

«LANGUAGE» OF RELIGION IN DIGITAL GAMES: THE EXAMPLE OF VISUAL NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The article presents theoretical and methodological analysis of the problem of studying the “language” of religion. The place and role of the “language” of religion in the conditions of globalization is defined. The status and role of computer video games in the cultural modern world with the presence of religious overtones in them is outlined. Within the framework of systematic study of this problem the variety of modern theories of different scientists concerning the definition of the “language” of religion was considered. The main attention in the work the author emphasizes the description of the prominent role of religion in the game culture, which influences the peculiarities of understanding people’s worldview. Not only characteristic concepts are highlighted, but also a historical sketch of the visual novel as a new branch of digital games is considered. The article proposes such methods as semiotic, comparative analysis of game characters with supernatural abilities presented in visual novels. The images of gods, god-man and other supernatural beings in virtual computer games were considered. The representative mythical reality was analyzed on the example of several stories of visual novels.

Key words: Religion, Mass Culture, Visual Novels, Modernity, Players, Influence, Youth.

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Цифрлық ойындардағы діннің «тілі»: көрнекі новеллалардың мысалында

Аңдатпа. Мақалада визуалды новеллалардағы діннің “тілін” зерттеу мәселесіне теориялық және әдіснамалық талдау келтірілген. Жаһандану жағдайында діннің “тілінің” орны мен рөлі анықталады. Қазіргі мәдени әлемдегі компьютерлік бейне ойындардың мәртебесі мен рөлі оларда діни коннотацияның болуымен белгіленеді. Бұл мәселені жүйелі зерттеу аясында әр түрлі ғалымдардың діннің “тілін” анықтауға қатысты көптеген заманауи теориялары қарастырылды. Мақалада басты назар адамдардың дүниетанымын түсіну ерекшеліктеріне әсер ететін ойын мәдениетіндегі діннің маңызды рөлін сипаттауға аударылады. Сипаттамалық ұғымдар ғана емес, сонымен қатар визуалды новелланың тарихи эскизі сандық ойындардың жаңа саласы ретінде қарастырылады. Мақалада визуалды романдарда ұсынылған табиғаттан тыс күштері бар ойын кейіпкерлерін семиотикалық, компаративистік талдау сияқты әдістер ұсынылған. Виртуалды компьютерлік ойындарда құдайлардың, әулиелердің және басқа да табиғаттан тыс жаратылыстардың бейнелері қарастырылды. Көрнекі романдардың бірқатар әңгімелерінің мысалында репрезентативті мифтік шындық талданды. Сауалнама арқылы жеке тұлға мен қоғамның өзара әрекеттесуіндегі діни сюжеттік ойындарға деген көзқарас зерттелді.

Түйін сөздер: дін, бұқаралық мәдениет, көрнекі новеллалар, қазіргі заман, ойыншылар, ықпал, жастар.

«Язык» религии в цифровых играх: на примере визуальных новелл

Аннотация. В статье представлен теоретико-методологический анализ проблемы изучения “языка” религии в визуальных новеллах. Определяется место и роль “языка” религии в условиях глобализации. Обозначается статус и роль компьютерных видеоигр в культурном современном мире с наличием в них религиозного подтекста. В рамках систематического изучения данной проблемы было рассмотрено многообразие современных теорий различных учебных касательно определения “языка” религии. Основное внимание в статье акцентируется на описании заметной роли религии в игровой культуре, которая оказывает влияние на особенности понимания мировосприятия людей. Выделяются не только характерные понятия, но и рассматривается исторический очерк визуальной новеллы как нового ответвления цифровых игр. В статье предложены такие методы как семиотический, компаративистский анализ игровых персонажей со сверхъестественными способностями, представленными в визуальных новеллах. Были рассмотрены образы богов, богочеловека и иных сверхъестественных существ в виртуальных компьютерных играх. Была проанализирована репрезентативная мифическая реальность на примере ряда историй визуальных новелл. С помощью анкетирования было изучено отношение к играм с религиозным сюжетом во взаимодействии личности и общества.

Ключевые слова: религия, массовая культура, визуальные новеллы, современность, игры, влияние, молодежь.

