

Politics in Video Games: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and Battlefield 3

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Abstract:

This study explores the portrayal of political ideologies in popular video games, which are Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and Battlefield 3. The aim of this study is to show how these games convey ideological and political messages to players, potentially influencing their perspectives on political issues. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study examines the language, with visual and auditory elements, present in the cutscenes and during the gameplay of these games. The analysis employs van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (2000, 2006) to decipher the games' embedded ideological messages. The findings indicate that game developers perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of US military power. The developers also portray Arabs as the main source of terrorism and reinforce negative stereotypes of Iran and Russia.

Keywords: Political ideologies, video games, manipulation, ideological strategies, politics and video games

السياسة في ألعاب الفيديو: تحليل اجتماعي-معرفي لنداء الواجب: الحرب الحدیثة 2 و ساحة المعركة 3

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المخلص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تصوير الأيديولوجيات السياسية في ألعاب الفيديو الشهيرة " نداء الواجب: الحرب الحديثة ٢ " و " ساحة المعركة ٣ ". الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو إظهار كيفية نقل هذه الألعاب رسائل أيديولوجية وسياسية للاعبين، مما قد يؤثر على وجهات نظرهم تجاه القضايا السياسية. باستخدام منهجية البحث النوعي، تفحص الدراسة اللغة، مع العناصر المرئية والسمعية، الموجودة في المشاهد السينمائية واثاء اللعب في هذه الألعاب. يطبق التحليل نموذج فان دايك الاجتماعي-المعرفي لسنة (٢٠٠٠) و (٢٠٠٦) لفهم الرسائل الأيديولوجية المضمنة في الألعاب. تشير النتائج إلى أن مطوري الألعاب يديمون أيديولوجية الهيمنة للقوة العسكرية الأمريكية. كما يصور المطورون العرب على أنهم المصدر الرئيسي للإرهاب ويعززون الصور النمطية السلبية حول إيران وروسيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أيديولوجيات سياسية، ألعاب الفيديو، التلاعب، استراتيجيات أيديولوجية، السياسة وألعاب الفيديو.

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مجلة آداب الكوفة - جامعة الكوفة مرخصة بموجب ترخيص المشاع الإبداعي ٤.٠ الدولي.



1. Introduction

According to the information presented by Marketwatch in 2021, the video game sector is presently larger than both the film and music industries combined. This growth can also be attributed to the significant impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on various sectors, particularly the economy. The pandemic has increased video game production as people have chosen to stay at home to protect themselves from the virus. Those who prefer to stay at home seek affordable, enjoyable, and safe entertainment. The pandemic has led to video games being the preferred form of digital entertainment. As video games have gained more widespread acceptance, they have garnered increased attention from researchers in various fields, including psychology, sociology, and education.

Studies have shown that video games can have various effects on players' attitudes and behaviours, such as influencing their emotions, decision-making, and social interactions (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Ferguson, 2015; Greitemeyer & Mügge, 2014). This has sparked intense academic interest in the topic, with numerous studies exploring the impact of video games on areas such as aggression, prosocial behaviour, and mental health.

Despite this focus, little study has been conducted on the relationship between video games and political ideology. The representation of political ideology in video games is an important issue to explore because it has the potential to influence players' attitudes towards politics and contribute to the formation of their political identities.

Video games are one of the advances of modern technology that have paved the way for exchanging information and creating several discourses that construct our cultural beliefs, power relations, and ideological backgrounds. According to the report of the Newzoo website in 2022, over two billion individuals throughout the world regularly play video games across various platforms. As games often contain real-world references, meanings, and themes, they have the potential to convey ideological and political messages to players. Moreover, video games are often marketed and designed for younger audiences, children and teenagers who may have limited knowledge and understanding of the world, making them particularly vulnerable to the influence of political ideology in video games. Game developers and companies may use video

games as a tool for promoting their own political agenda, which can shape young players' attitudes and beliefs.

Political ideology is a fundamental aspect of human societies, shaping individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviours (Jost et al., 2009). It influences various aspects of life, such as economic policies, social welfare, and national security. Mjdawi and Jabi (2020) highlight the importance of studying language and communication practices in digital media. Therefore, understanding how political ideologies are represented and communicated in video games is a crucial step in exploring the intersection of video games and politics.

