

## Online gaming: the Portuguese scene

N. Gonçalves<sup>\*,1</sup>, and M. Figueiredo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ESE Viseu - Pólo de Lamego, Urb. Ortigosa, 5100-183 Lamego, Portugal

The poster describes the basic results from a survey on online gaming habits of Portuguese gamers. The survey was conducted online. A total of 971 online gamers took the survey within a period of three months. The survey was advertised on the most important Portuguese game site and on the two largest forums dedicated to online gaming. The study had two main objectives: a) describing Portuguese online gamers, their gaming habits and preferences (most played games, time spent playing, *clan* belonging, competitions, favourite game) and b) analysing arguments presented for gaming habits and preferences.

**Keywords** online gaming; survey; Portugal; communities

### 1. Introduction

Recently, digital and interactive entertainment, computer and video games, have emerged as relevant social media. It's not just the videogame industry that is growing, computer and video games participation in our cultural and social life is also increasing. Although we are starting to realize that computer and video games are "powerful learning devices" and that "the power of video games (...) resides in the ways in which they meld learning and identity" (p. 199) [1], "precisely who is playing is less well known" (p. 49) [2].

The recent interest in studies on Internet usage in Portugal allows a clearer picture of the impact of Internet and gaming in Portuguese online habits. Although not every data is exactly coincident - in 2003, Portuguese Internet users were reported as 29% [3] and 25.7% [4] of the total population of the country -, the studies clearly suggest an increasing number of Portuguese Internet users, from 19.4% in 2002 to 29.3% in 2004 [5], with an annual growth average rate of 21% in the period between 2000 and 2004 [6].

Specifically related to online gaming, according to the same sources, in 2003, 21.2% of the Portuguese Internet users played online games and 93% did it at home [3]. Other studies show an increase in the use of the Internet to play/download games, music and videos (from 49%[6] to 45.2%[5] vs. the previous 43.4%[4]). In spite of the differences between some numbers, the data suggests an increasing number of Portuguese Internet users and online gamers.

### 2. Methodology

We undertook a study about the online gaming Portuguese community with two objectives: a) describing Portuguese online gamers, their gaming habits and preferences; and b) analysing arguments presented for gaming habits and preferences. We based the production of data in a survey conducted online, between September 29, 2004 and December 30, 2005, hosted by My3q.com.

The questionnaire had 38 questions, from demographics and preferences to social issues and opinions. Before online publishing, it was tested with six gamers, to prevent possible misunderstandings. Survey advertisement was made in several ways. A notice was posted in the appropriate area of the three largest Portuguese forums dedicated to gaming: FraglÍder (<http://fraglider.oninet.pt>), War-Zone (<http://warzone.sapo.pt>) and G4mers (<http://g4mers-zone.sapo.pt>). At the same time, the forums administrators were asked by e-mail for some advertisement support. Finally, we used "word of mouth", sending e-mails announcing the survey to over 100 gamers, listed in Portuguese online gaming competitions public registrations. The survey was, thus, advertised in several online gamers clans/guilds/squads forums.

\* Corresponding author: e-mail: [nelson@esev.ipv.pt](mailto:nelson@esev.ipv.pt)

1 Although participation was voluntary, and there wasn't a fee or prize of any kind, the advertising  
2 process clearly raised issues concerning sample bias. The dedicated or experienced online gamers were  
3 more likely to find our notices, considering their higher participation in the gaming forums. Their com-  
4 mitment to gaming and interest in the survey's theme are also relevant issues.

5 At the time of closing, we had 1018 filled questionnaires. After checking each time and date of sub-  
6 mission and IP and/or domain of the participants, we discarded several questionnaires submitted in error,  
7 duplicate or in blank. After checking each response, we excluded all questionnaires that didn't have  
8 demographic data or had more than five blank responses. All together, we discarded 47 questionnaires  
9 resulting in 971 participants in the study.

10 The data is still being analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics and content analysis.

### 11 **3. Basic findings**

#### 12 **3.1 Demographics**

13  
14  
15  
16  
17 All the recent studies on Portuguese Internet users suggest a slight male predominance: there are more  
18 men than women using the Internet [3] and the percentage of men that consider themselves Internet users  
19 is slightly higher [4,5]. Our data suggests that in the Portuguese online gaming scene male predominance  
20 is much stronger. We didn't make any effort to target either men or women specifically but this finding  
21 is hardly surprising. Other online gaming surveys have stated the same kind of male predominance [7,8].

