the owners of games or how they make money.

Gaming platform infrastructures, privacy, and personal data

We also wanted to establish their knowledge and understanding on privacy. This question on how they would define privacy in video games generated several cautious statements, as quoted below:

It is something you must read before pressing "allow".

I am not concerned with that.

Privacy is thinking about security. That your personal information will come out. It is important, but personally I don't think anything more about it.

For me, privacy is important. I don't want people to know so much about me. I don't often allow my position to be shared.

Protecting one's privacy is important, because someone you don't know can affect your life, it's important to be careful.

When someone you don't know wants to befriend you, be careful on social media for you can be tricked to giving your information.

These answers indicate that the youth have some understanding of privacy although fewer took it seriously.

We also asked about **algorithms** in video games, what that meant and as gamers, why it was important to understand its importance. Not many informants attempted to respond but the few responses included the following:

I think it's about getting more of something if I've searched for it.

I have heard the word but forgot what it means.

Cultural representations

We asked questions about stereotypes and the representation of cultural groups in video games and if they ever experienced or reflected on it and these are some of the responses around: gender and sexualization, appearance, values, ethnicity:

The female body is often slim and pretty.

Boys play more than girls.

On gay characters in games: It's great that there is diversity with gay.

Avatars and skins.

On ethnic identity and appearance: I create avatars that look like me. If I can create an avatar, I first of all, try to choose someone who looks just like me.

I like to create avatars who look tough.

I tend to take something similar to myself and try to make it even better and cooler.

In GTA, as long as, I can buy skins. It doesn't matter what you look like.

In a nutshell, the response from the youth reveals that they are reflective on matters related to socio-cultural, technological and economic (spending) and parental and family relations. At the same time, there was limited reflection on the political economy of video game production and marketing strategies as well as use of algorithms. To have a deeper exploration of critical media literacy, we undertook workshops and below, we share some of the details from that process.

4.3. Workshop activities

Activity 1 – drawing a timeline of gaming routines.

1. Make a list of all the games you own or play.
2. Draw a timeline that shows what your daily gaming life looked like over the past week. In the drawing, you are welcome to show which games you played and when, who you played with and where. Have you spent money on games? Have you talked about games with friends? Have you seen advertisements on games? You can also draw this in



An example of a timeline

The purpose of this task was to get an overview of the participants' gaming habits and gaming-related activities over a short period of time. When we asked questions in the focus groups about the participants' everyday gaming, we found that some of them had problems remembering details. The advantage of the timeline task was that it gave the participants time and space to activate their memory. In addition, getting the participants to chart their gaming days in a time axis was a good way to get them to reflect on how much time they spent on games and what they spent the most time on.

FIFA, Fortnite, Roblox, ANIME tapper, MadFut, War Thunder, World of Tanks Blitz, Super Smash Bros, Zelda BoTW, Clash Royale, Minecraft, GTA, and Loon Bins were some examples of the games that the participants listed.

