

TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM IN VIDEO GAMING AND GENDER SENSITIVITIES

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Abstract

This research seeks to find out if video games are created for making ideological statements about gender and feminism, and if there are any differences between how females and males perceive, play and react to video games. The research is framed by the Technological Determinism theory, while the Qualitative Secondary Analysis (QSA) is adopted as the research design towards the selection of relevant reports by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) between 2002 and 2014. The study reveals that the advancements made in computer and digital information communication technologies mean that the nature and role of video games in media entertainment has become more psychologically and sociological complex. Also, male and females alike use video games for entertainment, education, information and even sports but do not perceive all video games the same way. The study, among other recommendations state that video games are “weapons” for modern feminists towards sensitizations on gender and related concepts, however, responsible video gaming, should not only be expected of male game developers; female video game developers should also employ reason with caution in the ideation and creation of video games that dominantly carry female themes.

Key Terms: Technological Determinism, Video Gaming, Gender Sensitivities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The mass media are channels of communication that exist in every society, but they are “mere” carriages of (our) human ideations Sharma (2013) hints in affirmation that media are carriers of human idea. Generally, there have been several literatures on the power of the media -starting from the all powerful to the limited or minimal effects (McQuail, 2005, pp.456-463). Though scholars of communication have done a number of studies on the role of different media on a number of different issues, many of such researches have focused more on the conventional media. Contemporary realities information, communications and media technologies have brought about several dynamics to the already complex reality of the role or influence of the media. One of the complexities of modern media is gender and the media. Gender has become

one of the focal points, and indeed vocal issues related to media content design and dissemination, but it seem not much has been looked at in terms of self created, computer designed graphics. Indeed, of much concern herein are video games which are seen as an essential contemporary mix to the issue of gender and feminism. According a BBC (2006) article, the involvement of more women gamers in video gaming means more money. The question is: can video games be considered as part of not just powerful entertainment, but a strong expression of self and gender? According to MediaWatch, 2014, p.1) the following is the actual situation:

Media are not transparent technologies; they do not offer a window on the world. In mediating events and issues, television, film, video games and other media are involved in selecting, constructing and representing reality. In so doing, the media tend to emphasize and reinforce the values and images of those who create the messages and own the means of dissemination. In addition, these values and images are often influenced by commercial considerations. As a result, the viewpoints and experiences of other people are often left out, or shown in negative ways.

At the instance of technological improvements in media and information communications, the media have been transformed and shaped severally over the course of time. The transformations that have taken place have in turn re-shaped our understanding and definitions of media effects or influence. However, since the media are only channels of our ideas –diverse or personal reality and fictions, much of what contains therein are partially our idiosyncrasies. Therefore there have been several sensitivities and controversies concerning who should do what in the media, to whom and with what effect or influence. In view of this assertion, Malgorzata (2011, p.2) the mass media powerful and reaches large audiences, and thus shapes opinions, attitude and beliefs –by invincibly transferring the dominant hegemonic ideology, the mass media controls social life.

Gender sensitivities are among the controversies that have plague the media and media professional as well as scholars of communication. In the wake of increasing overlaps and interdisciplinary nature of modern communication media, technologies and contents, such professionals like computer scientists also seem challenged to the debate on the effects, influence, and ethics of modern communications. This is mostly so in the case of computer programming, computer content generation and effects. These are all products of technology; Gordon (2002), and Appelgren, (2004) are of the opinion that video games are a part of what is today called story telling convergence. Technological determinism therefore can be seen as the extent to which these technologies determine who should do what in the media, to whom and with what influence. This may be the reason Jenkins (2001) looks at convergence in terms of technology, economic, social or organic. Retrospectively, some of the computer programmed content generations are video games.

The preceding statements lead into the melting pot of technological determinism towards understanding some cursory perspectives between video gaming and gender sensitivities. This is because for some time now, video games seem to have become a strong part of the echoes for or against feminism, hence providing humanist with theoretical postulations. This perspective is arguably what Gordon (2002) points that video games are part of what is today called

storytelling convergence -ownership, tactical structure, information gathering methods all forming part of the convergence.