Through examining the strategies used by MPs and Ministers in parliamentary discourse, as outlined in Alghezzezy's 2020 study on "Manipulation in Interpellation of Iraqi Parliamentary Discourse," it becomes apparent that language is a powerful tool for persuasion and manipulation in political contexts. Drawing on this insight, this paper aims to explore the political ideologies in video games by exploring games that tackle significant events of the present time. By examining the political themes and messages in video games, the researcher can gain insights into how these games can shape players' views of the world. The study tries to answer the following question "What are the political ideologies that are found in the selected video games?" For this objective, van Dijk's (2000, 2006a) socio-cognitive approach and ideological discursive strategies are chosen as a theoretical framework for analysing the communicative modes utilised in the games.

This paper is limited to the examination of two action video games which are Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and Battlefield 3. These games are selected because they are known for incorporating political elements and are popular among gamers. Moreover, action video games often feature violent themes and may have a stronger influence on players' attitudes towards politics compared to other genres.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ideology

Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836, as cited in Heywood, 2021, p. 3) popularised the concept of ideology during the French Revolution. He defined ideology as the "science of ideas". This viewpoint is supported by the notion that ideas are not divinely or naturally derived but are formed through the social environment and the physical senses

(McLellan, 1986, p.6, as cited in Richardson, 2007, p. 32). The term “ideology” is a combination of the words “idea” and “logy.” “Logy” refers to the study or science of a particular phenomenon, as seen in words like “methodology,” which denotes the study of methods. Consequently, when applied to the term “ideology,” it is defined as the study of human ideas (Eagleton, 1991, p.63).

The concept of ideology encompasses various interpretations, including a political belief system, the ideas propagated by the ruling class, the ideas that shape individuals within a social context, and the creation of a collective sense of belonging (Eagleton, 1991, p.3). Consequently, ideologies play a significant role in structuring and shaping the political and social realms. Human beings heavily rely on their ideologies to comprehend the world they inhabit (Freedman, 2003, p. 2).

Providing an adequate definition of ideology is a challenging task; up to this point, no single unified definition has been proposed. This is mainly due to the diverse and often incompatible meanings attributed to ideology. Some of these meanings include the identification of thoughts and ideas that are actively influenced by society, the set of ideas that define particular social groups, and the process through which values, norms, and beliefs of social life are generated (Eagleton, 1991, pp. 1-2).

However, there are accepted definitions for the notion of ideology. Althusser (1971, p. 162, as cited in Locke, 2004, p.33) states that ideology is a “representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” Hodge and Kress (1993, p. 6) describes the concept of ideology as “a systematic body of ideas, organised from a particular point of view.” Everything that we say or write is ideologically loaded: “Language is not an obvious window, but a refracting, structuring medium.” (Fowler, 2004, p. 53). ideology contains the person’s beliefs, disposition and expression of feeling (nonverbal) (van Dijk, 1998).

Many scholars and researchers have conducted extensive research on ideology in various ways. However, van Dijk’s (1998, p. 58) ideological theory provides a more thorough understanding of this concept by combining and integrating its three fundamental components, which have only previously been examined separately. He lists the three components as follows: (i) Cognitively, ideology is made up of thoughts

in the minds of individuals, which cognitive psychologists often study. (ii) Societally, Ideology includes group membership and value judgment, which sociologists and social scientists often investigate. (iii) Linguistically, ideology is not intrinsic knowledge; consequently, it must be learned, acquired, or modified through spoken or written discourse.

For van Dijk (1998, p. 8), ideology can be defined as “the basis of social representations shared by members of a group”. Ideology can influence what is seen as right and wrong. Ideology is the framework of a person’s worldview and the output of our logic system. It aids people to act in a certain way in accordance with what they adapt to and think is “right” or “common.”

2.2 Politics and Political Ideology

Mohammed and Alhuseini (2019) highlight the significance of studying political discourse, stating that it is essential to comprehend how ideologies are conveyed and contested in various domains. Politics and political ideology are important concepts to understand when studying how video games can influence social cognition and convey political messages. Politics is the process by which groups of people make collective decisions that affect the allocation of resources and the distribution of power within a society. It encompasses various activities, including elections, governance, social movements, protests, and advocacy. The goal of politics is to promote the common good and ensure that individuals and groups are treated fairly and justly (Dahl, 2008).

Dahl (2008, p. 54) argues that politics involves the exercise of power, which is the ability to influence others’ behaviour or decision-making. Power is an essential element in political systems, and it can be exercised in various ways, such as through coercion, persuasion, or negotiation. The distribution of power within a society determines who holds authority and how decisions are made, affecting the lives of all members of that society.

