

Understanding Politics in Video Game Narratives, Gameplay and Culture

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Abstract

Video games and gaming culture have a varying relationship with politics. The case studies presented in this paper demonstrate a desire by some game creators to separate their works from political discussion, while others will speak candidly about the political intentions of their work. Examining the history of video games and politics reveals hostility towards specifically non-white, non-male creators and works, and a sub-culture among the gaming community who expect apolitical content. It is also shown how games can be used by politicians and government institutions for civic engagement in political dialogue and military enrollment.

This paper uses techniques defined by narratologist Mieke Bal and ludologist Ian Bogost to demonstrate the persuasive and subjective power of stories and gameplay within video games. By using relative concepts, it is possible to understand how video games are perceived differently by the player, leading to various political affiliations. Understanding game narratives and procedural rhetoric, meaning can be derived from works to demonstrate how achieving objectivity in narrative is a difficult task, as works from Bal have previously defined.

With works such as *Life is Strange 2*, a positive relationship between politics and gaming can be discovered, revealing the potential for change in the way such topics are regarded in gaming culture. Previous studies have explored the ludification of culture in social media, which is demonstrated in this paper to have notable effects on how game creators present their works. Further research suggests that the debate regarding the intersection of identity and politics is ongoing but recent examples show a hesitant step towards accepting the persuasive nature of gaming and stronger comfortability with political stories.