22 Concerning age, our data suggests that the average Portuguese online gamer is 20 years old. The  
23 minimum age was 11 and the maximum 58 years old. Around 74% of the answers rested between 16 and  
24 25 years old. Our findings seem to indicate that the Portuguese online gamer is younger than the average  
25 Portuguese Internet user (40.8% are between 15 and 24 years old [3]; 56%, in 2003 [4], and 63.7%, in  
26 2004 [5], are between 16 and 24 years old) and slightly younger than the online gamer profiled by the  
27 Game Research survey [7]. Our findings challenge "the notion of the videogame audience as comprised  
28 largely, if not exclusively, of pre-pubescent males (which) has been remarkably pervasive" (p. 49) [2].

29 The marital status data is according to the age findings: a clear predominance of the never married.

30 In terms of geographic distribution, the Lisbon district is the most represented region. The fact that  
31 Lisbon is the most populated district [9] and has the highest percentage of Internet users (34.5% of the  
32 population in 2003 [4] and 39.2% in 2004 [5]) helps to understand the importance of this district.

33 Although we didn't considered the population regional distribution in our sampling process, Table 1  
34 shows a clear proximity between the national distribution of the population by district and the geographic  
35 origin of the online gamers that took the survey. Since the percentage of Internet users from the different  
36 regions of Portugal, except for Lisbon, is very similar (from a minimum of 19.7% to a maximum of  
37 23.1% in 2003 [4] and from 22.5% to 27.9% in 2004 [5]), online gamers origin seems to be mainly de-  
38 termined by global demographic tendencies.

39 In Portugal, the Internet user has relevant academic qualifications, 33.6% have completed High  
40 School and 26.7% Higher Education [3]. In what concerns the Portuguese online gamer qualifications,  
41 the majority (51,4%) already has a High School or Higher Education diploma. Most of the respondents  
42 are students: 35.8% in High School, 27.9% in Higher Education. From these, 0.4% are studying for a  
43 Master degree and 0.2% are PhD students. In Portugal, according to the number of Doctoral degrees  
44 registered between 1970 and 2001 [10], only 0.09% of the population had a Doctoral degree in 2001.

#### 45 **3.2 Patterns of online gaming**

46  
47  
48 In Portugal, online gamers are home-based: 93.3% of the respondents stated playing mostly at home,  
49 using ADSL (50.2%) and Cable (47.4%) Internet connections (the fastest domestic connections avail-  
50 able). Almost every one stated having Internet at home for more than one year (91.6%), 73.4% for more  
51 than 2 years. The current computer is used for gaming for more than one year by 75.4% and for more  
52

1 than two years by 51% of the participants. The explanation for the longevity of the current computer  
 2 used for gaming is upgrading: 67.1% affirmed having upgraded the computer used for gaming. This also  
 3 means that a very significant percentage of the computers with less than a year (16.2%) have already  
 4 been submit to some sort of upgrading.  
 5

6 **Table 1** Portuguese online gamers and Portuguese population distributions by district

		n	%		n [9]	%
<b>District</b>	Lisbon	312	32.1	Lisbon	213601	20.6
	Oporto	163	16.8	Oporto	178183	17.2
	Setúbal	99	10.2	Braga	831366	8.0
	Aveiro	66	6.8	Setúbal	788459	7.6
	Braga	65	6.7	Aveiro	713575	6.9
	Coimbra	53	5.5	Leiria	459426	4.4
	Leiria	48	4.9	Santarém	454527	4.4
	Faro	35	3.6	Coimbra	441204	4.3
	Viseu	22	2.3	Faro	395218	3.8
	Santarém	21	2.2	Viseu	394925	3.8
	Castelo Branco	19	2.0	Viana do Castelo	250275	2.4
	Madeira	14	1.4	Madeira	245011	2.4
	Açores	7	0.7	Açores	241763	2.3
	Évora	7	0.7	Vila Real	223729	2.2
	Viana do Castelo	7	0.7	Castelo Branco	208063	2.0
	Vila Real	6	0.6	Guarda	179961	1.7
	Beja	4	0.4	Évora	173654	1.7
	Guarda	3	0.3	Beja	161211	1.6
	Portalegre	2	0.2	Bragança	148883	1.4
	Bragança	1	0.1	Portalegre	127018	1.2
	Not answered	17	1.7			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>971</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>103561</b>	<b>100</b>

34 These findings clearly suggest that online gamers are demanding computer and Internet users, sup-  
 35 porting the idea that “online gaming is not for the inexperienced gamer and Internet user” [7].