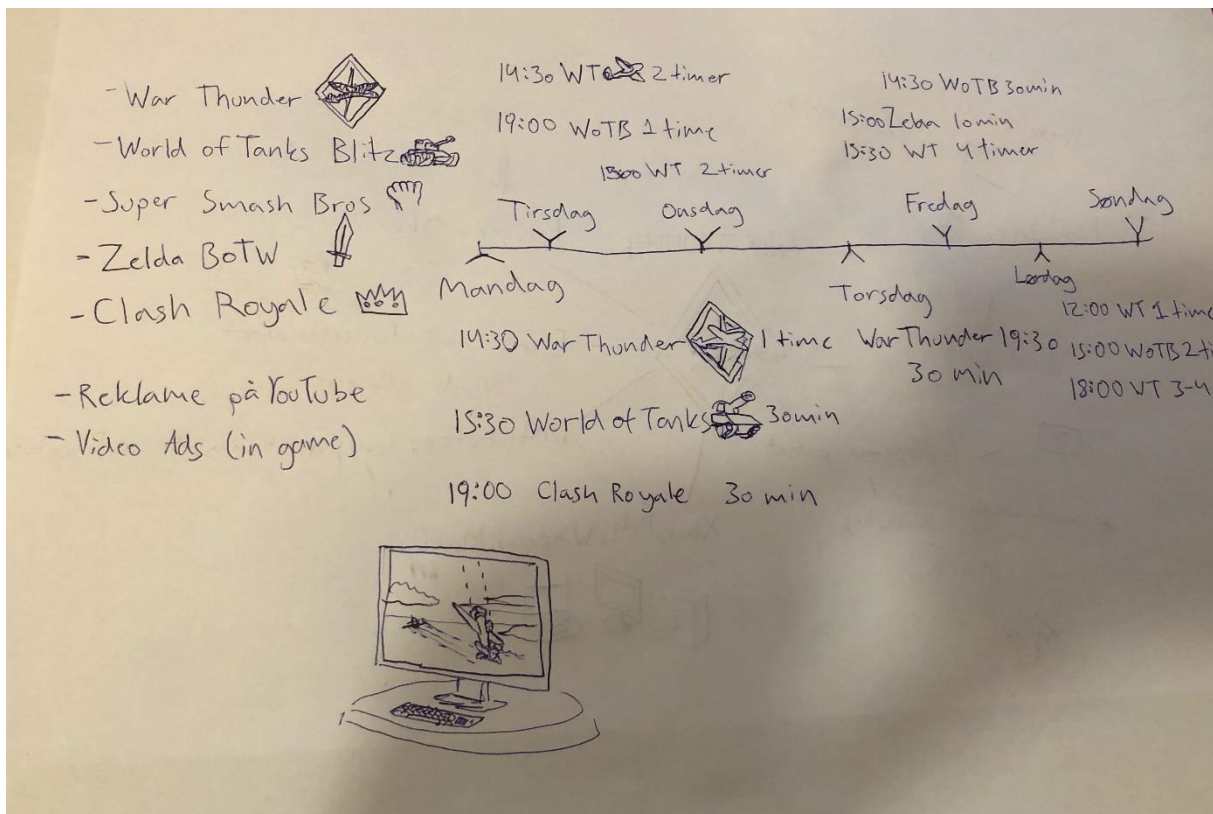


Figure 1: an example of a timeline of video gaming timeline drawn by one of the participants.

The image above shows an example of a timeline drawn by one of the workshop participants, a 14-year-old male (whom we shall call M). M explained his timeline as follows:

On Monday I played a bit of War Thunder, the same on Tuesday, but on Tuesday I also played Flash Royale, which is a mobile game like that. On Wednesday I again played a lot of Clash Royale and a bit of War Thunder. On Thursday I barely got to play Flash Royale because it was quite a busy day. On Friday I played War of Tanks Blitz, a bit of Zelda and War Thunder. On Saturday I barely managed to play War Thunder, and on Sunday I also played Clash Royale.

In the Oslo workshop V (14-year-old male), one of the participants, described his timeline as follows:

On Monday I played Terraria for 15 minutes after school. I talk about video games with friends every day and have played Loon Bins on the iPad during school. I played *Pokemon Go* at school with friends, and then I played an hour of Terraria on Saturday and Sunday.

In the Kristiansand workshop S (14-year-old female) said when she presented her timeline that it made her notice that she had fixed routines about when she played and what. Like the other participants, she was a little surprised by how much time she actually spent on games in a week: "I get the impression that playing is my biggest hobby, but that I play so much that I don't remember all the games I've played".

"Before, I gamed a lot more, but now there is so much school and a lot of other things that I do, so I kind of mix it up with gaming" (B, 15 years old male)

Activity 2: draw a map representing the production side of video games

We want to get a sense of how you understand the production side of games - who the game owners are, how the game owners make money, different marketing strategies, what kind of typical messages are conveyed in the games, etc.