Jost et al. (2009, p. 309) state that political ideology can be described as a collection of beliefs, values, and principles that shape individuals’ political views and actions. Political ideology is a fundamental aspect of human psychology, and it influences how people perceive the world, what issues they prioritise, and what policies they support or oppose. Individuals’ political ideologies are influenced by

various factors, including family upbringing, education, economic status, and social environment (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). Research suggests that political ideologies are not static but can change over time, depending on individuals' experiences and exposure to different ideas and perspectives (Jost et al., 2009).

2.3 Video Games

Games are generally enjoyable to play. Their goal is to provide players with a pleasant experience; individuals play games freely with no other reason than a desire to have fun. However, game participants receive more than just a good time; they also learn, share, and construct culture (Huizinga, 1950, as cited in Gámez, 2009, p. 36). The terms "game" and "play" refer are part of each other. Play may be defined as a free-form activity, whereas a game is a rules-based activity (Juul, 2005, p. 36). Nevertheless, these definitions may be subject to linguistic variations, as in other languages, such as Spanish, the terms "play" and "game" are represented by the same word: "juego."

A game is anything that produces a positive experience, such as playing the lottery or yelling, "The Wolf is coming!". Games are often seen as activities that are solely for the purpose of providing fun, enjoyment or entertainment. There should be no other benefit or gain in playing games. Using a computer as a gaming platform opens up a wide range of game options, such as Solitaire or WarCraft (Blythe and Hassenzahl, 2003, as cited in Gámez, 2009, p. 37).

Games that are played with the assistance of a computer can be referred to as computer games, digital games, and other similar terms. However, in this study, all of these kinds of games are called video games. The term "video game" refers to any game that is played using a computer, gaming console, or mobile phone. As with the chess algorithm developed by Alan Turing in the 1950s, the computer can assume the role of a game companion, either as an opponent or an ally. In other instances, computers have been utilised to enforce game rules and construct the narratives that accompany them (Gámez, 2009, p. 38).

The contemporary social and interactional environment has changed as a result of the use of digital media, which frequently moves various social functions, including communication and conversation, to digital environments. One of them is the world of video games, where players may immerse themselves and interact socially with artificial

intelligence (AI) and other real-world players (Korhonen et al., 2009, p. 274).

For a long time, video games have been a part of our lives. The idea to emphasise here is that playing and enjoying video games requires less and less effort as time passes. Video gaming is no longer restricted to specialised saloons designed for this purpose. Computers, home gaming consoles, tablet PCs, mobile phones, and other smart devices all provide gaming opportunities in one way or another. In the contemporary world, video games are almost ubiquitous (Erad, 2018, P. 2).

McCann (2009) classifies video games into nine genres based on their interactions with the player. These include action, action-adventure, adventure, MMORPG, RPG, simulation games, sports games, music games, and strategy games.

2.4 Video Games and Politics

Nasser and Kareem (2018) highlight the significance of studying the intersection of politics and social media platforms like Twitter. Much like social media platforms, video games have become an increasingly significant aspect of political discourse and have the ability to shape public opinion. In his book “Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames”, Ian Bogost (2007) claims video games are capable of expressing political messages and can be used to promote a particular political agenda.

Video games can be used to perpetuate stereotypes and promote political propaganda. Some games, particularly those with military themes, can present a simplistic and one-sided view of international conflict. For example, “America’s Army” is a military first-person shooter game funded by the United States Army and used as a recruitment tool. The game promotes a highly sanitised and idealised view of military life and ignores many of the ethical and moral challenges that soldiers face in real life (McLean & Griffiths, 2013).

Another way in which video games and politics intersect is through the gaming community itself. Video games have become a popular form of social and cultural expression, and they have given rise to communities of players who share common interests and identities. These communities often use video games as a platform for political expression and activism. For example, in the wake of the protests against police brutality and racial injustice, gamers used games like “Animal

Crossing” to express their support for the Black Lives Matter movement (Stavros, 2020). The gaming community has also been influential in promoting diversity and inclusion in the industry and in challenging sexist and racist attitudes in game design (Shaw, 2012). Through these actions, the gaming community has shown that video games can be an effective tool for social change and political mobilisation.

Algezzy (2019) underscores the significant role of visual media in representing political events and daily life issues by examining how political cartoons convey messages and shape beliefs. Similarly, Alhusseini (2020) offers valuable insights into the relationship between language, media, and ideology by examining the media coverage of terror attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka. Their researches offer insights into the potential of visual mediums, such as video games, to engage players in critical reflections on political ideologies and real-world politics. The relationship between video games and politics is complex and multifaceted, and it is shaped by various factors such as game design, player demographics, and cultural norms. However, as video games continue to grow in popularity and influence, it is clear that they have the potential to be a powerful force for political expression, education, and activism.