Modern video games started on 29th of November, 1972, when *Pong* was launched in California, but video games have become a lot more complex today. Video games today are allowing “serious games” to aid simulation of real world situations (Briand and Guiliano, 2011, p.3).

Due to the increasing sophistication of video games as a form of media genre, the debate over what is appropriate and balance for both sexes may continue for some time more and or may never seize. This is because in the main stream media, such arguments for or against feminism has spirals into several twist and turns like politics, films, journalism, advertising, public relations, social media and several other media convergences. Malgorzata (2011, p.2) states further that stereotypical ways of mass media portrayals of reality leads to other groups been underrepresented or ignored, and therefore turns out to become an incomplete image of society.

Irrespective of the several dimensions of the debate on gender sensitivities (feminism or sexism,) this research report is concerned mainly with the interesting niche angles that have been brought to bear as a result of video games. The core of this paper does not hint at a solution to gender sensitivities in the media or especially pretends to find solutions to gender debate be one through video games. The foregoing forms the background to this research report. The Thesis herein only serves to be an additional thoughts about how people tend to use or agree with media content largely as a result self orientation or as a partial display of our idiosyncrasies which are yet an extension of human ideations. In other words, there is an inspiration that since video games are a computer generated creation for entertainment or education, but perhaps not information they could provide a better understanding of gender sensitivities as a product of human ideations and the way people feel about the opposite sex and hence an extension of our idiosyncrasies about gender -for or against feminism and sexism.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There are several studies about or on gender; and most of such studies have emphasized more on women -either as what women should shown to be; what they are not but shown to be, or what they are but portrayed in the media. The following statements serve to support the forgoing statement, thus:

...the image and representation of women and girls in the media has long been a subject of concern. Research shows that there are many fewer females than males in almost all forms of mainstream media and those who do appear are often portrayed in very stereotypical ways... In everything from advertising, television programming, newspaper and magazines, to comic books, popular music, film and video games, women and girls are more likely to be shown (MediaWatch, 2014, p.1).

The media are often implicated. Though there are several studies on media and gender generally, very few studies are concern about how personality clashes are reflected in niche media like video games. In other words, while many studies have tried to show the role of the conventional media in influencing gender biases, but not much has been observed in reverse –trying to see that media portrayals are human idiosyncrasy and reflections, as such, an influence on media instead of the other way round. Video game shave become part of the disturbing equation. According to Paul Jackson, Director General of the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association quoted by the BBC (2006, pp.2-3), video game shave are receiving negative press

already; the kind of negative press that other media have received in the past, all because some game developer are pushing the boundaries of taste and decency too far.

Indeed, as a result of foregoing concern, this study is a modest attempt at understanding if and how media genres like video games have been catharsis for human idiosyncrasies about gender and feminism, instead of the already suspicion that media influences toward idiosyncrasies about gender and feminism.

1.3 Research Questions

The questions below are the bases for this study:

1. Are video games also designed or created for making ideological statements about gender and feminism?
2. Are there any differences between how females and males perceive, play and react to video games?

1.4 Objectives of Studies

This study seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To find out if video games are also designed or created for making ideological statements about gender and feminism.
2. To find out if there are any differences between how females and males perceive, play and react to video games.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is not just an added literature on gender and feminism but seek to look at the role of personal believe in media content creation. With video games in perspective, this study then there expects to be a motivation towards experimental studies on gender and feminism with the hope of benefiting the curiosity of activists, media scholars and policy makers, computer scientists, counselors and therapist. The study – a Nigerian niche media curiosity hopes to stimulate further and other researches on video games in Nigeria and other developing countries, and encourage the debate about media as catharsis for gender equality or extension human reality about gender.

1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Technological Determinism –used herein to refer to how Information Communication technologies (ICTs) have been determining the contemporary changes in the nature, and application of media contents like video games and gaming

1.6.2 Video Gaming –as used in this study, the term refers to the idea, programming, marketing distribution, and contemporary uses of computer generated video games.

1.6.3 Gender Sensitivities –this refers to the real or perceived male and female role conflicts, biases and interests inherent in the uses of ICTs for programming, marketing distribution, and contemporary uses of computer generated video games.