Introduction

The technological breakthrough that has occurred, especially after the pandemic period, has brought a new reality to society in everyday life – the developed virtual and gaming reality. A modification of culture and tradition and their transformation into a game is revealed, and this is clearly visible in popular culture. The importance of religion as a worldview and a person's way of life has increased greatly. The influence of religion is great, and it also extends to sociocultural aspects through its unique language – the “language” of religion. Modern games have taken over virtual culture, and the demand for new varieties is growing day by day. Keeping pace with the times, religion has penetrated various forms of popular culture. The language used in sacred texts can have a profound impact on how society perceives and treats them in the modern world. This can have far-reaching social, cultural and political consequences. Religion plays a prominent role in gaming culture, exerting a significant influence on the public's collective imagination, so the study of religion, characters, and representational reality in digital games should be central to the field of religious studies seeking to understand youth perceptions of religion.

Methodology

The phenomenon of the “language” of religion in a scientific research framework has been the subject of philosophical and

methodological positions since the dawn of human consciousness. The Russian philosopher M.K. also speaks about this. Petrov: “Language is rightly considered the main means of communication and its instrument, a symbolic way of influencing each other by people of a single linguistic, and usually social, affiliation to achieve a variety of goals” [1, p. 39]. The use of systematic, retrospective and semiotic methodological tools in the study made it possible to study in detail this phenomenon as a modern phenomenon of mass culture, presented in the form of semiotic and comparativist analysis. The method of content analysis was used, as well as questionnaires and unstructured interviews, with the help of which we were able to effectively process a large amount of information. SWOT analysis allowed us to draw up a qualitative hypothesis and recommendations. This holistic approach allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject of research and study it in depth.

Main part

B. Russell paid special attention to a critical understanding of traditional theological arguments in favor of God and sought to develop a logically and empirically based approach to religious issues: “Religion draws strength from the feeling of unity with the universe - a feeling that it can evoke in a person. At first, unity was achieved by subordinating the universe

to our own concept of good; union with god was easy because god was love. But the collapse of traditional religion made us doubt whether we can trust this method of unity" [2, p. 7].

For example, Ludwig Wittgenstein can be considered a supporter of two main ideas, according to J. Hyman: "semantic (about the meaning of religious speech) and epistemological (about the justification of religious beliefs)" [3, p. 179]. Semantics holds that the expression of religious beliefs is distinct from statements of facts supported by logic or science, and instead involves an interpretation of reality based on a specific set of religious principles. According to the second belief, since religious claims cannot be tested or confirmed empirically, they are fundamentally resistant to falsification and verification. Wittgenstein talked about how similar the world and language are: "language is an image (projection) of the world, which is a mosaic of atomic facts" [4, p. 85]. Speaking about facts, in his work "Logical-Philosophical Treatise" Wittgenstein writes: "1.13 The world is facts in logical space, thereby denoting its objectivity, that which is inherent in the natural sciences" [5, p. 10]. Wittgenstein's fideism consists in not turning inside out the various aspects of human activity, and religion in particular, and allowing them to develop in this world through their own "language", the proof of which is not necessary.

Already in the modern world, the "language" of religion can be called "multimodal" [6, p. 93]. This term is defined by religious scholars David Lewis A. and Christine Kramer H., explaining the phenomenon of comics and religion in them. Multimodality is characterized by facilitated understanding of text with a unique assembly and products. The basis lies in visual perception, a narrative that evokes a wide range of emotions in readers. And scientists include religion there, arguing that religious experience is multimodal. We know that a single formalized definition of religion does not yet exist. However, it is normal to consider that religious traditions include rituals, texts, beliefs that are expressed through speech, prayer, meditation, music, art and other things. And therefore, these symbolic texts, images, and other means of religious

expression, such as "the plots of comic books, the narrative of short stories, include and awaken many ways of interpretation and understanding, and also reflect the basis of sensory perception" [6, p. 94].