For us to be able to get such an overview, we need your help to visualize via a drawing. Here is an explanation of how to do it:

1. Draw the logo or write the name of their favorite game on a poster
2. Take out a new sheet of paper and find out the following (feel free to use google search):
3. How much money you spend on the game
4. Who owns the game and how much the gaming company is worth.
5. Who distributes/sells the game
6. Which platforms the game can be played on and who owns these.
7. Make a list of all marketing, both visible and hidden, that exists about this game - advertising, sponsorships, influencers, game-related merchandise, etc.
8. What the game costs and everything you can spend money on in the game.
9. Take out the poster with the game's logo and draw everything you noted above. Try to show how the different things are connected.

Advertisers see popular influencers, or so-called influencers, as an effective way of reaching young people. Many young players today follow these influencers on social media. For children and young people, it can be particularly difficult to recognize advertising when it comes as a tip from a YouTuber or influences what they look up to.

M: If there is a Youtuber like that who almost only plays one game and he makes merchandise that in a way promotes that game, it is counted as.

Interviewer: Yes

J: Unofficial merchandise, is that part of... because I've found both unofficial and official

J wondered if unofficial merchandise counted as merchandise as well when he asked: "when people make videos about games and such, is that also a form of promotion?"

To give the participants inspiration for content that they could have in the drawing, in task 2 we asked the participants to find out who owned their favourite game and how much the company was worth. None of the participants could figure this out.

V: By the way, we were going to find out how much game companies were worth, right?

Interviewer: Yes

V: It doesn't exist. It's not possible.

Interviewer: Yes, but if you can't find it, then that itself is interesting.

V: I found out how much they had roughly earned from the game, then.

M: Yes, it's a bit of the same here. Nowhere does it say how much it's worth. It's not... it's still private info.

V: I just took how much the game cost times the number of copies sold.

Interviewer: There might be a way to calculate approximately how much they earn

Like the Kristiansand group, the participants in the Oslo workshop believed that it was difficult to find information online about how much the companies that owned their favourite games were worth. To get an idea of how much the company made from his favourite game, *Terraria*, owned by the company, *Re-Logic*, V tried to multiply how much the game cost by the number of copies sold. He concluded that the company had earned approximately 5 billion NOK from the sale of the game. When the informants found out how much the owner companies were worth, they were surprised:

J: I'm surprised at how much money they've made, but it's a very big game and in China alone they've made around 600 million dollars from the game. Yes, I was a little surprised, but it is so popular that it fits.

V: They have earned more in China than in the rest of the world

During the conversation after they had presented their drawings about the production side of computer games, there was a discussion about how they perceived their role as actors:

M: I think the same. We are in a way a part of it since we play it ourselves, but at the same time if you don't spend that much money then you are not too big a part. But as B said, we are part of it.

Like M, the other Oslo workshop participants recognized that through their time and money investments and their participation in gaming culture they were implicitly alimentering a variety of big actors' economic interests. They however saw themselves as an insignificantly small part of the video gaming economy.

Activity 3: Analyze a video game

In this task, we asked one person in the group to log in to a game and present and comment on the game while the whole group conduct a small analysis of the game, commenting on issues such as the appearance of the characters, the roles, and the worldview conveyed by the game.

1. Choose a game that you like (Minecraft, Fortnite, League of Legends...?)
2. Log in and start playing. As you play, note the following: the story, how avatars look, skins, items used in the game, difference between avatars.
3. Make a small analysis of the game on a poster that says something about the following:
 - The characters' appearance and how they are represented
 - About the roles of the characters and social relationships
 - About the world depicted in the game.

For this task, the group in the Oslo workshop chose to look at and analyse the games *Genshin Impact*⁸ and *War Thunder*⁹. During the discussions after the tour of the game *Genshin Impact*, we asked if they saw any differences between the male versus the female characters. The participants responded as follows about the characters' appearance:

V: I think they look cool

M: The way they are drawn is quite cool, and it kind of gives a Japanese animé style. Manga and animé are a very similar Chinese and Japanese animation culture. Thought it looked okay.

