A Taxonomy of Gaming and Gamification Usage in Right-Wing Extremist Propaganda

Research on the use of video games in digital propaganda is an emergent area of study. Current approaches focus on the gamification of propaganda (the addition of gaming elements to non-game contexts) as emergent techniques for circulating content and increasing radicalizing effects. An exemplar of this is the live stream of the Christchurch attack, where the attacker filmed his violent murder in the form of a first person shooter game (Schlegel, 2020, p. 2). While the research in this new area of study focuses on parsing the effects of this trend, no research has yet shown how right-wing extremist propaganda incorporates specific games, gaming motifs, or gamified elements as a persuasive force in propaganda materials. To better understand how gamification is used to radicalize, our team is developing an analytic model for the visual rhetorical content of right-wing extremist digital propaganda. This presentation describes our initial findings about gamification elements including the use of a “plug-and-play” style of video production, our development of a four category taxonomy, “Mechanical, Thematic, Specific, and Aesthetic appropriations,” video game usage in our video dataset, and statistical findings which highlight the persuasive capacities of these taxonomic categories. Ultimately, our data suggests that such material is most persuasive when gamification generates intrinsic motivation to interact with digital propaganda. These findings provide needed insight about the ways propagandists attempt to radicalize youth in gamer communities online.