For example, in his article Porosenkov S.V. examines the specifics of the language of religion in a historical and philosophical framework and its relationship with natural languages in culture. He writes: "...artificial languages began to be created, a prerequisite for the functioning of which is the possibility of reinterpreting their meanings..." [7, p. 62]. Similar to S. Porosenkov's theory, in this study the object became "language" as a phenomenon of codification in digital games. Within the framework of post-secular times in the modern world, when the model of religion is changing - its language will be used directly as a "code" in digital games and visual novels.

Studying the problem of the relationship between games and religion in his work, another scientist, Jason Anthony, defines a typology of dimensions based on ancient Greek civilization. He argues that "digital games entangle the human mind to the same extent as religious practice" [8, p. 9]. The two sides of his idea are that, firstly, he creates a single "language" that can contain religious elements, past and future. Secondly, it gives a lot of game developers the opportunity to create more detailed, complex and specific religious images, characters, movements and overall narratives.

Images of Gods, God-Man in Digital Games

First, we need to consider the origin story of the visual novel? Visual novels originated in Japan in the 1990s and are a new form of storytelling that has become particularly popular among computer games in recent years. They combine traditional literature, graphics and sound effects to create an established and popular form of entertainment. Visual novels are interactive games that combine elements of classic video games with the deep narrative structure of novels. At first they used stylized animation and were accompanied by voice acting, sound effects and music. Although visual novels have minimal gameplay mechanics common in conventional video

games, their unique storytelling creates an engaging experience for players.

The first researcher of visual novels as mass culture was N.A. Karskanova. In his master's thesis, he defines short stories from the point of view of plot development as "a very flexible type of storytelling, in which the story can be developed as much and as desired, while a book published in the same format will be very large in volume" [9, p. 10]. Thus, it reflects the peculiarity of visual novels from a number of other manifestations of mass culture, especially gaming culture. And while the concept of interactive storytelling isn't entirely new, visual novels represent a significant shift in the implementation of this idea. Unlike traditional role-playing games or interactive fiction, visual novels tend to be more narrative-driven. This is because they prioritize storytelling over actual gameplay mechanics. They are often praised for their ability to emotionally involve players in their immersive narrative experiences.

For example, studying visual novels as a way of developing foreign language project competence, senior teachers of the Ural Pedagogical University and the Ural State University of Foreign Languages Zelenina L.E. and Sosnina N.G. come to the conclusion that: "the methodological value of visual novels lies in the technical accessibility of this application for both students and teachers" [10, p. 156]. Open access to visual novel templates and the tools used to develop them is widely available on the Internet. In their opinion, these tools significantly simplify the process of adapting short stories to the conditions of language learning. Compared to other complex or expensive educational programs and resources, visual novels are

relatively easy to use and integrate into the classroom. In addition, visual novels often have a user-friendly interface and intuitive navigation system, which contributes to their technical accessibility. Ease of use allows students to engage with content without requiring extensive technical knowledge and skills. Likewise, teachers can use visual novels in their teaching methods without going through a difficult learning curve. Thus, now we have the opportunity to study the specifics of the visual novel in a multidisciplinary way, because it can be applied to various areas of human activity.

On the Internet you can find a huge number of video reviews of visual novels. One of these videos presents popular virtual games in 2017, to which they added their own - Policenauts, Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, Hanachirasu [11]. All the plots of these stories were classic and fell under the standard genre of romance, since the term "novels" itself in this context means exactly that. This was the start for post-Soviet countries to come up with their own unique visual novels six years ago. East Asian novels entered the international market, quickly gaining popularity and being released one after another, while in the West they had not even heard of such video games.

Thus, based on our research using a questionnaire on the Google platform, we can present a statistical analysis of the most popular visual novels this year (Figure 1).

