THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS IN VIDEO GAME DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Video game developers are among those who directly contribute to this through their direct involvement in video game development. Therefore, there are conflicts of interest in the game development, and the developers can avoid the breach of ethics. This can be done if the video game developer understands the importance of ethics as it plays a significant role in shaping human development. This paper discussed ethics and its relationship with human development, the consequences of avoiding ethics in game development, and some Islamic principles that can be applied in game development. In connecting ethics in game development with human development, the code of ethics for game developers gave insights into the relevant values to be added to the guidelines of game development and human development. The consequences of ignoring ethics are dire, including shirk, and involvement in gambling and pornography. Maqasid Syariah is the Islamic principle that should be implemented and compiled to ensure the obedience of game developers toward the ethics in game development.

KEY WORDS: Ethic, Values, Game Development, Islamic Ethic

1. INTRODUCTION

Video games have undeniably become an imperative part of most of our life, either as a form of entertainment and even as a hobby. Not only kids, adults and young adults are also likely to involve themselves with video games. This is because playing video games will increase the users' dopamine (thoughtfulparent, 2024) Dopamine is a chemical released in the brain that makes an individual feel good (Healthdirect, 2021) and becomes active when individuals participate in something fun and pleasurable, such as video games.

Because of this, the content of the game needs to be content appropriate for all of the ages of its players, especially for the young player or the children. As they can be easily influenced by what they see and hear.

Video game developers are among those who directly contribute to this through their direct involvement in video game development. Because of their role in developing the games, they have many opportunities to influence others to do good or bad, to maximize their efforts, good or bad. In order to get the most out of their efforts, they must be committed to making the video game developer a useful and respected profession.

This can be done if the video games developer understands the importance of ethics as it plays a significant role in shaping human development. This is because ethics and values make people understand that their decisions affect themselves and others. Thus, ethics and values increase confidence, leadership capacity, improve decision making and provide long-term benefits (Sharma, 2021). In Islam, ethics can be defined as good values and principles based on Islamic sources (Mohammed, 2011). Rosidi, Mokhtar, and Majid (2022) also suggest that maqasid shariah could be a model that developers can use in developing software, including video game development.

This paper is compiled through content analysis using literature review on the existing articles that are available on the internet. In this paper, the objective that we are going to discuss here are as follow:

- Video games, ethics and human development
- The effect of ignoring ethic in video game development
- Islamic principle as a guide for ethical game development

2. Video Games, Ethics and Human Development

The code of ethics for game developers is proposed by International Game Developers Association (IGDA), a non-profit organisation that aimed to, according to their homepage, "advance the careers and enhance the lives of game developers by connecting members with their peers, promoting professional development, and advocating for the interests of game developers worldwide". According to their Code of Ethics on their "Policies" page, their objectives of code of ethics are as follow:

1. To promote the growth of our industry and the growth of creative endeavours;

2. To ensure a professional standard of workplace environment for all development.

3. To publicly establish and communicate our standards as media professionals.

Their code of ethics is divided into three parts: principles, workplace, and leadership. Principles refers to the ideals that every member should follow, workplace refers to their rights to have better facilitations to ensure professional delivery and creativity. Last but not least, leadership, which refers to the standards for the management and leadership of development studios. The general idea of this code of ethics is to uphold the game developers on their accountability towards the game development in various areas that the code of ethics already mentioned.

The principles section in this code of ethics focused on the idea of how game developers should behave and what principles they should adhere to. Respecting human rights, protecting intellectual properties, knowledge sharing, accountability, and striving for the recognition of the professions are the main ideas of this section of this code of ethics. Workplace element in code of ethics aimed at the environments of the workplace that are considered as ideals, such as no discrimination towards races, religions and origins, no harassment in terms of verbal and sexual, and to prioritise safety for all developers. Last but not least, the element of leadership in the code of ethics is focused on the role of leaders in the

game development team, including but not limited to, welfare of the workers, obeying contracts and allowing knowledge transfer among developers for better products and experience.

The values of the code of ethics in game development such as accountability, trustworthy, respect, good leadership and competence are crucial as those values reflect the quality of work which is affected by how those values are connected to each other. For instance, good leadership in the workplace seeded respect from the developers, thus increasing their competency in developing a quality game.

Human development will be better if the guideline of the development follows those values in code of ethics of game developers. In fact, the common theme of all codes of ethics are about the value of trust towards each other. The value of Islam in terms of sahsiah or personality among Muslims are found in this code of ethics. To summarise, the values embodied in this code of ethics related to the ideal guideline of human development according to Islam which are included, but not limited to, uplifting human rights, protecting people from harassment, developing good leadership, and taking care of workers' welfare.

