

A disparaged industry is technically

Computer games are associated with violence. The media contribute to this through their selection of images.

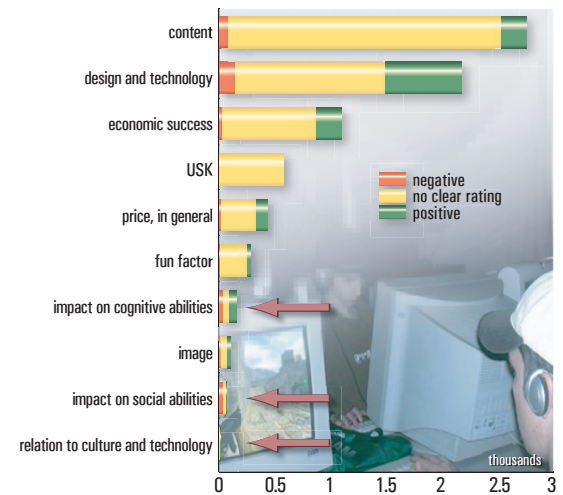
Research Links:
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Computer games are part of everyday culture, receiving an overall positive media image. This becomes obvious when looking at the average media coverage in a time period without any extraordinary events, such as the third anniversary of the violence in the school of the German city Erfurt on April 26th. Nevertheless, computer games are associated with violence. The media contribute to this image through their choice of graphics. This is the result of a **Media Tenor** analysis, which, in the time period between July 2003 and June 2004, examined the topical structure of 274 articles on the products of the computer gaming industry that were published in 19 daily, weekly and monthly media.

The good media image primarily resulted from technical product descriptions in the review sections. The balance between positive and negative assessments on technical product characteristics was out-

balance and readiness to resort to violence on the other, as the Director of the Criminological Research Institute in Lower Saxony, Christian Pfeiffer, points out. But critical topics such as growing isolation, dumbing-down and an inclination towards violence appeared

2 Social and cognitive effects are not of interest

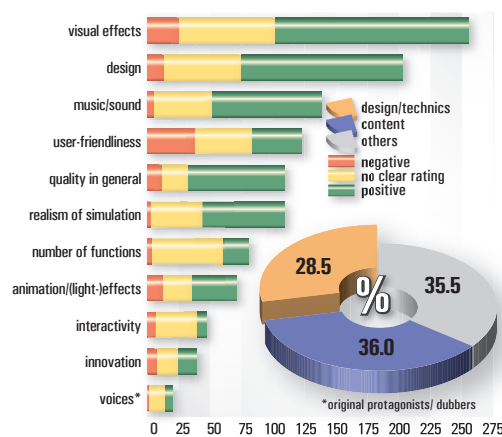


Presence and assessment of product characteristics

Source: Media Tenor
07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Basis: 274 stories with
10,500 reports in 19 media

1 Outstanding technical assessment



Presence and assessment of technical product descriptions

Source: Media Tenor
07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Basis: 274 stories with
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standing. Only ergonomics sometimes left something to be desired (graph 1).

There is a statistical correlation between excessive media consumption on the one hand, and school fai-

just as rarely in the media as positive ones, such as the promotion of media competence or openness towards technology (graph 2).

The focus was on content and technology, while only 3% of all statements dealt with social consequences. Of those, a large part appeared in two articles of the monthly magazine **Psychologie heute**. The 2003 December issue quoted from a study of the University of Bochum, according to which the consumption of games that glorify violence reduces the ability for compassion. The May issue of 2004, however, shows how the best-selling computer game “The Sims” trains the players’ psychological agility and teaches them something about their own life. Violent games are an important part of the industry, but they are not the norm. The same thing is true for the effects. According to psychologists, they largely depend on the type of game chosen and, above all, the extent to which parents take responsibility for their children’s media consumption. If they play “Sims” for hours on end, they still do not learn their vocabulary lists or quadratic equations.

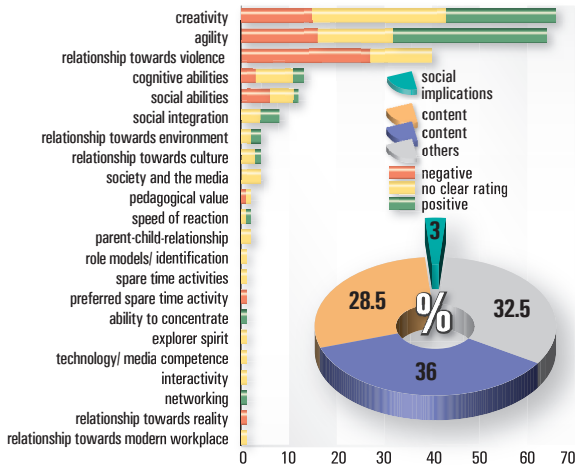
What is the origin of the violent image?