A visual novel released in 2018, Romance Club is ranked number one in the gaming rankings. As of September 2023, the game features thirty-five unique stories, half of which contain religious motifs and plots. Most screenwriters, artists, composers and other game developers work in the CIS countries. To expand the audience, the

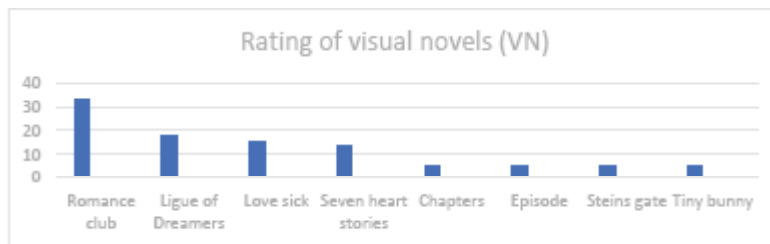


Figure 1 - Statistics of popular visual novels.

stories are translated into English, Russian, Turkish and other languages. On the popular Google Play platform, the number of downloads of the game exceeded 10 million, while other games in the ranking have an average of 100,000 to 500,000 downloads. Statistics of popular stories are available in the game itself.

In the world of virtual games, religious motifs are manifested through visual and audio elements. For example, the music in them may have a connotation of religiosity or spirituality, and the game world may contain symbols, signs, or architectural elements associated with religion. The most popular novella of August-September 2023 was the story called "Kali: Call of Darkness" from the novella "Romance Club", which received a figure of 3,045,776 readings. This story is about the angry Hindu goddess of death, Kali, as described in the Vamachara Bhava tantra. In the future, we will take a closer look at this goddess and her story "She appears in a dark blue appearance. Her hair is disheveled, She is adorned with a necklace of human heads..., She has four arms... She is adorned with a crown of precious stones and various ornaments" [12, p. 42]. In history we see the image of the goddess Kali (Figure 3) as one of the incarnations of Parvati. The story is permeated with a religious plot, which explains the essence of religious holidays, symbols and rituals of Hinduism. It tells the story of the arrival of Amala, the Indologist protagonist, to Calcutta, India in 1980. Her goal is to solve the mystery of the disappearance of a British diplomat. During the investigation, the task force finds the headless body of a man, who turned out to be one of the victims of a ritual murder committed as an offering to the goddess Kali by supporters of Kaula Shaktism. The moon is considered to be her symbol, and anorthosite is a moonstone, widely known in esotericism and known as the Muktakeshi stone, as mentioned in the story.

Also in the story appears a young man named Raitan Vaish, who is gradually revealed as one of the avatars of the god Shiva, known for his concern for order. His believers call him Mahadeva Rita-Shiva (Figure 2). Writer Alexandra R. in a recent interview shared that she added the prefix "Rita" to avoid comparisons with other acting Hindu avatars.

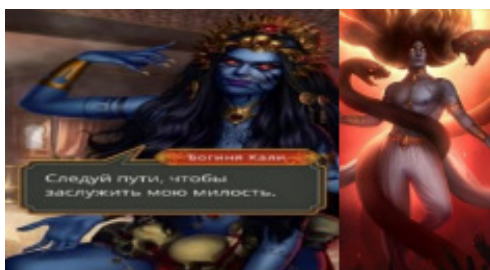


Figure 2 - Goddess Kali. Mahadeva Rita-Shiva.

This story refers to Hindu sacred texts such as the Mahanirvana Tantra and Vamachara Bhava: The Left Hand Path in Tantra, which was mentioned above. The main character also recites the text about which the Russian sectologist A.L. Dvorkin writes: "This universe was born by you, this world was created by you" [13, p. 172]. Studying the text of Mahanirvana tantra, in chapter four one can find many similar appeals to the goddess Kali: "You are the only Para-prakriti..., and from You the entire Universe arose. You are the Mother of this Universe (10)" [14, p. 206]. The screenwriter, focusing on the creative and destructive form of the goddess, implies words from Tantra: "You are the Beginning of everything, the Creator, the Guardian and the Destroyer of the world (34)" [14, p. 209]. In other words, it can be argued that the historical materials and scriptures mentioned in history do not contain significant deviations from the original English and Russian translations.

Analyzing the content of news, articles, photographs and videos, as well as comments from users of popular social networks such as TikTok, Youtube and Instagram, it is worth noting that the story, which attracted the attention of a huge number of people in the post-Soviet space, leads to a serious fascination with Indian culture and language. Many people travel around India, arrange thematic photo sessions and filming in the style of a visual novel, idealizing the country and all its geo-ecological, socio-cultural and spiritual-religious aspects.

