



Problems of Muslim Society in Southeast Asia: A Study of the Impact of Online Games from an Islamic Law Perspective

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Abstract: One of the problems of Islamic law in Southeast Asia and even the world today is the emergence of online games in Muslim society. Therefore, concerns have arisen about the game, how it impacts Muslim society, whether it is in accordance with Islamic law or not. This study aims to examine the impact of online games on Muslim society and how Islamic law views it. This qualitative study applies content analysis related to Islamic legal analysis. Reference terms have been compiled as a guideline, taken from the main opinions of three schools of thought, namely *al-Syafi'iyah*, *al-Malikiyyah*, and *al-Hanabilah* according to their main references. Interviews with sharia experts provide information on the assessment of this third item. Finally, Islamic legal analysis determines the decision on these items related to justice according to the opinions of the previously mentioned schools of thought with their reference terms. This study reveals that the mystery box and unlimited purchase features in dare and esports games are compared to the requirements of justice according to sharia. Online games are not only contrary to Islamic law because they contain elements of gambling, fraud and speculation. Online games can also have negative impacts on the perpetrators such as psychological, health, economic, social and mental disorders, so that the perpetrators can behave abnormally both physically and psychologically. In addition, it also goes against Malay cultural values that uphold strong Islamic teachings in society. This study also recommends that the government strictly control and grant permits to institutions that create online games that are more educational and beneficial for people in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Indonesia.

Keywords: Online games, muslim society, fairness, impact, Southeast Asia, Islamic Law

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Abstrak: Salah satu problematika hukum Islam di Asia Tenggara bahkan dunia saat ini adalah muncul permainan game online pada masyarakat muslim. Karena itu, timbul kekhawatiran terhadap permainan tersebut, bagaimana dampaknya bagi masyarakat muslim, apakah sesuai dengan hukum Islam atau tidak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana dampak game online terhadap masyarakat Muslim dan bagaimana pandangan hukum Islam. Studi kualitatif ini menerapkan analisis konten yang berkaitan dengan analisis hukum Islam. Istilah rujukan telah disusun sebagai panduan, diambil dari pendapat utama tiga mazhab yaitu al-Shafi'iyah, al-Malikiyyah, dan al-Hanabilah sesuai dengan referensi utama mereka. Wawancara dengan para ahli syariah memberikan informasi tentang penilaian ketiga item ini. Akhirnya, analisis hukum Islam menentukan keputusan mengenai item-item ini terkait dengan keadilan menurut pendapat mazhab yang disebutkan sebelumnya dengan istilah rujukannya. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa fitur kotak misteri dan pembelian tanpa batas dalam permainan daring dan esports bertentangan dengan persyaratan keadilan menurut syariah. Game online selain bertentangan dengan syariat Islam karena mengandung unsur perjudian, penipuan dan spekulasi. Game online juga dapat memberikan dampak negatif bagi pelakunya seperti gangguan psikologis, kesehatan, ekonomi, sosial dan mental, sehingga pelakunya dapat berperilaku tidak normal baik secara fisik maupun psikis. Selain itu, hal ini juga bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai budaya Melayu yang menjunjung tinggi ajaran Islam yang kuat dalam masyarakat. Kajian ini juga menyarankan agar pemerintah secara ketat mengontrol dan dalam memberikan izin kepada lembaga yang membuat game online yang lebih edukatif dan bermanfaat bagi masyarakat di Asia Tenggara khususnya Malaysia dan Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Game online, masyarakat muslim, keadilan, dampak, Asia Tenggara, Hukum Islam

Introduction

Muslim communities in Southeast Asia have characteristics that are identical to Islam in law, social, culture, customs and political systems. Islamic teachings were practiced well long before European nations came to colonize and bring new values that were different from before. Muslim communities in Southeast Asia are often called "nations of the same race" (*negeri surumpun*) namely the Malay identity as a cultural, religious and territorial characteristic that binds the regions of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Southern Thailand and the Southern Philippines.¹

¹James T Collins, "Malay Identity in Southeast Asia: Understanding the Cultural and Linguistic Phenomena," *Journal of Computational and Theoretical Nanoscience* 23, No. 10 (2017), p. 9932-9934. Takeshi Kohno, "Political Background of Islamic Educational Institutions and the Reach of the Stage in Southeast Asia," *Studia Islamika* 16, No. 2 (2009).