J: I think the same as M.

V: They often show the different gender things about the characters, and they also look very young too

J: Because people wouldn't pay if the characters looked old gray and, like, didn't spend money to be able to get them. But young, strong and on foot like that, they are more attractive like that

B: even then they wear very unique clothes

In the Kristiansand workshop, the group chose to analyse the games *Saints Row* and *Minecraft*. During the recording of the game *Saints Row*, one of the participants (Boy, 15 years old) asked us to stop and track back. He had seen something. In one of the scenes, he asked us to notice graffiti on the wall that was written in Arabic. He also pointed to the way the terrorist characters were dressed as Arabs. He believed that the way the game portrayed Arabs, with He said that this was a racist game.

According to Anna Everett and Craig Watkins (2008), narratives in city/street games rely on themes and game elements that construct authentic urban culture as ultra-violent, hypersexual, exotic and a repository for dangerous and illegal activity. In the stories, assumptions are made

⁸ Genshin Impact is anime action RPG game popular among PC and mobile gamers. Developed and published by Chinese company miHoYo, the free-to-play action RPG features an action-based combat system that uses magic, character swapping, and gacha monetization for players to acquire new characters, weapons, and other resources.

⁹ War Thunder is a free-to-play, cross-platform, MMO military game dedicated to aviation, armored vehicles, owned by the Russian gaming company Gaijin Entertainment. In War Thunder, aircraft, attack helicopters, ground forces and naval ships cooperate in realistic competitive battles. You can choose from over different vehicles and a large variety of combat situations.

about how white, black and brown bodies, cultures, spaces and styles are simulated and made visible in the world of video games.

The remark about the portrayal of Arabs in *Saints Row* led to a discussion about the skin colour of the characters and racism. Another participant (Girl, 14) disagreed a bit with the claim that the game was racist, and meant that it was too quick a conclusion. She asked about who the game developers were and what they looked like. She googled the name of the game developer behind *Saints Row* and found out that the game was developed by the company Volition. After she showed the picture of Volition founder Mike Kulas, there was discussion about whether there was racism behind the fact that it was a white developer who made games with Arab terrorists. A nice reflection on popular discourses related to identity politics.

Activity 4: Design your own game

Imagine you are a game designer/developer and you have been given the task of proposing an idea for a new game. The assignment says "propose the idea for a game that doesn't exist that you would most like to play!"

Draw the idea for the game on a poster

This task aimed to provide an opportunity for the workshop participants to express their meaning making around video games. They were initially asked to propose an idea for a game that doesn't exist that they would like to play. We observed that they had some difficulty in thinking of an entirely new game, so we gave participants the option of simply modifying the design of an existing game if they chose to.

This is how V (15-year-old male) from the Oslo workshop described his game idea:

I chose to improve *Zelda – Breath of the Wild*. *Zelda* is such an open world RPG game where you sort of, there is a knight who has to rescue a princess, and who goes out and kills a lot of people to rescue her. I was thinking of maybe putting in more varied weapons. Now there are only a couple of categories, and you quickly get tired of them. Same shrines and there's a beast, and dungeons like that that you must get through to get to the end. They are kind of repetitive. It's the same things repeatedly. There are 120 shrines and almost all of them are the same and you get tired of them after a while. I could put in a few more enemies. Now there are only about five or six different enemies...maybe a little longer or a more in-depth story. You mostly go and just kill and find enemies. Game mechanics are quite nice, but I would have perhaps added a few more, and a better reward for finding all the collectibles that are scattered around. Now that you find them all, you get a golden bash that allows you to make a dude dance. Getting this reward takes maybe 20 hours at least just by playing and getting the collectibles. So, I think it could improve.

The drawing and the spoken narrative illustrate that he possessed a notable amount of knowledge about the design elements of the game *Zelda – Breath of the Wild*, and other games in general as he highlights narrative and technical elements such as game mechanics.

