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Virtual Morality: The Role of Conscience in Video Game Decisions

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This study centers on conscience as the moral principle that guides people's actions and thoughts toward living beings. Forcing people to make decisions and observe their behaviors about moral problems would be difficult in real-life and laboratory settings, however, video-games offer an unlimited world where psychologists could study moral decisions and acts within ethical boundaries. While playing video-games, players' moral principles could reflect into the virtual-world and influence these decisions (Joeckel et al., 2012; Weaver & Lewis, 2012). To observe the role of conscience in moral decision-making process, people's decisions in video-games were analyzed in this study. Sample consisted of 17 participants (7 Male and 10 Female; Age range: 18-25) from Czech Republic and a similar number of participants will be reached in Türkiye. During the study, participants played three chapters of Detroit: Become Human video-game and, they made decisions under time pressure at first. Later, they played the same chapters again and this time they were not under time pressure. After the experiment, players were interviewed about their decisions. Thematic analysis method was used to analyze participants' answers to see how they explain their moral decisions. In the part of the research conducted with Czechs, results showed that time pressure would lead to more moral decisions through intuitive and automatic thinking, as they would not have time to think about the game's narrative or goals. Moreover, according to the participants' responses, it was concluded that they made more moral decisions because the game's characters were human-like, and in this case, it is thought that artificial intelligence affects people's moral decision-making mechanism when it has human-like features. As a result of the research planned to be conducted with Czechs and Turks, it will be seen whether there is a difference in the phenomenon of conscience between two cultures.

Keywords: Conscience, decision-making, video-games, time pressure, moral decisions

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