INFLUENCE OF COMPUTER GAMES' DESTRUCTIVE RELIGIOUS PATTERNS ON RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES OF YOUTH

Alyona G. Ayrapetova
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) on psychological Sciences,
teacher of the National University of Uzbekistan
UZBEKISTAN
independent.2017@inbox.ru

ABSTRACT

Information-communication technologies as the main social process of nowadays are considered in the article. The information-psychological manipulation of individual and public consciousness as an indirect impact on views, opinions, attitudes, beliefs on various aspects of life and activity in order to change them is presented. The choice of youth as the main influence object with the purpose of religious attitudes deformation and ideological mobilization is substantiated. The connection between religion and computer games is demonstrated.

Keywords: Information-communication technologies, social process, Internet, information-psychological manipulation, psychological war, destructive religious attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Today information-communication technologies are the basic social process of nowadays, the main way of social space and time formation, the important mechanism of social management.

The process of social interaction is increasing every year and becoming more dynamic. Information development compresses time and space, opens borders, allows you to make contacts anywhere in the world, changes the content of various activities. It's *no accident* that Alvin Toffler, the American sociologist, one of the authors of the post-industrial society concept in a number of his works focuses on the rapid pace of this process, which *characterized* the cultural and political changes taking place today [1].

Modern life is hard to imagine without the Internet. It performs the function of information, education and socialization, including religious one. At the same time, the Global Network often becomes rather *than* a *single* source of information and training, but also some guideline *to proceed*[2]. Therefore, today information-psychological manipulation of individual and public consciousness actively presents exactly on the Internet.

Information-psychological manipulation is an indirect impact on the views, opinions, attitudes, beliefs on various aspects of life and activity in order to change them. In this regard, many researchers and analytic experts tend to consider it as a kind of psychological war. This method in the conditions of global informatization of social space is more effective, as it allows to cover a wide audience and not to cause destruction to material facilities.

Taking into account this concept, possibilities of modern information space are actively exploited by leaders of religious-extremist movements in order to distort religious attitudes and ideological mobilization of youth.

Describing the mechanism and using methodology of public communications'modern means for extremist purposes, Vice-President of the Russian criminological Association I.Y.Sundiev emphasizes that the primary task of religious extremist organizations ideologists is to "seduce" the present and future inhabitants of cyber-space and, if possible, to recruit the maximum number of them into their ranks. And "seduction" is primarily to create the most attractive their self-image with the help of information-manipulative techniques [3].

Russian authors Y.V. Kiselev and P.A. Kislyakov also note that for some time the threat is not only increased propaganda of violence on the Internet, but also the "heroization" of the extremist image [4]. In the most popular social networks terrorists position themselves as courageous, brave, purposeful fighters for the faith. In their online appeals they manipulate of teenage conformism and attract attention to those psychological features in which young people are in dire need because of their age characteristics: interpersonal unity and equality of "brothers in faith", functional and role-playing demand for each member of the group, compensation for accentuated character traits, social attraction. Using the desire of young people to group identity, the militants do not forget to mention that their organization has its own uniform, flag, coat of arms, anthem, passports and other attributes that emphasize identity.

In order to develop the ideology of religious extremism, the leaders of terrorist movements have recently significantly intensified the use of information resources' capacities. Today, there is not so much increasing of financial capabilities and technical equipment of terrorist organizations, as the focus of extremist ideology on young people.

The search for potential candidates is often carried out on forums and blogs, where the most active participants are distinguished [5]. In cyber-communities with certain direction players are always discussing the plots, characters and "passing" of the game. Sometimes the participants of online platforms *find creative ways* andgenerate their own versions of the popular game's plot, come up with new characters or give existing characters additional or other features and abilities. For example, fans of the "Mass Effect" created on the forum their own version of the Commander Shepard and presented him as an atheist [6].

In media-recruitment of new religious extremist organization's members, recruiters are primarily interested in the candidate's potential ability to generate ideas in line with extremist and terrorist concepts. So-called case-methods are used to assess social and psychological competencies [7]. Cases, developed for recruitment purposes, are a kind of "smart traps" on which many computer games are built.

At first sight, computer games and religion have little common aspects. Games are associated with new technologies, modern lifestyle, something entertaining and frivolous. Religion, on the contrary, seems to be an extremely conservative sphere. However, these directions often overlap.

