

## Visualization of Muslims in Video Game as a Leading Image of Islam for Society

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**Abstract** - Economically, the global game market generates a profit of around IDR 2.2 trillion in 2020. Half of this revenue comes from the Asia Pacific region. Games can no longer be underestimated as a form of communication technology media that can affect human life. In video games there are messages conveyed to the players, these messages can be ideological, political, economic, social and cultural. One of the messages in the game world that is interesting to study is the image of Muslims in the world of games developed by developers from the West or Europe that display cultural bias, especially since the 9/11 incident in the United States until its development in 2022. This study aims to find a conceptual formulation in the application of imagery of a religion, especially Islam in game media. This research is oriented towards explanations in anticipation of religious phenomena/symptoms in supporting the process of its application in the game world as a technological medium. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research with the method of library data. This research was conducted by examining the visual representation of visual symbols of the Islamic religion in various video games, especially video games developed by western developers, then associating them with the activities in the game. In this study the description uses the facts from the data obtained as they are. The results of this research are expected to show the formulation of the concept in representing Islam in the game world and become the correct reference in its application. The results show that in the early 2000s, information about Muslims was minimal so that Muslim visualizations were often used as antagonistic positions and tended to be people from the Middle East, and over time, up to 20 years later, Muslim positions could be positioned better. The conclusion is that Islam is a religion for all races, therefore it is not correct to describe Islam only to one race. Hijab is the most appropriate way to visually represent Muslim women in games, or keffiyeh / shemagh even though it is a cultural artefact from the Arabs, but its existence has also spread to other Islamic countries and is firmly entrenched in the minds of the general public as a hallmark of Muslims. so that keffiyeh/shemagh can become one of Islamic identities, even though it is not quite right.

### 1. Introduction

Visualization in the video game is something that can affect the perception of players. Visualization is an important part of not only data analysis but knowledge transfer process [1]. Video games are electronic games that involve interaction with a user interface or input device such as a joystick, controller, keyboard or motion sensing device to generate visual feedback. Referring to [esport.id](#) data, game players in the world number around 3.24 billion players. The global game market generates an economic profit of around IDR 2.2 trillion in 2020. Half of this revenue comes from the Asia Pacific region, including Indonesia. Gaming is a big industry that can be used to convey a message be it ideological, political, economic, social or cultural. Islam as one of the major religions in the world does not escape its representation in the game world. Stereotypes about Islam often appear in various media, not apart from video games. Among the stereotypes of Islam that are seen by western countries include terrorists, jihad extremists, suicide bombings and other negative

things. The representation of Islam in the game world, especially those developed by the West and Europe, often displays a cultural bias. The developer's lack of understanding in Islam makes the representation of Islam often negative. The cultural bias in the representation of Islam in the game world can have a bad impact on the next generations who play games who are also not well educated regarding the religion of Islam, especially after the controversial 9/11 incident in the United States.

The significance of this research related to similar research is as follows; Research conducted by Eskasasnanda entitled "The Causes and Impacts of Playing Online Video Games on Middle-High School Students in Malang, Java Timur" This study revealed that students play online video games due to peer pressure; and online video games are preferred because they are considered more modern, practical, realistic and varied [2]. Another research conducted by Okur & Aygenc entitled "Video Games as a Learning and Teaching Tool for Environmental and Space Design" Stories, architectural and graphical elements used in games make a very important contribution to the success of the game. This significant impact has been confirmed by a survey conducted among a number of people who actively use video games [3]. Further research from Yilmaz et al entitled "The Impact of Heavy (Excessive) Student Video Games on Peers and Teachers in the School Environment: A Qualitative Study" The findings show heavy gamers display problematic behaviors including communication and behavior problems in the school environment. The results of the study also show that students who play heavy games prefer to stay at home and play video games rather than attend school activities [4]. Baros' next one is titled "Fantasy Video Games and Archetypal Criticism" Many games depend as much on story as game mechanics; participate and draw from the same narrative history as the novel. [5].

