The Rite of Jihadification in ISIS Modified Video Games: Mass Deception and Dialectic of Religious Regression in Technological Progression

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Abstract : ISIS, the terrorist organization, modified two videogames, ARMA III and Grand Theft Auto 5 (2013) as means of online recruitment and ideological propaganda. The urge to study the mechanism at work, whether it has been successful or not, derives (Digital) Humanities experts to explore how codes of terror, Islamic ideology and recruitment strategies are incorporated into the ludic mechanics of videogames. Another aspect of the significance lies in the fact that this is a latent problem that has not been fully addressed in an interdisciplinary framework prior to this study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Therefore, due to the complexity of the subject, the present paper entangles with game studies, philosophical and religious poles to form the methodology of conducting the research. As a contextualized epistemology of such exploitation of videogames, the core argument is building on the notion of "Culture Industry" proposed by Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment (2002). This article posits that the ideological underpinnings of ISIS's cause corroborated by the action-bound mechanics of the videogames are in line with adhering to the Islamic Eschatology as a furnishing ground and an excuse in exercising terrorism. It is an account of ISIS's modification of the videogames, a tool of technological progression to practice online radicalization. Dialectically, this practice is packed up in rhetoric for recognizing a religious myth (the advent of a savior), as a hallmark of regression. The study puts forth that ISIS's wreaking havoc on the world, both in reality and within action videogames, is negotiating the process of self-assertion in the players of such videogames (by assuming one's self a member of terrorists) that leads to self-annihilation. It tries to unfold how ludic Mod videogames are misused as tools of mass deception towards ethnic cleansing in reality and line with the distorted Eschatological myth. To conclude, this study posits videogames to be a new avenue of mass deception in the framework of the Culture Industry. Yet, this emerges as a two-edged sword of mass deception in ISIS's modification of videogames. It shows that ISIS is not only trying to hijack the minds through online/ludic recruitment, it potentially deceives the Muslim communities or those prone to radicalization into believing that it's terrorist practices are preparing the world for the advent of a religious savior based on Islamic Eschatology. This is to claim that the harsh actions of the videogames are potentially breeding minds by seeds of terrorist propaganda and numbing them to violence. The real world becomes an extension of that harsh virtual environment in a ludic/actual continuum, the extension that is contributing to the mass deception mechanism of the terrorists, in a clandestine trend.
Keywords : culture industry, dialectic, ISIS, islamic eschatology, mass deception, video games
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