Like V, the other participants approached the task by choosing to modify a video game that they were familiar with. Here is how J (15-year-old male) describes his idea for a modified game design:

the game I chose might be my favourite game. There may not be that much of what I feel like improving. I just have such a big point. It's just that...it's a game called *Smash*. It's a two-part fighting game where you fight each other and it's about knocking each other off the field and then the more you hit the opponent the easier it is to knock them off the field, and the game has a total of one hundred characters, one hundred levels. While the game was still alive, when they were still fixed by Nintendo who developed it, there were constantly new updates with more paid characters that totalled a hundred pieces. But the biggest thing I would do to make the game better is to make it so that you can create your own characters, design them, give them their own attack moves and that.

In this description of his idea for a modified design of the game *Smash*, J, by opting “to make the game better is to make it so that you can create your own characters, design them, give them their own attack moves and that” is referring to a manoeuvre in gaming language known as avatar customization (Ducheneaut et al., 2009). Today’s digital media interfaces increasingly allow users to create and modify avatars and to interact in online spaces using those avatars, for uses ranging from social media and education to e-commerce (Kang & Kim, 2020). Avatars in digitally mediated spaces play a significant role in self-representation by allowing users to manipulate, control and embody the virtual selves (Nowak & Fox, 2018).

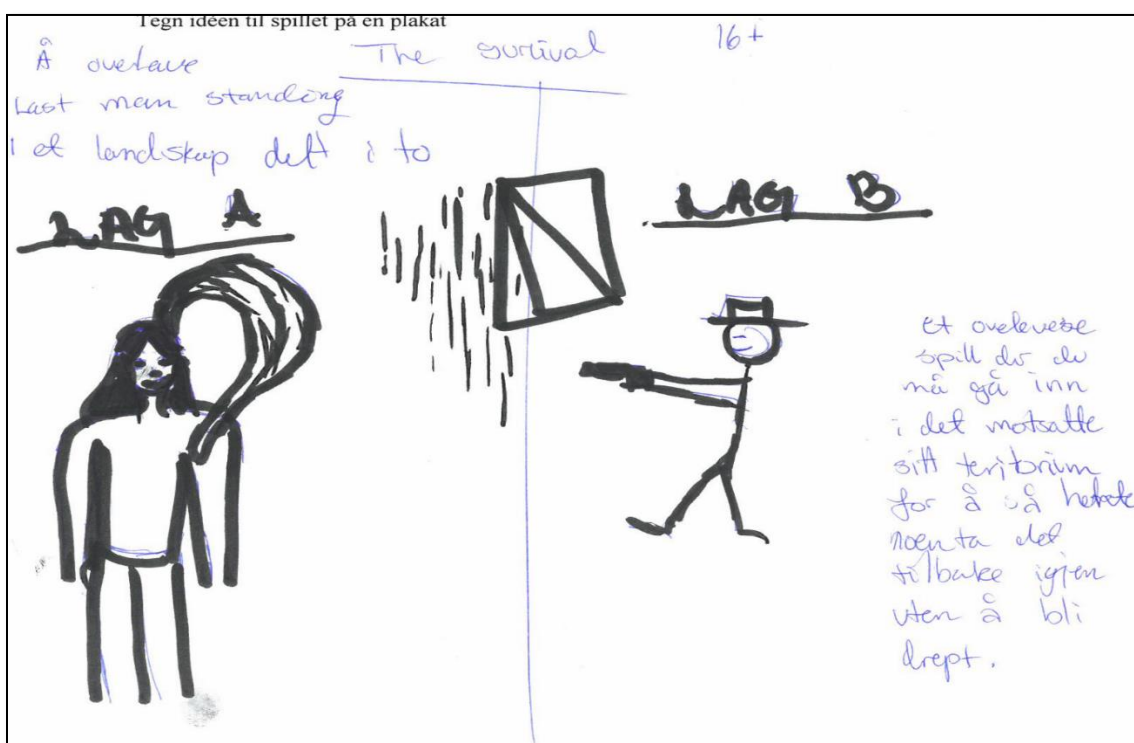


Figure 2: an example of a *game design* drawn by one of the participants.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0. Introduction