As part of the study, an interview was conducted with a photographer from Odessa, Ukraine, who creates such photo sessions. During the interview, it became clear that the photographer is more skeptical about virtual games and the transfer of their

stories into real life. His vision of games is romanticized and denigrated, which does not always reflect their true essence. The photographer also gave permission to use his edited photographs, including those that have not yet been published on official pages on social networks. As part of the filming, people not associated with virtual games took part, who tried on the images of avatars of Shiva and the goddess Kali (Figure 3).

Also during the interview, another story was discussed - "Arcanum" - the name of which speaks for itself, since it is directly

related to tarology. The photographer, who is a practicing tarot reader, notes that the real meaning of the cards is distorted and incomplete, which applies not only to this story, but also to other stories and games in general.

The famous story "Heaven's Secret", currently in two parts, has been able to attract many readers, with a total of 3,468,625 reads as of September 2023. In the first volume of this visual novel, we meet the main character named Vicky, whose life was cut short and she ends up in a sky school, where she discovers the secrets of the afterlife. This

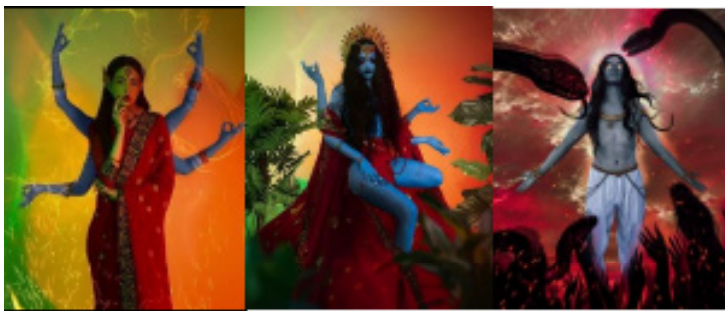


Figure 3 - Photo set in the style of the story "Kali: Call of Darkness"

world talks about heaven and hell, and also gives information about the heavenly hierarchy among angels and demons, such as thrones, seraphim and cherubim, as well as individual characters - Lucifer, Satan, Mammon and Sheppha (ruler).

If we talk about the ratio of angels and demons in this story, it is worth noting that the number of demon characters is 25, which is 54% of the total number, prevailing over angels, who are only 15 and make up 46%. Of the demon characters, 55% are male and 45% are female. While among the angel characters, 67% are men, most of whom occupy leadership positions in the school

and the citadel, and only one woman out of 33% became a seraph, Shepf's closest ally, which emphasizes the problem of gender inequality in this society.

The player is given the opportunity to choose in the love line, which can be a full or incomplete branch. He also has the opportunity to join angels or demons, or achieve balance by accumulating the same stats. This will allow him to become the first "balance-bearer," which was previously practically impossible, and also to establish relationships with the opposite side. Malbonte and the Supreme God, created directly by the screenwriter and the rest of

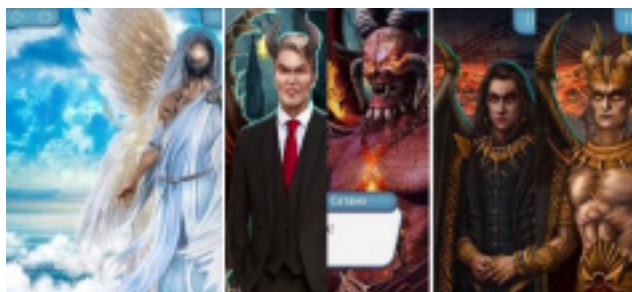


Figure 4 - Shepfa, the Supreme God. Two hypostases of Satan and the demon of wealth Mamon.

the game developers, are included in the course of the plot. All characters in heaven have a human appearance, with the exception of demons, among which 24% have two forms - human and demonic. Some examples of such characters are Lucifer, Satan, Mammon, as well as the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, who will appear in the second part of the story.

The images of demons take on unique forms, and each person perceives them individually. However, there are certain characteristics that they all share: horns, dark, burgundy and brown hues, a downward gaze, wide wings and a dismissive, indifferent demeanor. In comparison to angels, who are always dressed in light, pastel shades, their wings are crystal white and fluffy, and their gaze is directed upward.