Do the media still contribute to the violent image of computer games, despite overall positive assessments?

Topics that are critical for the image of PC games – growing isolation, dumbing-down, readiness to resort to violence – appear just as rarely in the media coverage as positive ones, such as the promotion of media competence or openness towards technology.

sophisticated

3 Uncritical view on social consequences of computer games

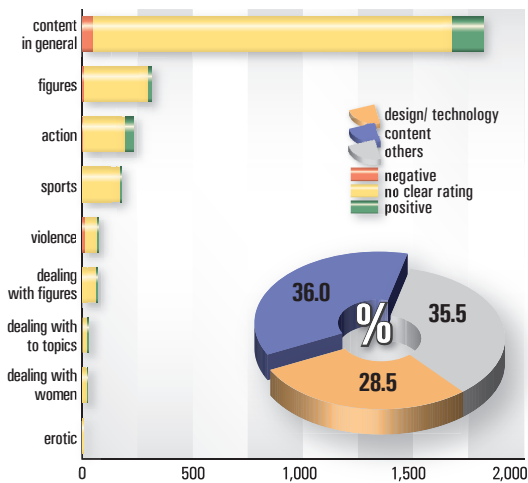


Social implications by industry sector

Source: Media Tenor 07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004 Basis: 274 stories with 10,500 reports in 19 media

The German weekly tabloid **BamS**, the most important review platform for computer games, published an article on September 21st, 2003, on the seemingly obvious connection between sometimes deadly car races on country roads and games like “Autobahn-raser” (highway racer). Yet, it did not put forward any clear evidence, and the association between computer games and “hooliganism on our streets”, which the article suggested, was entirely based on the

4 Media do not take offense at content



Presence and content of illustrations

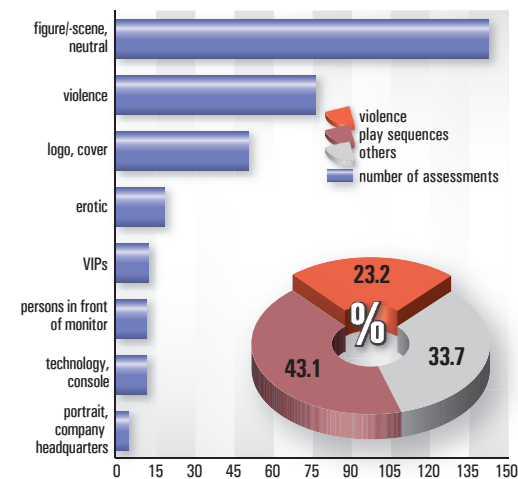
Source: Media Tenor 07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004 Basis: 274 stories with 10,500 reports in 19 media

speculations by police psychologists. Reviews in the broadsheets were less sensational, even if they also addressed violence. The **FAZ** criticized “ideological ballast” and “naïve hurrah-patriotism” in an anti-terrorism game; the **SZ** despised bloodthirsty massacre games. Yet, both praised the respective game as “innovative” or “graphically fantastic” (graph 4). The **BamS** called for a “rebellion” against the racing game, but still assumed that players were able to distinguish between game and reality.

Violence as illustration

The violent image of computer games has got less to do with the content of some games. What is more important, editors liked to use violent images for illustrating their articles. **BamS**, the same publication that hypocritically stood up against hooliganism, was responsible for almost 60% of violent images, and the weekly magazine **Stern** for 20%. Even when violence did not play any role in the description of contents, journalists still liked to use these images to grab attention. They thereby solidified the cliché (graph 5), which the norm of their articles denied.

5 Illustrations underline violent image of computer games



Presence and valuation of illustrations

Source: Media Tenor 07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004 Basis: 274 stories with 10,500 reports in 19 media

Basis:

Media: Die Welt, FAZ, Fr. Rundschau, FT Deutschland, Süddeutsche, Tageszeitung, Bild-Zeitung, Handelsblatt, Berliner Zeitung, Spiegel, Focus, Stern, Zeit, Welt am Sonntag, Bild am Sonntag, FAZ am Sonntag, Super Illu, MAX, Psychologie heute

Time: 07/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Analysis: 274 stories with 10,500 reports in 19 media

No obvious facts are provided, the association between PC games and “hooliganism on our streets”, which the article suggests, is entirely based on speculations by police psychologists.

Even when violence does not play any role in the description of contents, journalists like to use violence as an attention-grabber. They thereby solidify the cliché, which the norm of their articles denies.