This study sought to achieve two goals: first, to gain insights into the state of gaming practices and competence among families (parents and youth) in Norway. Secondly, the study aimed to establish the competences and strategies families needed for a conscious, critical and safe use and regulation of video games. This chapter builds on chapter 4 on the presentation of findings with the aim to discuss some of the key discourses emerging from the findings. The second part of the goals is addressed in the next chapter (6) particularly on resources – which supplements the recommendations parents share under findings in the chapter above.

5.1. Socialization seen as dividend of video gaming

In David Buckingham's (2003) media literacy dimension focusing on audiences, he underscores the importance of understanding users' experiences as well as their interests and needs, and how different groups use, interpret and relate to the media. In this regard, it is important to focus on media users' practices related to video games in their everyday lives. Both parents and youth had reflected and critical perspectives on video games ranging from what platforms they use, how much they played video games, with whom they played video games, how long they played and so on.

One of the key reflections by both parents and youth on the positive attribute of video gaming was the aspect of socialization. Socialization has been well documented among gamers in Medietilsynet (2018); Ask (2011), Børsum (2012) and even among immigrant youth in Norway (Dralega and Cornelissen 2018). Here, both target groups elaborate how for instance parents and youth are able to spend quality time together although this dwindled as the children got older or as they obtained from either school or online. We also learnt that socialization often mutated from online friendships to physical relationships and even love affairs which informants were happy about. In addition to the well documented benefit of learning, collaboration, strategic thinking and group work, (UNESCO; Dralega and

Corneliussen 2018) we are pointed towards the benefit to well-being and mental health. Here, we see how youth with difficulty in school or life or ‘introverts’ are able to get out of their cocoons and make friends through video games. In several cases, we then see them weaning off playing primarily with their parents and siblings to playing comfortably with peers.

The role video games play in socialization is furthered by what Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) refers to as the third place or what Turkle (1996) references as fantasy world - a place where players escape into constructed places in which they can experiment with their different identities and community building (Dralega and Corneliussen 2018; Shaw). At the same time, some of the youth are able to critically reflect on the negative sides of these experiments as one reminds about the discrimination, inequality and negative aspects (Swertz 2016). One informant, showing empathy, points out how wonderful it is that video game producers have guy characters among avatar skins which he indicates was a positive contribution by producers. Another points out how most female characters are casted in stereotypical ways with big boobs, narrow waists and very much sexualized. All these elements are acknowledgements, well documented in critical research (Dralega and Corneliussen 2019; Shaw 2014; Børsum 2012; Swertz 2016).

Similarly, such critical insights are reflective of the element of representation as articulated by Buckingham (2003). He argues that the representation dimension is about people's ability to uncover the lifevalues that are conveyed in media narratives. How realistic are the game narratives and to what extent do these narratives reflect society? How are different groups portrayed and to what extent are these portrayals stereotypical? To this extent, we can say that our informants were critical on aspects of representation. In fact, furthering this point, two mothers and a few youth with immigrant backgrounds indicated that they often used avatars with ‘unconventional’ skins such as ‘big hair’, ‘brown skin’ etc. This ethnicity association has been identified in Dralega and Corneliussen (2018) as a source of identity construction and belonging among youth with immigrant backgrounds – we see it here too.

5.2. Limited awareness of political economy of video games

While critical about the positive and negative social cultural aspects of video games, neither parents nor youth were as critical in their reflections about the political economy of video games. Both focus group discussions and workshop activities produced limited insight and awareness about fundamental elements of critical game literacy (Medietilsynet 2019; Love 2010; Kellner and Share 2019; Freshette 2019). In Buckingham’s (2003) call for critical

media literacy particularly in area of video game 'production', he lays emphasis on uncovering media users' understanding of the economic and political forces that govern the media industry, media production and infrastructures, nationally and internationally.