3. THE EFFECT OF IGNORING ETHIC IN VIDEO GAME DEVELOPMENT

In Islam, video game and other form of entertainment is considered permissible unless it has forbidden thing was included in the game or entertainment , such as the hadith narrated by Hanzalah RA, the words of the Prophet SAW:

يَا حَنْظَلَهُ سَاعَةً وَسَاعَةً وَلَوْ كَانَتْ تَكُونُ قُلُوبُكُمْ كَمَا تَكُونُ عِنْدَ الذِّكْر لَصَافَحَتْكُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ حَتَّى تُسَلِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الطُّرُقِ

The meaning: "O Hanzalah! There is a time for worldly affairs, there is a time for worship. And if your heart is always the same as when you are remembering Allah SWT, the angels will greet you and greet you in the middle of the road." Sahih Muslim (2750)

يَا حَنْظَلَهُ سَاعَةً وَسَاعَةً وَلَوْ كَانَتْ تَكُونُ قُلُوبُكُمْ كَمَا تَكُونُ عِنْدَ الذِّكْر لَصَافَحَتْكُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ حَتَّى تُسَلِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الطُّرُقِ

Imam Nawawi when interpreted this hadith also transmitted in Sahih Muslim with a different wording, he made it clear that it is not necessary for us to perform ibadah all the time. That is why when Hanzalah felt worried that he is a hypocrite because he was 'careless' from remembering Allah SWT, the Prophet SAW explained that there is a time set aside for worship, there is also a time that needs to be set aside for worldly life and having fun with the family (Pejabat Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, 2020).

There are many effects when ethics and values are being ignored while developing a video game. One of them is that it could lead its players to be involved in gambling activities. There are many examples of video games that are making the gambling element a vital part of the game. Two of the most popular mobile games in Malaysia, PUBG Mobile and Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, sell their players boxes that contain items that are rare or unavailable in the game store.

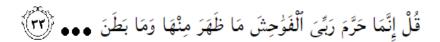Fig. 1. The example of lootbox that are popular in current video game industry

This type of idea (loot box) is forbidden in Islam because it contains the elements of gambling. If luck is on the player's side, then the player will get the item with just one attempt to open the chest. Otherwise, It is possible that players will not get items after dozens of tries, even with thousands of money invested in the game.

Next, pornography also is an issue if the ethics and values are abandoned while making a video game. Since many years ago, many video game developers have been synthesising sexy women in their games. Many of the games can be seen portraying an image of a woman character with "the lesser of the cloth, the stronger the character is".

Fig. 2. Portrayal of woman character in video games with too revealing clothes

All of this are an element of soft pornography and could indirectly be a promotion to the real pornography itself.Allah tell us in Surah Al-'A'raf, verse 33;

$$\text{قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ ٱلْفَوَٰحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ ••• ﴿٣٣﴾}$$

Meaning: "Tell them (O Muhammad): My Lord has forbidden indecent acts, whether overt or hidden?...."

Based on this verse, watching pornography or other indecent acts in privacy at home, through video games or through the internet is forbidden. Apart from that, the pornography is also highly linked to violent ideas and behaviour (Hald, Malamuth and Yuen, 2009). So the developer of video games should think about this and remove the contents that are promoting pornography in their games, as it is not only forbidden but also brings negative effects to the human interaction with others.

Other than that, video games that abandon ethics and islamic value can also cause a person to be involved in things of shirk. There are many examples of video games that have this problem. One of them is PUBG, where the game in 2020 introduced a mod where it allows the player to receive weapons and others by worshipping idols, this feature was criticised by the Muslims and later removed by the game developers (kumparanTech, 2020).

4. ISLAMIC PRINCIPLE AS A GUIDE FOR ETHICAL GAME DEVELOPMENT

Islam is a universal religion, namely a religion whose application is not limited by a particular place and time. It is suitable for all classes of people. The universality of Islam is first seen in the concept of monotheism which forms the cornerstone of its teachings. Thus, it can be used as guidelines in creating a video game which is ethical and could promote the betterment of the ummah. Allah s.w.t said in Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 90:

$$\text{يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِنَّمَا ٱلۡخَمۡرُ وَٱلۡمَيۡسِرُ وَٱلۡأَنصَابُ وَٱلۡأَزۡلَٰمُ رِجۡسٞ مِّنۡ عَمَلِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِ فَٱجۡتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تُفۡلِحُونَ ٩٠}$$

Meaning: "O Believers! Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous sacrifices at altars, and divining arrows are all abominations, the handiwork of Satan. So turn wholly away from it so that you may attain true success."

Hence, as a video game developer, especially for Muslims. They should always avoid including the things that are clearly prohibited by religion as part of a game. There are many ways to make sure the games that are being developed are in line with the interest of religion. Rosidi, Mokhtar & Majid (2022) suggest that maqasid shariah could be a model for the video games developers. Below are the five principle of the maqasid shariah:

1. Protection of the religion (al-din)

2. Protection of the life (al-'nafs)

3. Protection of the intellect (al-'aql)

4. Protection of the lineage (an-nasl)

5. Protection of the property (al-mal/wealth).

Through the maqasid syariah, the video game developer should think about the effects of their video game based on the principle that has been outlined in the maqasid syariah. If the principle of maqasid syariah is being complied by the developer, surely the game that they are developing will promote a better gaming environment to the gaming community.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethics enables us to tell the truth, keep our word, or help those in need. It is an ethical framework that supports our daily lives and helps us make decisions that positively impact us and distract us from unfair consequences. The ignoration of ethics in video games could bring many bad impacts to yourself, your family, and the ummah.

As Muslims, we already have an ethical framework based on the Qur'an and the practices of the prophet, Muhammad S.A.W. It can be applied to everything in our daily lives including in the development of video games, such as in this paper where it can be seen that the principle of maqasid syariah could be used in order to make ethical video games in accordance with Islamic values. Thus, the Muslim developer should follow and maximize this principle in order to make better video games for the ummah.

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