3. Methodology

The current study depends on the qualitative method. According to Berg (2001), qualitative research concentrates on the concepts, definitions, features, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of phenomena. Shank (2002, p. 5) describes qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning”. According to Krippendorff (2019), the qualitative method is preferred since it focuses on how certain propositions and ideas are conveyed. It helps identify and expose the ideologies concealed under explicit propositions. This kind of method aims to understand “how” and “why” a certain social phenomenon happens in a particular context and time (Polkinghorne, 2005). Thus, the present study adopts this qualitative research method to answer the research question, “What are the political ideologies found in video games?”.

The data of the research consists of two action video games, namely Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and Battlefield 3, which have been released on different platforms, such as PCs and consoles. The

researcher plays the game (or watches the game being played on the YouTube website) multiple times to fully understand the discourse and the political messages the game tries to convey. The analysis will be on the language, with visual and auditory elements, used in cutscenes and during the gameplay of the selected video games. The language of video games is analysed through the socio-cognitive model of Van Dijk (2000, 2006).

3.1 The Model of the Study

This study draws both on van Dijk's (2000, 2006) socio-cognitive theory and ideological square and his categories of ideological discourse analysis.

3.2 van Dijk's (2000, 2006) Model

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach aims to provide a link between discourse (microstructures) and society (macrostructures). In this respect, van Dijk (2015, p. 469) points out that the link between discourse and society is not merely analytical; instead, "the real interface between society and discourse is socio-cognitive because language users as social actors mentally represent and connect both levels."

According to van Dijk (2014), Socio-cognitive Approach is interested in studying the role of cognition besides studying the role of society. Theoretically, this approach is linked between discourse, cognition, and society. Practically, it requires the analysis of macrostructures as well as microstructures. This approach shows how cognitive and social reasons play an important role in interaction and communication (van Dijk, 2001).

Van Dijk (2014) mentions that the term cognition indicates mental structures like personal cognition and social cognition, belief, emotions, and goals. It also includes all the mental activities that contain memories, knowledge, and thought. Society involves local microstructures and political and social macrostructures that are related to the relationships between groups, like inequality and dominance.

The mental mediation between discourse and society is referred to as context. It is not an objective or predetermined limitation of society or culture but rather a subjective definition, construction, or interpretation of such elements of the social environment. Context can be defined as "mental constructs of relevant aspects of social situations" (van Dijk,

2006b, pp. 163-165). Participants of a communicative situation construct subjective definitions of context depending on their knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and the like. This situation is also known as “mental models” (also known as semantic models because they represent what discourse refers to or what it is about). Mental models refer to a person or group’s experience and their representations of the world around them.

Since mental models are subjective (i.e., personal opinions, evaluation, and emotion that are linked to social situations), they may be a biased exemplification of reality (van Dijk, 2003, 2006b). Moreover, the recipients’ knowledge is also a part of the context, i.e., our discourse should be relevant to the knowledge of recipients (van Dijk, 2003). Socially and culturally shared knowledge is known as “social representations.” In order to understand and produce discourse, participants are required to construct a mental model of the situation in which they are involved as well as to activate previous knowledge (van Dijk, 2003, 2006b).

Another cognitive aspect of this approach is social cognition which refers to a set of attitudes, norms, values, knowledge, and ideologies mentally represented, acquired and reproduced through discourse in a particular social group (van Dijk, 2003). Ideology is also part of social cognition, which is described as the study of how we speak, think and argue (van Dijk, 2006a). Ideology consists of beliefs and opinions shared by social group members, acquired through social interaction. Ideology is not always expressed in discourse, as what people say is influenced by contexts. However, the underlying ideologies of people or social groups influence discourse at large and may be made explicit by analysing formal and ideological structures of discourse (van Dijk, 2011).

A social group with unique social cognitions and ideologies positively represents its members while negatively representing members of another group. This situation is called positive self-presentation and negative other presentation or “ideological polarisation” and is one of the basic strategies that characterise ideological discourse. This strategy takes place only because other groups are different. In addition, it is called ideological square since it consists of four strategies; emphasising our good things and their bad things, mitigating our bad things and their good things (van Dijk, 2011).