Buchingham challenges media users to be critical of, for instance: who owns the companies that produce video games? What kind of technology and infrastructures are behind the games and how do they work? What kind of regulation governs the gaming industry and how are consumers' rights protected? These are questions we asked our informants, both parents and youth. In addition, youth were tasked with activities aimed at challenging their knowledge and competences through the workshops. The questions on the understanding and role of algorithms as well as video game producers, who they are what they earn etc were all met with limited responses because our informants were not aware. Slightly better and in some cases somewhat vague responses were given for the concept privacy – generally indicating that our informants – youth and their parents lacked comprehensive media literacy of these important elements in video games.

This understanding affirms the assumptions we developed from the literature indicating limited critical media literacy on aspects of micro-transactions (Dralega, Repstad, Seddighi and Corneliussen 2020; Dralega and Corneliussen 2018; Action plan 2019-2021).

5.3. Video game regulation and the Investment in time and money

While this study shows limited critical media and game literacy when it comes to the knowledge about the role of algorithms, as well as the political economy and infrastructure of video games, it was not the case with regulation discourses particularly when it comes to the resources of time and money spent on video games.

Video game regulation was a topical issue and mainly source of unease among both parents and youth. Although very few parents indicated dialogue as a regulatory model, a fact already shown in previous research (Dralega et al. 2019), several of the parents experienced some form of conflict when it came to video games. Indeed, some of the youth here proclaim what has become a universal youth cry they parents do not understand video games and are too strict (Ibid.).

Time and money were important factors for contention. Both parents and youth had a lot of divergent perspectives on the issue of time and money.

Perhaps not surprisingly, time-use in video games has been well researched and documented as one of the most critical frictions especially in family contexts (Seddighi, Dralega, Prøitz and Corneliussen 2019; Helle 2020; Nova 2018; Medietilsynet 2018). In fact, several of these studies elaborate why time-use is a source of conflict ranging from sleep deprivation, struggle to concentrate in school, isolation from family time, inability to perform chores and so on. Hence, it was not surprising that the informants of this study had a lot to share about the ‘negative’ impact of video gaming – some parents indicating that it was difficult to know when to ask the gamers to ‘stop’ or how to regulate time-use for video gaming (especially for boys playing on PlayStation consoles) as opposed to time-use on mobile phones (for girls mostly on YouTube or tik-tok). The youth also acknowledge that video games took a lot of time. In fact, some youth took up the role of regulating time-use for their younger siblings.

In terms on money – particularly on video games, it was clear that all actors were conscientious about money spent on buying video games. Several of the youth argued that they did not spend much on video games, several of them claiming they played free games while parents gave the impression that the youth knew not to over withdraw from the bank cards attached to the consol. The connection between spending on buying video games or in game spending and political economy of video games from the production side was not clearly made nor articulated – so while the informants were aware of spending money on games they were not generally nor obviously aware of the financial aspects and connections of the producers.

Buckingham (2003) highlights the issue of language as one key dimension of media literacy. This deals with the ways in which video games use language to convey their message and the kind of language used in games to convey messages. Concerns articulated by two particular parents in this regard concerned the issue of the vulgarity of the and violence of the language in games that children imitated or listened to. As a result, the two parents mentioned above opted to either ban games (such as *Squid Games* and associated music), switched off the game, or warned their young ones to abstain from such games. Here, we see parents reacting to the ‘negative’ influence of language from video games onto their children as a cause for drastic regulation as a means of ‘indirect’ critical media literacy.