For example, in "Strong hold" it is necessary to build special religious buildings, and many global strategies such as "Total War", "Civilization" or "Europa Universalis" are made to choose and pursue a certain religious policy. In "Fallout" or "Mass Effect" different cults, doctrines, religious traditions and mystical practices are always met. Even in shooters, which, in general, don't have detailed plots, there is an appeal to different faiths or religious concepts. So, in the "Doom", which is at the origins of this genre, the main character literally resisted the invasion of demons from hell. In "Painkiller" the armies of hell and heaven fight *among*

themselves. And in "BioShock Infinite" the player begins his journey from *christening*, and in the future faced with the plans of the mad prophet and his fanatical followers again and again.

Analysis of the media market shows that the plots of most computer games from strategy to RPG[1] are based on the fact that the main character is a member of religious missions and campaigns, a Templar knight, a wandering monk, or he plays as a prophet or confronts some "crazy" God.

It's noteworthy that in recent years the gaming industry has grown from a specialized market to the main share of leading media corporations. This growth in popularity and use of technologies has allowed computer game developers to complement the story lines of various religious nuances and details. This aspect can be involved in the religious socialization of young people, that is, in the process of interaction, during which social agents (in this case, the cyber-space) have an impact on religious beliefs and opinions.

Religious socialization takes place in two stages. Primary religious socialization leads to the idea of the presence or absence of God, forms norms of behavior within the framework of a religious model of behavior and introduces traditional attitudes into the system. The primary stage covers three periods in a person's life: early childhood (from birth to 3 years) preschool period (from 4 to 8 years), school period (from 9 to 18 years).

American psychologist Ernest Harms experimentally proved that in this period there are three phases of understanding of God and religion by children and teenagers. Up to six years religion is perceived as a fairy tale, from 7 to 12 years religious socialization continues in the framework of a realistic stage, which is replaced by an individualistic stage, lasting up to 18 years [8].

Religious desocialization or resocialization can develop indirectly through religious patterns of computer games due to a number of factors.

The first factor is the discredit of religion. Many developers of computer games, actively implementing religious concepts in the game to make the plot more mystiques, do not really delve into their essence. Often authors of game plots confuse chronological sequence of religious events, create false, absurd, and in some cases perverted images and religious model of behavior, offend religious feelings of believers.

It is well known that in teenage years there is an expansion of cognitive status through the desire for development, self-consciousness and self-determination, interest in the self-personality and its potentials, the ability to self-observation. The key features of this period are the emergence of reflection and the formation of moral and religious beliefs. In this age period through the mechanisms of social perception, young people begin to realize themselves as part of society, acquire new socially significant positions, try to understand the essence of religion and determine their own form of belief.

An important point in this process is apperception − the dependence of perception on such features of personality as worldview and beliefs. It means that an individual with deficient religious literacy can succumb to the formation of distorted religious models.

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[1] Computer Role-Playing Game (acronym – CRPG or RPG) - computer games genre, based on playing process elements with one or several characters.

In most cases, the religion representation in computer games still meets the standards that were set back in the game "Populous" in 1989 by Peter Molyneux, the French game designer. This game is positioned as a "simulator of God", that itself is irrational and unacceptable thing from the point of view of religious faith and psychology of religion. According to the plot, the user assumes the functions of God who must use miracles and a "magic hand" to lead his peoples to prosperity. In the "Skyforge" the user can also pass the game from an ordinary warrior to a real divinity.

It isn't being amiss to note that to try on the role of God and perform His functions in the real world is a psychological pathology. From the point of view of social psychology, each individual in everyday life is involved in several social roles, a set of which is quite wide and diverse. In ordinary cases, a person only assimilates the role, while the complete coincidence of the structures of social role and personality is possible only as an episode. However, in a situation where the role is strong enough or the person is too weak, cohesion with the role is possible, and as a result it becomes part of the personality.

This is also quite acceptable in the process of gambling. This is because the game involves the passage of a certain level to the end of the time, which is not less than an hour. In addition, a so-called "*engulfment*" in the game often takes place, which can causes addiction.

The user, who plays the role of God regularly and for a certain period of time, will thus compensate unrealized need for acceptance, authoritarianism, superiority over others, resulting in the transformation of the game role into a social role. The losing of the habitual social role is experienced as a social inversion, the loss of part of personality and can be the result of severe psychological dysfunction.

Here are a few more paradoxical examples that form the degraded and contradictory religious attitudes.