3.3 van Dijk's Ideological discursive strategies

In section (3.2), a review of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is presented, and the concept of ideology is clarified; "the science of ideas." van Dijk (2006a) points out that the notion of ideology describes and refers to the beliefs of a group of people. Discourses of social groups, therefore, can be controlled by their ideologies, i.e., discourses are ideologically based, and people tend to represent their own ideologies positively and negatively represent the ideologies of other groups. In van Dijk's (2006a) words, "many of the mental structures of ideologies and ideological practices are polarised on the basis of ingroup-outgroup differentiation" (p. 730).

Consequently, ideological discourse displays various forms of polarisation and the four strategies of van Dijk's ideological square, i.e., the macro level of analysis, which consists of four aspects (emphasise our good things, de-emphasise our bad things and emphasise their bad things, de-emphasise their good things) and the micro level of analysis which consists of the 42 strategies. In order to construct ideological discourse analysis, van Dijk (2000, pp. 62-85) proposes a set of ideological discursive strategies: "1. Actor description 2. Authority 3. Burden 4. Categorisation 5. Comparison 6. Consensus 7. Counterfactuals 8. Disclaimers 9. Distancing 10. Dramatisation 11. Empathy 12. Euphemism 13. Evidentiality 14. Example/illustration 15. Explanation 16. Fallacies 17. Generalisation 18. History as lesson 19. Humanitarianism 20. Hyperbole 21. Implication 22. Illegality 23. Interaction and context 24. Irony 25. Legality 26. Lexicalisation 27. Metaphor 28. National self-glorification 29. Negative other-presentation 30. Norm expression 31. Number game 32. Openness, honesty 33. Polarisation, us-them categorisation 34. Positive self-presentation 35. Populism 36. Presupposition 37. Pseudo-ignorance 38. Reasonableness 39. Repetition 40. Situation description 41. Vagueness 42. Victimisation".

4. Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of two action video games, each represented by two extracts. The analysis of video games is conducted through a critical perspective and, more specifically, through the lens of van Dijk's (2000, 2006) socio-cognitive theory and his ideological square.

4.1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is a first-person shooter video game released in 2009 by Activision. It was made by Infinity Ward. It is the series' sixth instalment and the direct sequel to Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. The plot of the game revolves around Task Force 141's pursuit of Vladimir Makarov, the head of the Russian Ultranationalist party, as well as the US Army Rangers who are protecting the Washington, DC region from a Russian invasion. Players can control Sergeant Gary "Roach" Sanderson, Private James Ramirez, and Captain Soap MacTavish (Infinity Ward, 2009).

Extract 1:

"SSDD" (Same Sh*t, Different Day) is the opening mission of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2. It acts as a tutorial to show players basic game mechanics and controls.

The mission starts with a monologue spoken by General Shepherd that introduces players to the game's single-player story mode:

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Boundaries shift, new players step in but power always finds a place for rest its head. We fought and bled alongside the Russians, we should have known they'd hate us for it. History is written by the victor. And here I am thinking we'd won. But to bring down one enemy and they find someone even worse to replace him. Locations change, the rationale, the objective. Yesterday's enemies are today's recruits. Train them to fight alongside you and pray they don't eventually decide to hate you for it too. Same shit different day you know what I'm looking for Sargeant Foley. Keep your eyes open.

The first sentence, "*The more things change, the more they stay the same.*" appears to reflect a perspective on the enduring nature of war and power throughout history. This strategy is called **history as a lesson**. By examining the historical trajectory of the United States and its evolution into a military powerhouse, we can see that despite the passage of time and breakthroughs in medicine, science, and technology, there appears to be something that does not change. Within the military context, it might represent a cyclical repetition of combating opponents for similar goals. The phrase can be seen as an embodiment of the perpetual struggle for power and, specifically for the United States, the ongoing endeavour to maintain that power.

The statement “*Boundaries shift, new players step in but power always finds a place for rest its head.*” suggests that boundaries constantly change due to conflicts, leading to the creation of new nations or the merging of existing ones. However, regardless of these shifts, power always establishes itself in a particular country. The idea of power is personified and used as a **metaphor** to represent the present status of the United States as a dominant global superpower. Through decades of utilising its military strength, the United States has ascended to become the foremost superpower in the world; therefore, allowing power to find a “resting place” in the hands of the American elite.