5.5. The significance of research process

The strategic decision to engage the informants particularly the youth, first in focus group discussions and later in workshops, enabled this study to achieve its intended primary ambition – which was to not only gain insights into the status on critical media/video game literacy but also be able to raise awareness about important elements in critical media literacy (Kellner and Share 2007). Intentionally incorporating dialogue as well as hands-on activities naturally generated critical reflections (Garcia, Segler and Share 2013) and sense of ownership (Kellner and Share 2007) by each participant. Hence, responses such as those we received from the plenary sessions after the workshops were a good indicator that the youth came out of the research process more conscious and aware of various elements of critical game literacy than when they came into the research process.

5.6. Concluding remarks

This study sought to gain insights into the state of critical game media literacy (GML) and competence among families (parents and youth) in Norway. In order to achieve this, qualitative methodologies employing participatory and dialogical approaches (mixed methods) were adopted with all the target groups constituting youth, parents and actors in order to achieve both a deeper understanding of discourse and generating resources and tools needed for a conscious, critical and safe use and regulation of video games.

The study established that video gaming habits/patterns and video game regulation were areas that generated critical reflections. The issue of time use and spending on video games were still a topic of contention between parents and youths in this study as evidenced in previous studies (Medietilsynet 2018; Seddighi et al. 2019; Dralega et. al. 2020; Dahle et al. 2020). The consensus seems to be on dialogue and participation of parents in their children's games as an avenue for promoting critical media literacy opposed to conflictual approaches (Dralega and Corneliussen 2019).

The topics around algorithms and the production side of video games (Medietilsynet 2019; Buchingham 2003) were not subjects our informants were well conversant with nor within their local public spheres (discussed with peers or parents). This new understanding led to the development of especially two resources/tools i.e. Guide for parents, teachers, students on how to promote video game literacy and a VR 360/Escape room that allows users to navigate well-crafted challenges that heighten critical media literacy on the key issues. Along with this,

we hope that the report as well as dissemination activities from this project will go a long way to raise awareness and contribute to media literacy for various stakeholders.

6. RESOURCES AND DISSEMINATION

6.1. Resources

This project has resulted into several resources aimed at various target groups. Among the outputs is a report, a guide with activities for teachers and/or parents on how to promote critical media literacy among youths. The guide includes various activities and instructions on how to implement the activities.

6.1.1. Report

This report is the main output for the project. The report states the project objectives, research processes and outcomes as well as conceptual frames and analysis. The key findings are summarized in the report as well as recommendations for relevant actors and stakeholders working on the topic on video games and critical media literacy.

6.1.2. Guide for video games and critical media literacy in family contexts

A guide has been prepared to help parents, teachers and youths to raise awareness and critical thinking around video games. Instructions precede the 4 sample activities laid out in detail for participants to undertake in individual or group setting.

<https://www.nla.no/forskning/fou-prosjekt/dataspill-og-barnefamiliers-kritiske-medieforstaelse/>

6.1.3. VR/360 Escape room



Figure 3: Activities 1 in the Escape room.

In collaboration with NDLA, the researchers have contributed to the development of a VR36 escape room and activities meant to raise awareness about critical media literacy especially relating to video games. Entitled: 'Your digital everyday life' the Escape room offers the player with four challenging everyday situations that the player has to solve to move from one challenge to the next. Not only are the users invited to play, they, get immersed in selected topics like algorithms, technology, and so on and as they solve a challenge, they get to learn about various elements of critical media literacy through game and play.

Escape here: <https://ed.ndla.no/preview/37120/nb>

6.2. Dissemination

6.2.1. Conferences

We plan to present our paper on '*Video Games and Critical Media Literacy in Family Contexts in Norway*' at the World Learning Summit May 23-26th. University of Agder. We will present our findings under the Media Literacy Session.

<https://wls.futurelearninglab.org/>

6.2.2. Scientific Publications

Our chapter on '*Video Games and Critical Media Literacy in Family Contexts*' is being prepared for a chapter in an anthology on 'Digital Danning' (2023), edited by Margunn Serigstad Dahle and Grete Skjeggstad Meyer.

6.2.4. Popular publications

The researchers are also preparing a popular version to be shared with Forskning.no in which we share the key findings from the research with the general public.

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