According to Stuart Hall [6] representation is a production of the concept of meaning in the mind through language. It is the relationship between concepts and language that describes real objects, people, or even events into fictional objects, people, or events. Representation means using language to say something meaningful, or describe the world meaningfully to others. Meaning is constructed by a representational system and its meaning is produced through a language system whose phenomena do not only occur through verbal expressions, but also visually. This study aims to find a conceptual formulation in the application of imagery of a religion, especially Islam in game media. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research with the method of library data. This research was conducted by examining the visual representation of visual symbols of the Islamic religion in various video games, especially video games developed by western developers, then associating them with the activities in the game. In this study the description uses the facts from the data obtained as they are.

## **2. Method**

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research with the method of library data. This research was conducted by examining the visual representations that show Islamic identity from various games released by Western developers from the events of 9/11 to 2022. Games are limited to games that display Islamic identity and are released by major developers other than Indie. From the Islamic identity that appears in the game then associating it with writings related to this theme. In this study the description uses the facts from the data obtained as they are. Qualitative research collects data qualitatively, and the method of analysis is primarily qualitative. This often involves exploring inductive data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or concepts and then describing and interpreting those categories. [7]. According to George, literature methods research "involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinions on research questions; a necessary component of any other research method at some point" [8]. In using descriptive qualitative research using the literary method, data is searched by looking at various literary data related to the object under study and interpreting the findings from the data with the object under study.

The research question is how is the visual representation that shows Islamic identity from various games released by Western developers from the events of 9/11 to 2022? Are there conflicting values in Islamic teachings in general regarding the depiction of Islam in the game world? The steps for collecting data to answer the questions are explained as follows: 1. Read and understand video games that show Islamic identity in them. 2. Selecting data related to cohesive devices used in video games such as ornaments, objects, characters and so on 3. Selecting data related to research objectives. Literature study is used in research to obtain data related to research, both books and previous research literature. Literature studies related to the study of games are used as theoretical references. Libraries are used as a basis in providing an overview of research data. The libraries used are in the form of books, journals, research and sources from the internet related to the object of study.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Referring to the search results, several video games were obtained that feature characters that display Islamic nuances. Referring to the sequence of years after the 9/11 incident, there are video games that display Islamic nuances in video games.

1. *Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare* (2007) by Infinity Ward (Activision)  
*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* is a 2007 first-person shooter video game developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision. Infinity Ward, Inc. is an American video game developer. Activision Publishing, Inc. is an American video game publisher based in Santa Monica, California. Activision is one of the largest third-party video game publishers in the world and was the top United States publisher in 2016. In figure 1 there is a prayer mat hanging on the car seat. Through this visual framing occurs that the vehicle user is possibly Muslim. The prayer mat has been used for centuries by millions of Muslims [9]. There are prayer mat for individual prayers, and there are prayer mat for congregations. This appearance is accompanied by a character that is shown with an Arabic face with a violent expression and carrying a firearm. Another character appears to be wearing a balaclava mask so that he looks mysterious and closed. Not all Arabs are Muslims, but Muslims are the majority of the population there. The Arabian Peninsula, however, is better known as the birthplace of Islam. Today, the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants are Muslim. Nevertheless, tiny communities of Christians survived the rise and dominance of Islam and continued to practice their faith, notably in Bahrain and Kuwait. [10].



**Figure 1.** Capture of Antagonist Character with Prayer Mat in COD 4 Modern Warfare Games

In Figure 2, a character 'Khaled Al-Asad' who looks vicious using a keffiyeh / shemagh is shown. The shemagh is the Scarf which is worn by Arabic as well as other Muslim people who belong to other countries in terms of identity. It has multiple symbolic features which

denote the religious as well as socio-political representation. In the broader spectrum, it illustrates the attributes of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Muslim world [11]. Basically, the keffiyah / shemagh is not part of Islamic teachings, but because the majority of Muslims in Arabia have a culture of using it as a cultural artifact, people often equate keffiyeh / shemagh as an Islamic identity. Referring to figure 2 above, there is a herding of thoughts that Muslims are ruthless enemies and there is no nuance of friendliness, even though in this case there appears to be an Arab limitation as a Muslim.