1.7 Theoretical Perspective: Technological Determinism Theory

The technological determinism theory is the base of this study. The theory was propounded by McLuhan in 1970. The assumption of the theory is that technology in general and communication technologies in particular are the basis of society -past, present, and the future. level, including institutions, social interactions and individuals. The caution has been that with every new technology that is introduced and adopted there is trade-off is society. This implies that such a society with hardly remain the same after adopting such communication technologies (Baran, 2010) accordingly, every aspect of our lives is shaped or altered by the available and adopted

technologies (Griffin, 2000). There is therefore the need to question the benefits of communication technologies; who benefits from them, as well as what they trade-offs are - What we may or would need to give away or endure in order to gain the benefits of such communication technologies The major criticism of technological determinism lays in its strictest interpretation. Many scholars are of the opinion that it is an extreme theory which does not offer much to those attempting to understand complex sociological forces that relate to the convergence or divergence of media (Baran, 2010). The theory is however relevant to this study because it shows the bases for the development and application of video games for gender conflict “statements” and the potentials thereof of video games as catalyst for certain gender sensitivities.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design and Method of data Analysis

This research depended entirely on qualitative secondary data. In other words, the Qualitative Secondary Analysis (QSA) was the study design adopted for this study. According to Heaton (2008) secondary analysis refers to various analytical practices that depend on the use of pre-existing data towards investigating new research questions or to re-examine primary study questions so as to ensure certain corroborations. Heaton (2008) maintains that the secondary analysis of statistical data is already an established and well-documented methodology; however, the re-use of qualitative data for new or further analysis remains under-developed. This study therefore considers the QSA worthy of insightful understanding and analysis of qualitative data on video games and gender sensitivities. Selected real life events about video games and gender sensitivities reported by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) between 2002 and 2014 were considered for analysis herein this study.

2.2 Qualitative Secondary Data

Theme 1: Selected Reasons for Computer Generated Media Content

Sub-Theme 1: Selected Reasons for Video Games
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Video games are created for entertainment and amusement● Video games are created for education and information● Video games are created for exercise● Video games are created for profit making● Video games are created for social campaigns and propaganda |
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Source: QSA, 2014

Theme 2: Gender and Feminism in Video Games

Sub-Themes: How Females and Males Perceive, Play and React to Video Games
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- Most video games are created by men
- Most video games show men as strong and women as weak
- Feminists feel that male video games developers are pushing taste and decency too far
- Feminists opine: women in video games mean more regards for women
- Feminists opine: women video game players are sensitive to how women are shown
- Feminists opine: male and females roles in video games reflect off the screen reality

Source: QSA, 2014

3. Discussion of Findings

3.1 Discuss on Theme 1:

Video games are created for entertainment and amusement -secondary data shows that though there are several types of video games, most video games are created for entertainment and amusement. This means that the original purpose of video games still remains the touch stone of such media content. Indeed, it is only recently that video games have become a lot more complex, allowing “serious games” to aid simulation of real world situations (Briand and Gurliano, 2011, p.3). Video games can be so engrossing the players may become obsessed. According to BBC (2005, p.2), a South Korean man died after playing *Star Graft* due to lack of rest or sleep. Professor Mark Griffiths, quoted by BBC (2005, p.2) says that some video games are completely engrossing and are not the type of games you play for 20 minutes and stop; some players are noted for spending up to 10 to 15 hours playing. Furthermore, compulsive gaming is possible, and addiction risk damage to relationships, health, education and careers. There is a consideration that mutual replacements for video games’ addicts are important for recovery (BBC, 2006).

Video games are created for education and information –according to Gordon (2002) video games have become part of the contemporary story telling convergence of the media. This means while audiences are entertained, some video games also offer a good chance at been educated and informed.

Video games are created for exercise -according to BBC (2006, p.1) there is another apart to video games called “exer-gaming” where participant use the video game for exercise. It is simply a situation where the game in question is designed to keep the player in motion as to generate the maximum or expected physical response, thereby entertaining but also exercising in the process.