In "Resident Evil" representatives of the "Los Illuminados" religious cult are infected with Las-Plagas parasite, which is considered an *emergence of divinity*. Los Illuminados followers believed that, committing their bodies and souls to parasite, they regained spiritual purity, enlightenment and real happiness.

If you realize a content analysis of this game's plot, it becomes obvious that teenager's religious patterns of knowledge and behavior may be easily transformed. The reasons for this transformation are age-related increased impressionability and suggestibility as well as repetitive patterns that can become a stable stereotype of thinking.

Psychologists in the field of religion agree that each individual has his own "way to God". This applies to the age and format of faith. Somebody is ready to share God in childhood, but someone is aware of a spiritual commitment to a particular religion only in old age. In addition, despite the common canons for all believers of one religious denomination, each individual develops his own form of spiritual practice. That is, someone needs to comply with all the regulations and prohibitions, fast, regularly visit religious sites where worship takes place, perform prayer rituals. For others – religious rituals in everyday life or religious holidays are quite enough.

With an adequate agent of religious socialization (parents, spouses, relatives, close people, religious institutions), a person *gains denominational* religious *knowledge* and begins to profess a certain religion in a more rigorous form or with certain indulgences.

If the agent of religious socialization is the cyber-space, which offers content that encloses or promotes destructive religious attitudes, it is quite possible that the individual can take for the truth the game dogma that spiritual purification is impossible without the presence of some parasite in the body.

Another game in the psychological thriller genre –"Silent Hill"– contains several contradictory or distorted religious lines. The first thing a gamer faces is the causes of the horrors taking place in the city. Game developers report that the rituals of some secret esoteric cult gave rise to an evil parallel world. The situation is exacerbated by the cursed lake, in the waters of which the inquisitors washed axes after the destruction of witches.

According to the plot, the user should play for a religious leader who will have to stop the raging gods with the help of his disciples and followers. It is possible to carry out conceived in different ways: from reading street sermons and search of new supporters to cruel executions with ideological opponents. Such actions, programmed by many games, point us to the next factor, contributing to religious desocialization and resocialization.

The second factor is that many computer games of the next generation don't just contain elements of cruelty, but literally consist of them and actually equate religion to violence. Media sociologist of Appalachian State University Professor Greg Perrault has researched five video games with a storyline on a religious theme: "Mass Effect 2", "Final Fantasy XIII", "Assassin's Creed", "Castlevania: Lords of Shadow" and "Elder Scrolls: Oblivion". Perrault found that in these games religion is compared with violence. It creates problems that the protagonist must solve either by fighting with religious fanatics or by breaking religious commandments and suffering from it [9].

The list compiled by Perrault can be continued. In the previously considered "Populous" – a simulator of God – peoples, worshipping other deities, are violently exterminated by faithful followers of the player-God and with the help of divine anger, taking the form of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and other disasters.

At some step of the game "Total War: samurai Sunset" gamer is faced with a situation in which Japanese peasants caught and murdered two Christian preachers. The user must decide what to do with the peasants. Among the proposed answers are "to let them go, as if nothing had happened", "to give them money and to praise".

In "Left Behind: Eternal Forces" gamer should lead an underground Christian movement and convert sinners to the Christian faith. Those who refuse to accept the faith can be shot.

Thus, one way or another, in the mind of users appears and then fixes the attitude that religion creates problems which can be solved only at the cost of someone's life – his own or his enemies. And due to the fact that virtual enemies are often representatives of other religious confessions, deviant behavior often acquires a xenophobic or religious extremist form.

It should be emphasized that the primary such attitude is formed in connection with their *virtual* life and *virtual* enemies. However, taking into account the consciousness virtualization, which

is actively gaining momentum at the present stage of society development, the number of facts of virtual and real "I" integration increases every year. The blurring of the boundaries between virtual space and the real world leads to the fact, that the primary destructive attitudes and behavior models are transferred from the gaming segment of the cyber-space into everyday life and become the causes of deviant behavior.

As an example, we can specify "Battlefield 3". In the virtual world, according to game's plot, on the 13th of November, 2014 in Paris a nuclear bomb was detonated. In the real world on the 13th of November, 2015 − on the same day as in the game − there were terrorist attacks in Paris with the largest number of victims in France.

We can cite another resonant case, when 20-year-old Alexander Koptsev from Moscow attacked parishioners of the capital's synagogue with a knife, causing serious injuries to nine people. Koptsev was charged with a crime of national and religious hatred. During the investigation it was found that Alexander liked to spend the evening playing a computer game "Postal".