**Figure 2.** Capture of Antagonist Character ‘Khaled Al-Asad’ with Keffiyeh / Shemagh in COD 4 Modern Warfare Games

2. Assassin Creed (2007) by Ubisoft Montreal

Assassin's Creed is a 2007 sandbox style action-adventure-stealth video game developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft. Ubisoft Divertisements Inc. referred to by business as Ubisoft Montreal (formerly Ubi Soft Montreal), is a Canadian subsidiary of French video game development company Ubisoft, located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. In figure 3 there is the majority of Assassins at Masyaf were, at least, that was the main Assassin's stronghold in the 12th Century. Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad himself belonged to a sect of Islam called Nizari Ismailism. In this game, the main character Altair is a Muslim with a calm appearance wearing armor which was quite common at that time. Using a veil that looks faint with other people.



**Figure 3.** Capture of Protagonist Character ‘Altaïr Ibn Al-La’ahad’ in Assassin Creed

In this game, Islamic figures are presented from various perspectives, both those who look devout to religion and vice versa. In figure 4, there is a Non Playable Character (NPC) which in that century mixed in between Muslims and others in Syria. For the appearance of Muslims themselves, they are often shown in shades of poor and slum. From this visual, there is a framing where Muslims are people who appear uneducated, unhealthy and poor.



**Figure 4.** Capture of Non Playable Character (NPC) in Assassin Creed

3. Uncharted 3 : Drake's Deception (2011) by Naughty Dog & Sony Computer Entertainment

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception is a 2011 action-adventure game developed by Naughty Dog and published by Sony Computer Entertainment. Naughty Dog, LLC (formerly JAM Software, Inc.) is an American first-party video game developer based in Santa Monica, California. Sony Interactive Entertainment (SIE), formerly known as Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE), is a multinational video game and digital entertainment company owned by multinational conglomerate Sony. Figure 5 shows the figure of Salim, a protagonist who helps the main character. Salim is the Sheikh of a tribe of Bedouin riders that reside in a camp in the Rub' al Khali desert that is less than a day's ride on horseback away from the mythical lost city Iram of the Pillars. Salim is knowledgeable on Iram and a skilled horseman, as it traditional with Bedouin riders. Salim is also bilingual, as he speaks both Arabic and English. The Bedouin engage in interaction with the sedentary people, their own dynamics prove persistent and irreducible in themselves. [12]. Islam in this video game is also shown as a tribal person, difficult to adapt to the outside world and tends to appear as a fighter. The Bedouin are nomadic Arab tribes who have historically inhabited the desert regions in the Arabian Peninsula

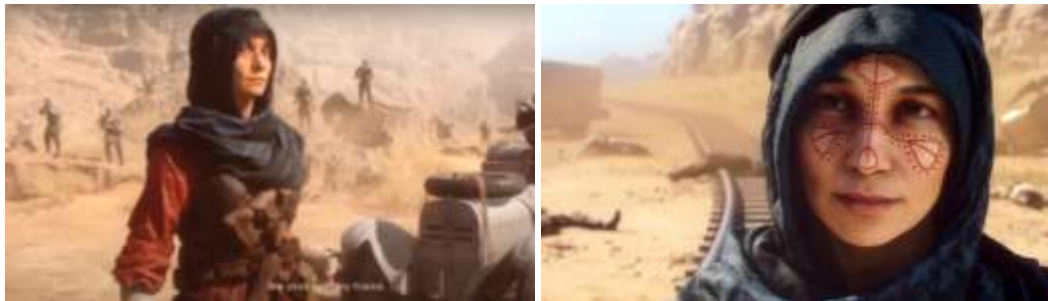


**Figure 5.** Capture of Protagonist Character 'Salim' in Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

4. Battlefield 1 (2016) by Dice & Electronic Arts.

Battlefield 1 is a first-person shooter game developed by DICE and published by Electronic Arts. It is the tenth installment in the *Battlefield* series. EA Digital Illusions CE AB (trade name: DICE) is a Swedish video game developer based in Stockholm. Electronic Arts Inc. (EA) is an American video game company headquartered in Redwood City, California. In figure 6, the character Zara Ghufon is a Muslim character who appears wearing a hijab and comes from the Bedouins. In presenting Muslim women, western developers have started to present better studies where Muslim women in Arab appearances wear the hijab. Hijab significantly addresses one of the religious identities for

Muslim women either those who are born Muslim or new Muslim. The new Muslim women adopt new style of identity markers by changing new lifestyle through wearing hijab. It is also a form of new bodily practices and new forms of behaviour that the new Muslim expresses herself as an observant and practicing Muslim [13].