36 According to our findings, 74.1% of Portuguese online gamers play, at least, five days per week, and  
 37 55.6% do it every day. Each gaming session lasts, in average, from one to three hours to 67.4% of the  
 38 gamers. More impressively, 84.2% play from one to five hours, and 5.5% stated playing more than five  
 39 hours per session. Online gaming “is indeed a time-consuming activity while for some it is life itself” [7]  
 40 and the online gamers seem to be, at least partially, aware of this, since 38.2% considered spending a lot  
 41 or too much of their time playing online.

42 It’s not difficult to find references to cheating in the online gaming communities. Besides the forum  
 43 discussions around the subject, it’s quite easy to find anti-cheating software, anti-cheating groups and  
 44 websites devoted to the subject. In spite of the importance the subject seems to have to online gamers,  
 45 89.9% said they never use cheats, and only 1% assumed using cheats manytimes or always.  
 46

### 47 3.3 Preferences

48 It is clear that Portuguese online gamers are action games adepts, specially the First-Person Shooter  
 49 (FPS) type. Excluding Role-Playing Games (RPG) and Real-Time Strategy (RTS) games, which have  
 50 some importance, other game genres or types are irrelevant as favourite game.  
 51  
 52

The preference for action games is confirmed by the titles selection. *Counter-Strike* clearly has more adepts than any other game (Table 2), *America's Army* being the second most chosen with 12.7%.

**Table 2** Portuguese online gamers preferences by type of game and series

		n	%			n	%
<b>Type of game played most often</b>	First-person shooter	839	86.4	Flight Sim	3	0.3	
	Role-Playing Games	46	5.0	Other	11	1.1	
	Real-time strategy	52	5.4	Not answered	4	0.4	
	Turn-based strategy	1	0.1				
	Car racing	12	1.2	Total	971	100	
<b>Game played most often/ present favourite</b>	Counter-Strike series	433	44.6	BattleField series	26	2.7	
	America's Army	123	12.7	Day of Defeat	25	2.6	
	Unreal Tournament series	43	4.4	Medal of Honor series	20	2.1	
	Call Of Duty series	42	4.3	Don't have one	6	0.6	
	Delta Force series	31	3.2	Other games	196	21.2	
	Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory	26	2.7	Total	971	100	

Other surveys' results already showed similar preferences, "action games are the most popular" and "the most popular game is Counter-Strike" [3]. GameSpy, a multiplayer gaming server browser, tracks more than 83.000 gamers playing in *Half-Life* servers (*Counter-Strike 1.6* servers use the *Half-Life* game server engine), over 34.000 playing in *Half-Life 2* servers (*Counter-Strike: Source* servers use the *Half-Life 2* game server engine), more than 13.000 playing *Call of Duty*, around 7.500 playing *Unreal Tournament 2004* and almost 7000 playing in *America's Army* game servers [11]. The top 5 games are First-Person Shooters. The game activity ranking from Csports.net, a worldwide FPS ranking system, identifies over 100.000 *Counter-Strike 1.6* gamers, around 17.000 for *Call of Duty*, around 9.000 for *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, nearly 8.000 for *Counter-Strike: Source* and almost 6.500 *Day of Defeat* gamers [12]. Another set of data to support the dominance of FPS comes from Serverspy.net GeoSearch, a free statistical service and software for game servers (subscription and installation required). It allows to filter game servers located in Portugal. We identified 117 servers and 51.3% were running the *Half-Life* game server engine, required to play *Counter-Strike 1.6* [13].

### 3.4 Social issues

Concerning the identity of Portuguese online gamers, only a very small percentage, less than 1%, doesn't use a nickname when playing online. The most representative group usually uses only one nickname (48%). Even though it seems that most gamers choose to have an alternative identity, they seem somehow conservative about it, concerned with their online gamer identity and preserving it. At the extreme side, we have a relevant group of 11.8% gamers that uses five or more nicknames.

At the present time, most online gamers (73.3%) belong to an online gaming organization, association, group or team, a clan or guild. Further, when looking into the past, without considering the present situation, only 23.9% have no past experience in belonging to a clan or guild and 22.1% have belonged to five or more clans or guilds. The data suggests that online gamers have a need to belong and that the clans or guilds are a way to satisfy that need, but it also seems that clan migration is an important phenomenon among the online gamers' community.