The ancient Jews professed the cult of the snake, which symbolized polytheism and was opposed to monotheism. Mammon, one of Satan's associates, has similar features to the image described in the New Testament, where he appears as a demon of greed for wealth and pleasure. Having descended to earth, he seduces people with luxury, pushes them to adventure, inflames passion and stimulates the desire for instant profit. As for Satan, in the Old Testament story, where Eve is seduced to violate the Lord's prohibition, he takes on the role of the tempting serpent, according to the interpretation of various thinkers based on the Bible: "And the great dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, was cast out to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev. 12:9) [15]. The image of horned demons is still relevant today, especially on the big screen. In his graduation work, Doctor of Sciences A.E. Kisilevich studies Satan R. Sherf and uses the Old Testament Leviticus as an example, which tells about the devil-goat Azazel: "the same sacrifice was made to them, both were revered to the same extent" [16, p. 10].

Lucifer, the fallen angel described in the Bible as the "son of the morning" and "the morning star", has become very popular in cinema. Tom Ellis, who played the main character Lucifer Morningstar in the Netflix series Lucifer, served as the inspiration for Lucifer (Figure 5). Considering that Lucifer is the son of Satan and in general they represent

a single image of the ruler of hell and the dark forces, it is worth noting that the name of Lucifer reflects his character, describing him as proud. Pride is one of the seven deadly sins, but Lucifer is the best student at the Academy of Angels and Demons. The continuation of the story, released in early 2023, clearly shows the reader Lucifer's childhood traumas - his mother Lilith, who once loved him with all her heart, began to go crazy, pushed him away and ran away from her son, while Satan continued to beat him. Thus, the screenwriter shows that a person's reaction and character in adulthood are determined by his childhood traumas, evoking the reader's compassion for the characters.



Figure 6 -Two appearances of Lucifer from the story "Secret of Heaven", Lucifer from the series.

Since ancient times, the four horsemen of the apocalypse have occupied a central place in the imagination of people, even before the mass appearance of cultural works. With the development of TV series, films, novels and computer games, the post-apocalyptic genre has gained new dynamics. However, it should be remembered that this topic can be used for manipulative purposes in the hands of destructive organizations, since everyone interprets the characters in their own way. The newly appeared horsemen of the Apocalypse are a continuation of this story. Shortly after the release of the unfinished Secret of Heaven, the writers introduced the first two horsemen - Plague and War. Their images were first described by John the Theologian in his Revelation. On the island of Patmos, the Son of God appeared before John with seven stars in his hands and asked him to write down everything he saw in his lifetime. John went up to the Throne of God and saw God surrounded by twenty-four elders and four living

creatures holding a book with seven seals that only the Lamb could open. The first four seals released the four horsemen, and the last one brought silence in heaven.

One of the horsemen described in the Bible was depicted "... a white horse, and a rider on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him; and he went out victorious, and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2) [15]. This horseman is usually called the Plague, or the Conqueror. The bow symbolizes conquest, although there is no direct reference to the plague in the text. This image of the Plague affected popular culture. In the visual novel, Plague is represented as a pale red, impulsive young girl with sores all over her body.

The other horseman described by John is introduced as: "And another horse went out, a red one; and to him that sat on it was given power to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another; and a great sword was given to him" (Rev. 6:4) [15]. This indicates that the second horseman is War, whose sword is a symbol of shed blood. The red horse symbolizes fires in areas, villages and cities. War's appearance in the novella is portrayed as dark-skinned, serious, aloof, ready to intimidate and kill crowds in his apocalyptic vision.

The remaining two horsemen correspond to Famine and Death in the biblical sense. Gradually, the hypothesis about this is confirmed, and each rider appears before us in his own unique appearance. Hunger is a melancholic and indifferent rider, depriving immortals of their strength and leading them to a state of weakness in a matter of minutes. Death, the last horseman, has the terrifying power of killing everything around him.



Figure 6 - horsemen of the Apocalypse - Plague, War, Famine, Death.