**Figure 6.** Screenshot of Protagonist Character ‘Zara Ghufron’ in Battlefield 1

Tattoo art is an ancient one and originates from the pre-Islamic era. The art underwent a major decline from the 1930s onwards, and today it is rare to see the conspicuous face of a tattooed Bedouin woman in Jordan and the Middle East. Tattoos have traditionally symbolized protection in battle and war, as well as from spirits and the evil eye. Many great and distinguished poets of the pre-Islamic era used tattoo imagery in their poetry as a powerful symbol of beauty. Often referred to as the 'jewel of the poor', tattoos were used to decorate the body and face, acting as a more financially affordable alternative to gold and silver. The influence of Islam on the art of tattooing is strong, and Bedouin Muslim women often tattoo themselves with crescents and stars and other geometric designs that feature prominently in Islamic art. Tattoos are also popular and significant as a symbol of belonging to a particular tribe [14].

5. Assassin’s Creed Origins (2017) by Ubisoft Montreal

Assassin's Creed Origins is a 2017 action role-playing video game developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft. Ubisoft Divertisements Inc. referred to by business as Ubisoft Montreal (formerly Ubi Soft Montreal), is a Canadian subsidiary of French video game development company Ubisoft, located in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. In figure 7, the protagonist Layla Hassan can be seen. Layla Hasan is shown as an Arab woman wearing a keffiyeh / shemagh. In this look, Layla is shown not wearing a hijab and is a reflection of a liberal muslim woman. Layla is a feminine Arabic name meaning 'night', while Hassan is a common Arabic surname meaning 'strong, good'. Layla's father, Ashraf Hassan, shares his birth name with Ashraf Ismail, the game director of Origins.



**Figure 7.** Screenshot of Protagonist Character ‘Layla Hassan’ in Assassin’s Creed Origins

6. Call of Duty Modern Warfare (2019) by Infinity Ward & Activision  
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare is a 2019 first-person shooter game developed by Infinity Ward and published by Activision. Infinity Ward, Inc. is an American video game developer. Activision Publishing, Inc. is an American video game publisher based in Santa Monica, California. In figure 8. Farrah's character in COD Modern Warfare with an arab face is a fighter who appears strong and tough behind her female face. Farrah uses the hijab in her own style as a picture of a Muslim woman who practices Islamic teachings. Farrah is shown as a warrior complete with armor and weapons. In this appearance, Muslim women are shown forced to become fighters because of the conditions in the game world. Farrah's identity as a Muslim is also maintained by game developers.



**Figure 8.** Screenshot of Protagonist Character 'Farrah Ahmed Karim' in COD Modern Warfare

#### 4. Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that in today's game world, Islam is often displayed in the form of Arab faces. The identity of the hijab is sometimes raised, sometimes not, and represents devout or more liberal people. Keffiyeh / shemagh is an Arabic tradition that is often used as a religious identity in video games. Islam is also often shown to be harsh, unfriendly and an antagonist in video games from the 9/11 case, this is possible because of misinformation about Islam. Changes began to be felt in the following years. Characters that have Islamic overtones begin to become the main character and appear in various ways, either as protagonists or antagonists. From the depiction of Islam in the game world, it seems that only one race (Arab) cannot be represented. Islam is a religion for all races, therefore, it is not appropriate to describe Islam only in one race. Hijab is the most appropriate way to visually display Muslim women in games, or keffiyeh / shemagh even though it is a cultural artefact from Arabia, but its existence has also spread to other Islamic countries and is firmly in the minds of the general public as a characteristic of Muslims, so that keffiyeh / shemagh can be one of one Islamic identity, even if it is not quite right.

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