Apparently, the gamers' nationality and the game played are two important issues that contribute to clan or guild identity. The large majority of clan/guild members (82.9%) stated that their groups only have Portuguese members. The spoken language is probably a relevant dimension in this matter. The game played also seems relevant to the identity of the group: 56.9% of clan/guild members belong to an organization built around one single game. This data shows the relevance of the game as an aggregator.

#### 4. Final thoughts and discussion

The results presented are only preliminary. Nevertheless, we believe the data available already allows us to raise some important issues relevant to the scientific community interested in online gaming.

According to our data, it's very likely that the Portuguese online gamer is a young male adult, around 20 years old, never married, living in a coastline district of the mainland, most likely in the Lisbon district. He's most probably a High School or Higher Education student who likes to play at home, using ADSL or Cable. He is an experienced Internet user, an experienced gamer and already upgraded his computer. He plays every day, or at least five days per week, during one to three hours, concentrating on just one game and never using cheats. Usually, he plays a FPS, probably *Counter-Strike*, and is constructing a virtual persona. He belongs to a clan or guild but this is not a new experience. His clan's members are Portuguese and they all play the same game.

The data also suggests that, in Portugal, online gaming is an educated young male adult's activity, country widespread, to which place of residence isn't relevant, done at home by experienced gamers and Internet users. It's a time-consuming activity of playing action games. Also, identity construction and group belonging are two important processes to understand the online gaming experience assuming nationality and the "name of the game" as relevant aggregator elements..

**Acknowledgements** The online gamers who had participated in this survey, Fraglúder for publicizing the survey.

#### References

- [1] Gee, James Paul (2004). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [2] Newman, James (2004). *Videogames*. London: Routledge.
- [3] Cardoso, Gustavo (coord.), António Firmino da Costa, Cristina Palma Conceição and Maria do Carmo Gomes (2004). *A Sociedade em Rede em Portugal*. Lisboa: CIES/ISCTE (Preliminary Report). Available at [http://www.cies.iscte.pt/linhas/linha2/sociedade\\_rede/pag2.jsp](http://www.cies.iscte.pt/linhas/linha2/sociedade_rede/pag2.jsp) [3/5/2005].
- [4] INE (2004). *Sociedade da Informação e do Conhecimento 2003*. Quadros Estatísticos. Available at <http://www.ine.pt> [1/5/2005].
- [5] INE (2005). *Sociedade da Informação e do Conhecimento 2004*. Quadros Estatísticos. Available at <http://www.ine.pt> [1/5/2005].
- [6] Unidade de Missão Inovação e Conhecimento/Observatório da Inovação e Conhecimento (2004). *Inquérito à utilização das TIC pela população portuguesa*. Available at [http://www.umic.gov.pt/UMIC/CentrodeRecursos/Publicacoes/inquerito\\_documento.htm](http://www.umic.gov.pt/UMIC/CentrodeRecursos/Publicacoes/inquerito_documento.htm) [2/5/2005].
- [7] Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon (2002). "Online Gaming Habits". *Game-Research.com*. Available at [http://www.game-research.com/art\\_online\\_gaming.asp](http://www.game-research.com/art_online_gaming.asp) [1/04/2005].
- [8] Kline, Stephen and Arlidge, Avery (2003). *Online Gaming as Emergent Social Media: A Survey*. Media Analysis Laboratory/Simon Fraser University. Available at <http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/onlinegaming/report.htm> [5/5/2005].
- [9] INE (2002). *Census 2001*. Available at <http://www.ine.pt/censos2001/censos.asp> [1/5/2005].
- [10] OCES/MCIES (2004). *Doutoramentos realizados ou reconhecidos por universidades portuguesas (1970-2003)*. Available at [http://www.oces.mctes.pt/docs/ficheiros/DoutorConcRec1970\\_2003.pdf](http://www.oces.mctes.pt/docs/ficheiros/DoutorConcRec1970_2003.pdf) [1/5/2005].
- [11] GameSpy Stats (2005). *Top Game Servers By Players*. Available at <http://archive.gamespy.com/stats/> [14/5/2005].
- [12] Csports.net (2005). *Top Games – Activity by Game*. Available at <http://www.csports.net/TopGames.aspx?Matrix=0&Mod=0> [14/5/2005].
- [13] GeoSearch/Serverspy.net. Available at <http://www.serverspy.net/site/geosearch/list.html?country=pt&g=all> [14/5/2005].