Despite the enormous popularity of the story "Secret of Heaven", the announcement of its sequel involving horsemen received a huge response. The second part of the story turned out to be a "squeeze out of the dust" for many players, as shown by content analysis of interviews, discussions on social networks and comments. The writers here invited a variety of horsemen - mortals capable of killing and resurrecting angels and demons; immortals plotted against each other; They organized feasts and balls during plagues and wars. The horsemen, who by their very nature should evoke horror and despair, suddenly show warmth and reveal their feelings to the main character. The First Horsewoman, Plague, has become a symbol of the recent pandemic that has claimed millions of lives on earth. The ruthless horseman of War, in his statements, imperceptibly refers to the events of our time, where different countries still cannot agree and end conflicts. However, he demonstrates that even he has hidden feelings despite his political differences.

It is important to note that despite the fact that Heaven's Secret is just an interactive game where the relationships of the villains are romanticized and idealized, it raises social issues such as gender inequality, unconventional relationships, as well as the impact of modern world events such as the coronavirus infection and wars on the territory of different countries. Modern man should pay attention to these problems and find ways to resolve them in order to prevent tension in society.

The symbolism associated with bloodstains - moons that appear before battles and wars in the game - stands out clearly. For example, in the duel between Dracula and the balaur in modern times, a creature similar to a dragon from Romanian mythology, as well as during the campaign of Sultan Murad with the Janissaries in the fifteenth century against Svetigrad. Thus, the semiotic meaning of the moon is preserved in a spatiotemporal context. A suitable example is the mention of the prophet Joel: "The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Joel 2:31) [15], indicating the time of Judgment Day. Thus, the burgundy moon is a harbinger of the end of the world. The story also

features the concept of the “Blood Moon Tetrad”, which links the four phases of the appearance of the moon before battles and wars. This is not an accident, since the symbolism of the number four is also often seen in the game. Four problem-solving hero friends represent the four corners of the world, the main character is kidnapped and taken to a dark castle at the age of four, Mehmet’s fourth son, at the age of fourteen, ascends to the throne after the death of Sultan Murad, and the Human Faces appear in the first half of 2023 update and Tetra, which symbolize the number four. Thus, this story has strong symbolism. This story is imbued with mystery, mysticism and the unknown; it often refers to religious texts and traditions, including the Bible, Torah and Islamic canons, and also quotes the Gospels. Some readers may not like this approach, but some like to predict events, build theories about parallel worlds and the existence of otherworldly forces and immortal beings in our world.

Thus, based on the screenwriter’s answers, we can conclude that, despite the desire of the developers to do something original and non-standard, deviating from the canons that society has become accustomed to seeing throughout its life, the result may not always meet expectations.

SWOT Analysis of the “language” of Religion in Virtual Games

As part of our research, an anonymous survey was conducted with the consent of the respondents themselves, which allowed us to assess people’s attitudes towards games with religious content, emotional reactions when playing such games and other aspects of interest to us. We have prepared a list of questions in both Kazakh and Russian languages. For this empirical study, we interviewed young people in the Republic of Kazakhstan, including cities such as Almaty, Astana, Atyrau and Aktobe, as well as students from the Novosibirsk Architectural University. The total number of respondents was 118 people, of which 80 were women and 38 were men, by September 2023. Among the respondents, youth predominated - 69 people aged from 17 to 20 years, which is 58% of the total number of respondents, 22% (22 people) are aged from 21 to 25 years. The number of respondents over 25 years of age was 3%, and among those who completed the questionnaire there were 46 adolescents under the age of 16, accounting for 17% of the total. The age-gender ratio and residence statistics of the respondents are shown in Figure 7.