The third sentence, “*We fought and bled alongside the Russians,*” refers to the cooperation between the United States and Russia during the Second World War. The second statement, “*we should have known they’d hate us for it,*” refers to the conflict and tension between the United States and the Soviet Union after the two world wars. This strategy is called **pseudo-ignorance**, which implies that America had good intentions to cooperate with Russia and did not think that Russia would turn against it. Additionally, General Shepherd presents the Russians as ungrateful and unreasonable, implying that the Russians hate the Americans for no apparent reason. This tactic creates a sense of “us versus them” among the players, pitting them against the Russians and framing them as the enemy.

The next three statements serve as a transition and discuss the past, present, and future. The first sentence, “*Locations change, the rationale, the objective.*” clarify that each warfare is unique because each opponent is different. Therefore, every conflict has a unique strategy, which relates to the first part of the first sentence, emphasising that while circumstances may change, the pursuit of dominance persists despite variations in objectives and motivations.

The second statement, “*Yesterday’s enemies are today’s recruits,*” focuses on both the past and the present, showing that people who fought against you in the past, such as the Iraqis during the first Gulf War, may now stand alongside you to achieve a common objective. The creation of a new Iraqi military force that would protect the Iraqi people was a step in the right direction. Still, it did not guarantee that the Iraqis would view the US favourably. Frohlich et al. (2014) point out that most Iraqis harbour resentment towards America, and that is what the General means by saying, “*pray they don’t eventually decide to hate you for it too.*” The

final sentence of the three suggests a scary future, “*Train them to fight alongside you and pray they don’t eventually decide to hate you for it too*”. This strategy is called **disclaimer**, an ideological strategy involving presenting oneself positively while simultaneously portraying others in a negative light. America mentions its positive attributes, like training and developing another country’s army, and then focuses on the negative characteristics of the other like betrayal and hate. This strategy exemplifies a clear dichotomy of the “good guy” (the US) versus the “bad guy” (the current opponent) for potentially turning against the US after receiving training and military development.

This monologue shows the mental model of those behind the game. Game developers are perpetuating the hegemonic ideologies of US military power. They are trying to convey that America has a long history of fighting terrorism and anyone who threatens the world, and although many hate it and work against it, it will remain the greatest force in the world. In this mission, Call of Duty reimagines the American Manifest Destiny concept, which asserts that the United States is a sacred realm divinely chosen to spread and safeguard democracy and American ideals across the globe (Stephanson, 1995). Additionally, the game implies that the US possesses the responsibility and superior authority to go anywhere and engage in any war to safeguard its hegemonic status.

Extract 2:

“**Team Player**” is the second mission of Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2. The US Army Rangers deploy to rescue BCT-one, which is stuck in the OpFor-occupied town. Following an airstrike, the Rangers enter the city to clear out any remaining OpFor and secure BCT-One. The player takes the role of Private First-Class Joseph Allen. The mission begins with the player laying on the ground as General Shepherd stands over him and assists him in getting up.

The mission starts with a speech from General Shepherd “*We are the most powerful military force in the history of man. Every fight is our fight. Because what happens over here matters over there. We don’t get to sit one out.*” The General is promoting the positive image of military force and thus their country by saying, “We are the most powerful military force....” The strategy of **national self-glorification** is obvious here. The general goes on to state that their military force is powerful not only now or in this century but “*in the history of man.*”

The General says, “*Every fight is our fight,*” and then gives an excuse for his country’s intervention in Afghanistan by saying, “*Because what happens over here matters over there.*” The deictic expression “*here*” refers to Afghanistan, and “*there*” to the United States; this is an example of the **evidentiality** strategy by which the General gives evidence for his belief of why every fight is their fight. The General means that what happens in Afghanistan affects his country (United States), whether politically, economically, or socially so that they “*don’t get to sit one out,*” which means that they don’t just sit and watch what is happening in Afghanistan and they must participate in the war. The evidentiality strategy makes the speaker’s claims more convincing.

The mission takes place in an area called “*The red zone,*” and fighters and people in that area use Arabic as the primary language, as is evident from the writings on the walls, posters, and signs. In this mission, American special operations forces called “US Army Rangers” are fighting against an Arabic-speaking force called OpFor (Opposing Forces) that occupied the town. This information implies that Arabs are the main source of terrorism, and they are in control of Afghanistan (**Implication**).