At first sight, the plot of this game is quite ordinary: main character – The Dude (full name The Postal Dude Junior) lives during a working week in Paradise city and makes the common actions: buys milk, cashes a check in the Bank, etc. However, each action can be performed in various ways: both peaceful and violent. The Dude treats everything with unprecedented cynicism and cruelty, jokes over his own murders.

In addition to direct incitement to cruelty, "Postal" contains many "references" to the ideology of religious extremism:
- Dave, the uncle of the main character, despite the hippie shirt with the inscription "God invented Rock'n'Roll" is the head of a religious cult, armed with a gun;
- representatives of the religious cult are always armed with almost all kinds of weapon, and the bookshelves in the Church are filled with literature, among which there are such books as "Quality and skill of thermonuclear explosions", "Tear gas and other flammable volatile compounds", "Your wife is my lover. Church relationships";
- Al-Qaeda suicide bombers, attacking the Church;
- a brass band performs one of the "Fallout 3" soundtracks[2];
- all the terrorists outwardly look like Osama bin Laden;
- goat milk production firm is called "Jihad";
- terrorists live secretly on the second floor the Habib's store.

Special mention deserves the "Bible Fight" game, which, in our opinion, is *undoubtedly a leader* in religion's discrediting and an obvious factor of religious desocialization.

"Bible Fight" refers to fighting in the style of "mortal combat", where everybody fights with everyone. The idea of the game is in struggle of two heroes until one of them kills the other. We want to highlight the word "*kill*", as the task of the user is not just to win, but actually to beat his opponent to the death.

Those who are not faced with this action-game could assume that the name of the game and the necessary condition (*to kill* an opponent) sets the task to defeat the evil demons, playing for the side of Light, such as angels. In any case, this is the first association, which consciousness gives.

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[2] one of the computer games, featuring religious cults.

However, "Bible Fight" has a completely different meaning. The user can choose different biblical characters(*Moses, Noah, Eve, the Virgin Mary, Satan and Jesus*) to fight each other in hand-to-hand combat. In fact, it's possible to put an end here, because on the history and psychology of religion base, the logic absence and insult of believers' religious feelings are obvious. But we will continue the analysis, as the story lines of the game destroy all possible Christian dogmas.

At the same time, young people, due to their low religious literacy, don't always understand the meaning of the used symbols and shout as an aggressive call: "Allahu Akbar!", which is puzzling for real believers, because this words combination means "God is great" and therefore it cannot be a threat.

And although it is not always possible to prove the existence of propaganda and establish its customers, many states prohibit the sale of certain games, citing the ban of presence the believers' religious feelings insults in the game.

For example, "Modern Warfare" and "Black Ops"(two versions of the popular shooter "Call of Duty") were banned in Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates due to the presence of the Koran in one of the locations. Then the ban "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare" was made by Turkey. The reason for the outrage of believers was that the player kills Muslims. Saudi Arabia also insisted on banning the spread in the country of the game about the tomb raider Lara Croft – "Rise of the Tomb Raider". The fact is that in one of the episodes the main character is searching for the tomb of the Muhammad prophet. The Royal national media Council found this aspect offensive to believers.

In conclusion, we want to accentuate that faith, regardless of its orientation and object, is a significant prerequisite for the formation of certain psychological attitudes and, as a consequence, social actions and behaviors of individuals and groups.

The virtual world created by computer games includes the whole range of moral standards. However, if in real life good and evil exist in some dissolved form, and are not so nomadic, at the virtual world they are most often found in pure form. It conditions inadequate use of skills transferred by teenager's personality from the virtual world to the real world.

It should be emphasized that, in accordance with the Convention on counter-terrorism, one of the main tasks is to counter the spread of the ideology of terrorism and to intensify efforts of anti-terrorist activities providing.

Based on the above said, computer games should not promote ethnic or religious hatred and portray representatives of certain faiths or ethnic groups as evil characters. Fighting on the side of good in a virtual battle, the player must understand that the evil he opposes doesn't have a certain ethnic and religious image.

If the game industry continues to position religion in a negative way and encourage gamers to appeal to God as to interest-free Bank for additional hit points, and their destructive tendencies to explain by the need to fight with the people of other religious denomination, in the near future we will have faith crisis and the end of civilization – a familiar and typical final for many computer games.

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