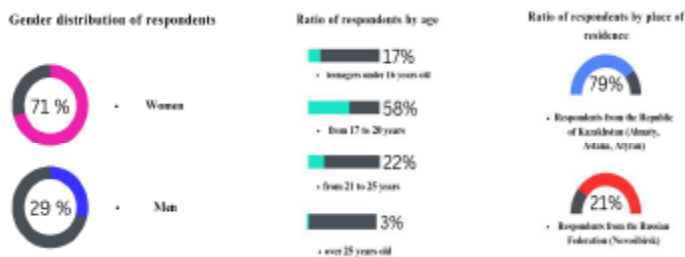


Figure 7 - Proportion of respondents by gender

One of the main questions that interested us was the degree of religiosity of the respondents (see Figure 8). Thanks to the answers to this question, we were able to analyze who spends more time on computer games - believers or non-believers. It turned out that there were 79 people who sincerely belong to religion or are inclined towards it, which is more than half of the respondents (67%). 26% of respondents were not practicing believers

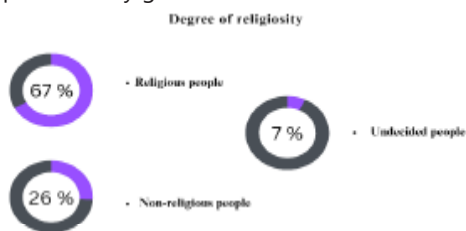


Figure 8 - Degree of religiosity of respondents.

or did not consider themselves such at all, while the remaining 7% had not yet solved this problem.

The survey revealed important information about the impact of visual novels on believers and their attitudes towards the presence of religious elements in video games. Almost half of those surveyed, specifically 53% of believers, expressed the opinion that such games do not offend their religious feelings. However, only 8% of respondents, who were believers and non-believers at the same time, expressed a negative attitude towards games with a religious plot, arguing that they should not be released to the masses. It was also noted that 39% of people remained neutral on this issue and were interested in more information about how games do not hurt the feelings of people with different ideas, as long as they do not disparage other traditions, races, cultures, or religions, and do not include obscene or sarcastic material.

It is important to note that play is not limited to childhood, and adults actively participate in various forms of play, including hobbies, sports, and entertainment. They use games for stress relief, relaxation, and leisure. Statistics show that 55% of respondents believe that computer games can help a person cope with depression and melancholy, forgetting about their problems. 22% of respondents believe that games will not completely relieve stress and depression, but will provide temporary distraction, and recommend turning to specialists. However, the remaining 32% believe that computer games do not provide any benefit, and 12% remain undecided.

An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the presence of religion in virtual games shows the importance of painstaking work and a comprehensive study of the basics of religions that are used in games. Such study can give a story additional depth, complexity and relevance to different cultures and mentalities, which will influence its popularity and influence in the market. It is noted that the use of sound effects, musical accompaniment and dialogue between characters makes it possible to deepen the player's interaction with the story, develop the emotional component and convey a unique mystical experience.

However, there may also be weaknesses associated with misunderstanding and interpretation of religious tenets and changes in characters, which can cause disagreements and disputes among representatives of different faiths. The use of real religious people and events requires a deep knowledge of the history and canons of religion to avoid inconsistencies and discontent of the masses.

In general, consideration of the SWOT analysis revealed the importance of religious elements in virtual games, subject to proper use and consideration of diverse opinions and values. The "language" of religion in games can be a source of both knowledge and emotional involvement, contributing to the development of cultural goals and traditions. However, it is important to respect different beliefs and prevent possible conflicts. However, inconsistency with the canons of religions, constructing them according to one's own plots can lead to discontent of the masses and insult to the feelings of believers, which can serve as a threat to society.

Conclusion

The "language" of religion used can have a strong influence on how society perceives it in the modern world and relates to its reinterpreted forms. This can have profound social, cultural and political consequences. For example, many readers of the Hindu story *Kali: Call of Darkness* travel to India to study the language and read the original sacred texts. Thus, religious language, starting with ancient symbols and signs, is now widely used in mass (especially gaming) culture, including religious themes, symbols, images of gods and messiahs.

The research work presented here demonstrates that religion provides important resources for the creation of cultural meaning and symbolic scripts that are relevant in contemporary popular culture. The connection between religion and games is that both offer activities based on the establishment of order and a form of escapism that allows one to escape from everyday life. Religion and games offer similar tools and represent different worldviews. Digital religious games are very popular and have religious

significance, although they are a little-studied area.

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended to study the problem of religion in virtual games in more depth. This includes considering measures to address these issues, analyzing trends and features of the introduction of religion into gaming culture, studying the impact of games on a global level, and understanding the roots, causes and consequences of such symbiosis.

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