The mission occurs in the area called “The red zone”, and the fighters that occupied that area are called “OpFor”, according to Fandom. (n.d.) website “*The red zone*” is “*an unnamed town in Afghanistan,*” and OpFor is short for “*Opposing Forces or Opposition Force,*” and they are “*an unnamed revolutionary paramilitary faction that seized power in the Middle East in 2011*”. The game’s developers employ the strategy of **vagueness** here, as they do not provide a specific name for the city or the fighters, making it unclear where the conflict is taking place and who the combatants are, and is it true or not that the Arabic language is used in that area. Since the developers did not use a specific name for the fighters or to whom they belong, this could be a **generalisation strategy**, meaning that all Arabs are responsible for terrorism in Afghanistan.

On the other side of the bridge in the town, there is a sign indicating the name of the street, which is “*شارع النصر*” “*Victory Street,*” as it is shown in the above picture. The US army kills all enemies and passes through “*Victory Street*” to complete the mission, and this is **Irony** as the US army defeats the terrorists (Arabs) in their victory street, showing how strong the US army is and how weak and easy to defeat the Arab fighters.

This mission reflects the game developers' mental model and political ideology concerning terrorism in Afghanistan. Game developers simply want to convey to players that Arabs are the main source of terrorism, as it is obvious from using Arab fighters against the US army and the Arabic language used throughout the town, indicating that Arabs control this city. Developers also portray the city as devoid of life, indicating that terrorism brought nothing but ruin, destruction and poverty to this country. They also want to convince the player that the intervention of America is right because "*what happens over here matters over there*," meaning that even though terrorism seems to be limited to Afghanistan but it will affect the world eventually. Hence, the US army must participate in what is happening in Afghanistan to protect their country and the world from terrorism.

4.2 Battlefield 3

Battlefield 3, also known as BF3, is the twelfth game in the Battlefield series. It was made by DICE. Battlefield 3 is the sequel to Battlefield 2 and was published on PC, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360 on October 25, 2011. The Campaign plot of Battlefield 3 takes place during the fictional "War of 2014" and spans nine months. The majority of the story occurs in the Iran-Iraq region. Other places include the border between Iran and Azerbaijan, Paris, and New York City. For most of the story, Blackburn, the main character, is being questioned about what he knows about an attack on New York. As such, the missions occur in a discontinuous, flashback fashion as Blackburn recalls his encounter with the PLR (People's Liberation and Resistance), a dangerous terrorist organisation that may be seeking chemical and nuclear weaponry (DICE, 2011).

Extract 1:

"**Operation Swordbreaker**" is the second mission in Battlefield 3's campaign. In this mission, United States Marines are deployed to the Iran-Iraq region with the objective of conducting "pacification" operations and restoring stability to the area.

While the squad are heading to the mission location, one soldier expresses confusion about why they are in Iraq instead of Iran if their mission is to deal with the PLR (People's Liberation and Resistance) by saying, "*If this is about the PLR, we should be in Iran - not Iraq.*" Suggesting that PLR is an Iranian movement. Another soldier replies,

“*They’re crossin borders*” The **evidentiality** strategy is evident here. The soldier is giving a reason why they are in Iraq. The evidentiality strategy is meant to justify the soldiers’ presence in Iraq and their actions against the PLR.

When the squad arrive at the mission location, one soldier asks a rhetorical question “*how this part of the world gets so fucked up all the time,*” this question can be seen, from an ideological perspective, as a reflection of a Western perspective that views the Middle East as inherently problematic and “*fucked up,*” perpetuating a negative stereotype of the region and its people. This strategy of **Negative other-presentation** suggests a belief that there is something fundamentally wrong with the region. This strategy justifies Western intervention, framing it as necessary to “fix” the region’s problems.

The squad then meet up with their commanding officer, Cole. Cole’s emphasis on “*the people of this country is not your enemy*” reinforces the notion that the military is there to protect and serve the civilian population. This framing is intended to cultivate a positive perception of the military (**Positive self-presentation**). By doing so, he is trying to reinforce the notion that the military is there to do good and is acting in the best interest of the people.

When the soldiers kill several enemy fighters, one soldier says, “*These guys weren’t locals. They weren’t speaking Arabic.*” Indicating that they are fighting outsiders who came from Iran. The strategy of **Repetition** is utilised here; the same idea has been mentioned by one soldier at the beginning of the mission. Then another soldier says, “*Al-Bashir is exporting all-star insurgent talent outta Iran into here now?*” implying that Iran is sending its fighters to Iraq. In this way, Iran makes Iraq a battlefield or conflict zone (**Implication**). This strategy effectively creates a negative image of Iran as a country that interferes in its neighbour’s affairs and contributes to the instability in Iraq. Repetition and Implication strategies emphasise that the US army comes to fight against outsiders who came from Iran, so the army is trying to save Iraq and the Iraqi people from this terrorist force. Moreover, it also demonises Iran and reinforces negative stereotypes of the country, which can contribute to anti-Iranian sentiment.

