

Alt-right, neomasculinities and Video Games: A Narrative Review

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The video game industry has become the premier cultural and entertainment industry in our time (Mohan, 2021), as proved by the data of the Global Games Market Report by Newzoo, which lists the number of players worldwide at 3.2 billion people. The existing literature normally focused on the USA scene highlights the political and ideological uses of the video game in different fields, such as geopolitics (Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2009; Nie, 2013) and political communications (Huntenmann & Payne, 2009; Moreno & Venegas, 2021). In our narrative review we are going to study the relationship between the alt-right (new decentralized far right-wing groups born in western societies as a response to the capitalistic crisis of 2008 who propose a reactionary solution to resolve current crisis of capitalism) and the gamer communities focusing on the topic of the masculinist discourse.

During the last decade, events such as Gamergate (GG) have uncovered certain affinities between the discourse of the new alt-right-wing forces and some sectors of the video game players, which assumed masculinist discourses (Kocurek, 2015) and/or neoliberal ones (Muriel & Crawford, 2018). For example, the spread of white supremacist or man-sphere discourses (Moreno and Venegas, 2021). We use man-sphere to discuss the online universe of publications, websites, and antifeminist groups (Kaiser, 2022). This digital space has been created by neomasculinist groups, a reactionary doctrine that look to resolve the current crisis of hegemonic masculinity by the “remasculinization” of men and the restoration of the traditional gender regime. An objective shared with the alt right who also perceives this “resmasculinization” as key part of the solution to the capitalistic crisis (Kelly, 2017). As a result, both groups see feminism as an existential threat to the Western society as it put in doubt the traditional regime gender.

In the case of videogames, there are resistances to change that advocate for the traditional and hegemonic discourse of the industry and the gamer community. In the last decade, the debate around genre inequality, which affects the industry from the beginning (Kirkpatrick, 2015), has also brought to light the growth of the alt-right in some parts of the youth (Nagle, 2018). This type of conservative resistances has generated a series of violent mobilisations and episodes against certain groups because of their genre, race, and sexual orientation (Shaw, 2012), feeding a traditional and technical vision of the medium associated with the traditional hardcore identity (author 1a, 2022).

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GamerGate, initiated in 2014 because of a fake news article about an alleged case of journalist corruption consisted of a mobilisation and a harassment campaign, of international reach, against women in the video game industry (Mortensen, 2018). On the one hand, this episode directly impacted Game Studies due to their critical vision of the hegemonic discourse of the industry (Chess & Shaw, 2016). On the other hand, it sealed a connection between one sector of the gaming communities and the alt-right, which was celebrated by the latter, maintaining that GamerGate was a political school for their movement (Anglin, 2016). During GamerGate women were presented as the source of corruption and degeneration of the “essence” of videogames and feminism was presented as a menace to the community.

Later, it has been highlighted that the alt-right adopted new tactics from digital spaces related to the gaming communities and GamerGate, such as doxing, shitposting or the political uses of memes (Forti, 2021, p. 160-161). It also has been identified how this link between the gamer world and the alt-right has facilitated the recruitment of young people through this type of “politically incorrect” discourse (Green, 2019). One of the key parts of this strategy is the defence and promotion of masculinistic privileges as the answer to the crisis, specially for younger generations, creating a new pro-masculinist sentiment in their bases (Kaiser, 2022). Following this logic, they search to protect their communities from the “internal” and “external” menace of those who put into doubt the conservative perspectives.

For these reasons, in this article, we look to contribute with a narrative review which has studied the relationship between alt-right and gamer communities focusing on the aspect of neomasculinism and its discourses inside the videogame industry. To do that, we have done a review of bibliography, in English and Spanish, through the platforms Scopus and Google Scholar, combining the following terms: “video games”; “videojuegos”; “gamer”; “jugador/a”; “alt-right”; “far-right”; “extrema derecha”; “masculinities”; “masculinidades”; “GamerGate”; “ideology”; “ideología”. We should also point out that although it is a global phenomenon, the existing literature usually focuses on English-speaking communities due to their influence and importance in the video game industry.

The results of the narrative review highlight the importance of the relationship between video game and the alt-right, especially significant in the youth. We can observe that the growth of the alt-right wing discourses has been fed off the historically hegemonic ideas of the video game world, benefiting from a digital culture based on a model of toxic masculinity, geek masculinity (Taylor, 2012). This model has encouraged and imposed a series of masculinist codes that marginalised women inside these communities (Condis, 2018). It has also omitted other groups unfit for the prototypical gamer figure (Shaw, 2012; Author 1b, 2022). Associated with this, although developed in parallel to the debate about the alt-right, there also a debate about what is being a gamer, what it means to identify as one and what type of values we can link with this identity (Muriel & Crawford, 2018; Shaw, 2012; author 1a, 2022). A whole battlefield for the “cultural war” that the alt-right bet on to grow their social base in the

youth (Jong, 2020) through, in part, a strong identity fight as they do in other fields (Blodgett & Salter, 2018).

In conclusion, the study of the discourse of the alt-right around the gamer culture and identity has become essential to understand the rise of certain hate speeches in these communities and the build-up of links between sectors of the youth and the alt-right-wing forces.

Keywords

“Gamer identity”; “gaming culture”; “alt-right”; masculinities.

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