Video games are created for profit making –though there are increasing video games that women do enjoy to play, a study by EA cited by BBC (2006) shows that 40% of teenage girls played video games versus 90% of teenage boys. This means that cracking the gender gap at the age by making video games more or equally attractive to girls means more money for gaming industry. Example, *Sims*, which is considered one of the most successful games in the world is played mostly by women, many of whom are under 25 years old.

Video games are created for social campaigns and propaganda – In South Korea, for instance, video games are popular and can be used for social campaigns. 30% of the 15 million South Korean population are registered for online gaming. The country is also host to the annual World Cyber Games. The availability and spread of fast broad band internet network huge online video gaming through which players are exposed to a number of online messages designed for quite different purposes. Like in the case of conversational sports, players of such

hugely popular online video games are considered and paid like conventional sports super stars. Nevertheless, some people simply like the games for its social aspects (BBC, 2005b, p. 2).

3.2 Discuss on Theme 2

Most video games are created by men – it is only recently that a survey shows that there is beginning to be more women video games developers in the industry.

Most video games show men as strong and women as weak –This may not be entirely surprising because since most video games are designed by men, the themes are tilted favourably towards men. There have been instances where male video game developers are accused of not been sensitive to female depictions in video games. The passion and fantasy is therefore seen to be taken too real.

Feminists feel that male video games developers are pushing taste and decency too far – as related to the preceding point above. The contemporary video game industry is dominated by men have been suspected by feminists who see most male gamers as extending their idiosyncrasies beyond comfortable gender limits. According to David Gardner, chief operating officer for Electronic Arts (EA), though more girls than boys are interested in video games by 50% difference, girls lose interest in 12 months, living most boys on with the games. Women who remain interested are highly selective and stick to fewer games than men. *Sims* is one the games women have consistently shown interest in, yet many are under 25 years. See the BBC, 2006 article titled “Games Industry in Falling Women.”

Feminists opine: women in video games mean more regards for women -women are becoming more interested in video games creation. The general opinion is that more women in video games mean more regards for women. In another BBC (2006) article titled “All Women Gamers Please Stand Up” it is stated that more women are needed in video games development because they understand better what it feels like to be a women. This is what Gordon (2002) refers to as a “story telling convergence.”

Feminists opine: Portrayal of women in video games is a sensitive issue -According to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), playing a video game is different from watching a video but the theme and tone of the games is equally worthy of caution and vital too.

Feminists opine: male and females roles in video games reflect off the screen reality- According to Jenkins (2001), media convergences include social and organic aspects where video games for instance are implicated and depicting what Sharma (2013) calls carriers of human idea. Personal gender perceptions are therefore depicted in the creation of video games as a small part of off the screen reality.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Video games have been around for more than two decade now. However, the advancements made in computer and digital information communication technologies mean that the nature and role of video games in media entertainment has become more psychologically and sociological complex. Clearly, this aspect an era of media entertainment needs to be understood more. Further studies on the role of feminism in video games should however tilt towards other methodologies like experiments in other to undo the potential bias of surveys and weak reliability of secondary information (relied upon in this study). This stands a good chance of providing a objective, valid, and reliable evidence(s) on the differences between female and make perception and reactions towards video games.

2. Male and female alike use video game for entertainment, education, information and even sports, however, women and men do not perceive all video games the same way. This is mostly true and in terms of extended gender sensitivities and biases. Video games are a “weapon” for modern feminists towards sensitization on gender and related concepts. However, such as the manner of responsibility expected of male game developers, female video game developers should also employ reason with caution in the ideation and creation of video games that dominantly carry female themes.

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN AYODELE OYEWOLE

John Ayodele OYEWOLE, was born on 19th November 1966. He had his first degree in Philosophy from the University of Ibadan in 1992 before bagging a Bachelor’s degree in Theology from the Urbanian University, Rome in 1999. He later went on a new terrain in his academic career where he obtained another Bachelor’s degree in Social Science at the Gregorian University, Rome in 2006 and consequently his Licence in Social Communication, from the same university in 2007. In 2010 he obtained his doctoral degree in Social Science (with specialisation in Mass Communication) at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas, Rome. He is presently a lecturer in the department of Mass Communication at Adekunle Ajasin University where he has been teaching since 2011. He enjoys carrying out researches on communication and humanity.