The game developers are trying to convey a political ideology and perspective regarding the conflict in Iraq. The soldiers’ statements reflect a Western perspective that views the Middle East as problematic and

“fucked up”. The text demonises Iran and reinforces negative stereotypes of the country, which can contribute to anti-Iranian sentiment. The US military is seen as a force for good whose mission is to protect the civilian population and prevent terrorist groups from taking control of the country.

Extract 2:

“**Operation Guillotine**” is the fifth mission in Battlefield 3’s single-player campaign. The mission takes place in Tehran, Iran, in the year 2014. The United States Marine Corps are trying to capture “Faruk Al-Bashir,” a high-value target associated with the terrorist organisation PLR.

In “Operation Guillotine” mission, The CIA agent Gordon asks the character Henry Blackburn to provide information about how he found the nuke in Tehran by saying, “*Fine. Tell us how you found the nuke in Tehran.*” the mention of a “*nuke in Tehran*” in the given text can be seen as a reflection of a dominant discourse that western media and political discourse have perpetuated for many years. This discourse often portrays Iran as a rogue state that poses a threat to global security due to its alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons, which Iran denies. This **negative other-presentation** can be seen as a rhetorical strategy to reinforce the ideological perspective that Iran is a dangerous and unstable country that possesses nuclear weapons.

Later in the mission, when the soldiers reach the bank, one soldier finds a map and says, “*Oh shit, we’ve got maps of Paris, New York*”, which can be seen as a **victimisation** strategy. The soldiers’ reaction to finding maps of New York and Paris in the Iranian bank suggests that they see these cities as potential targets of an attack and that they themselves could be victims of such an attack; this reinforces an ideological perspective that the US and its allies are under constant threat from external forces and that that using military force is necessary to protect against such threats.

The soldiers then find a suitcase that contains nukes, and one soldier says, “*Holy shit. You know what that is?*” and the other soldier replies, “*Russian.*”, “*Portable nukes.*” Here again, the idea that Iran has nuclear weapons is emphasised. Furthermore, the reference to the nukes being of Russian origin can also be seen as a subtle attempt to shift the blame for the development of nuclear weapons in Iran away from the US

and onto Russia, and this is an apparent **negative other-presentation** strategy.

The selection of the bank as the location or base for Faruk Al-Bashir and PLR in “Operation Guillotine” mission could imply (**implication**) that the game developers create a narrative that reflects real-life conflicts and events in the Middle East. Militias and terrorist organisations have been known to seize control of banks and financial institutions to fund their activities.

The discourse within the game mission portrays Iran as a dangerous and unstable country pursuing nuclear weapons, reinforcing a negative view of Iran and promoting a “us vs. them” mentality with the US as the “good” and Iran as the “bad” or “enemy.” The ideology behind the text also reinforces the portrayal of the US as a victim rather than an aggressor, even when it is engaged in military operations in other countries. Additionally, the game developers subtly shift the blame for helping Iran with nuclear weapons away from the US and onto Russia, demonising Russia as a threat to global security. Game developers also reinforce the idea that financial institutions can be used as a means of funding terrorist activities, which in turn justifies actions taken by governments to combat these activities, such as the implementation of economic sanctions on Iran.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the games Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 and Battlefield 3 reveals that the game developers perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of US military power and promote the idea that the United States is the greatest force in the world with the right to intervene anywhere to protect its hegemony. In Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, it is concluded that the game developers rewrite the idea of the American Manifest Destiny and suggest that the United States has a long history of fighting terrorism and anyone who threatens the world. The game also portrays Arabs as the main source of terrorism and portrays Western intervention as necessary to prevent terrorism from spreading. In Battlefield 3, it is concluded that the game reinforces negative stereotypes of Iran and Russia and creates an “us vs. them” mentality that demonises these countries as threats to global security. The discourse within the game also reinforces ideological perspectives that justify Western intervention in the Middle East region and frame it as

necessary to “fix” the region’s problems. The game also subtly shifts the blame for the development of nuclear weapons onto Russia and reinforces the idea that financial institutions can be used to fund terrorist activities, justifying government actions such as economic sanctions on Iran. These games use ideological discursive strategies to convey their political ideologies and mental models to players, shaping their perceptions of the world.

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