Islam has played a significant role in shaping civilization in Southeast Asia, particularly in terms of its historical and social influence. Since its arrival through trade routes and cultural exchange, Islam has been an integral part of the region's identity. Islam has not only influenced social and cultural values, but has also played a significant role in shaping political identities and fostering relationships among communities. The influence of Islam in Southeast Asia continues to this day, nourishing social structures and strengthening cross-cultural ties. Hence, there is a very strong Malay identity, namely, Islam, the Malay ethnic group, and the Malay language will serve as a framework for exploring contemporary Southeast Asia.²

Along with the development of the times, post-colonialism each country has various domestic problems ranging from political relations with law, customs and society including the problem of uncontrolled progress of communication media. one of the problems that emerged in Southeast Asian society, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, is the rise of online games. Online game transactions play a significant role in the esports industry. Esports refer to activity of playing computer games against other people on the internet, often for money, and often watched by other people using the internet, sometimes at special organised events.³

These online games serve not only as competitive activities but also as a source of income for various stakeholders. A report from New Straits Times on August 26, 2018, highlighted that a Malaysian player secured second place at an international tournament, earning RM16.8 million during The International 8 Dota 2 competition.⁴ Online games have the potential to generate substantial income, reaching millions, for multiple stakeholders involved in the gaming ecosystem. This demonstrates that gaming can serve as a viable source of revenue for developers, publishers, platforms, and even players who engage in professional or semi-professional gaming activities. The significant financial opportunities presented by the online gaming industry highlight its potential as a lucrative and growing sector for various parties to participate in and benefit from.

The rise in the organisation of electronic sports has given birth to a new economy centred on buying and selling in the virtual realm.⁵ Microtransactions

²Muhibuddin Usman, "The Role of Islam in the Formation of Civilization in Southeast Asia: History and Social Influence," *Jurnal Al-Fikrah* 13, No. 2 (2024), p. 164-173. Muhamad Ali and Robert Day McAmis, "Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, No. 4 (2003).

³Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/e-sports> (2024).

⁴NST Online, "Malaysian Gamer Wins RM16.8mil in The International 8", *New Straits Times*. (26th August 2018).

⁵Chua. D. Kainama. et. al., "Consumer Preference in Paid Game Microtransaction", *Journal of Research in Marketing* 10, No. 3 (2019).

refer to the buying and selling of items or features within virtual online games.⁶ The process of buying and selling within the framework of microtransactions entails a specific amount that both parties have mutually agreed upon in an online game. Microtransactions positively contribute to overall revenue growth, particularly through the hosting of annual esports tournaments. According to Statista, a leading source for electronic sports statistics, this revenue increase in the Esports market worldwide is projected to reach US\$4.8bn in 2025.⁷ This significant growth serves as evidence of the rise of microtransactions.

Moreover, esports are recognised for their diverse range of participants. All players can engage in these internet-based games simultaneously. This genre is referred to as massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), which feature a substantial market for buying and selling transactions through microtransactions. The marketplace offers virtual items and utilises various payment methods, including virtual currency, total game points, or tokens.⁸ Participants can use their accumulated points to purchase specific items available for sale on the official website, including those offered on the Steam platform.⁹

Beyond its impact on the economy, the transaction also fostered a collaborative network among participants from different nations. Strong relationships among these participants generate a social influence that cultivates positive attitudes. This collaboration has facilitated the global adoption of microtransaction concepts.¹⁰ It also influences the positive growth in proficiency of the second language, serving as an intermediate tool for engaging in competitions, particularly on the international stage.¹¹

Fairness, from the viewpoint of Islamic law, is not merely positive justice shaped by human ideas reflecting individual and collective interests. Rather, it is a form of revelational justice originating from God. Although fairness is rooted in divine guidance found in the Quran and Hadith, the two primary sources of Islamic teachings, it is universally applicable to all humanity.¹² Fairness in online

⁶ Paulo Rita, et.al., "The Role of Microtransactions in Impulse Buying and Purchase Intention in The Video Game Market", *Entertainment Computing*, Volume 50 (2024).

⁷ Statista, Esports – Worldwide, accessed on 25 April (2025),

⁸ Erin Gibson, et.al., "The Relationship Between Videogame Micro-Transactions and Problem Gaming and Gambling: A Systematic Review", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 131 (2022).

⁹ A. Zanescu, et.al., "Speculating on Steam: Consumption in the Gamblified Platform Ecosystem", *Journal of Consumer Culture* 21, No. 1 (2021) 34-51.

¹⁰ Paulo Rita, et.al., "The Role of Microtransactions in Impulse Buying and Purchase Intention in The Video Game Market", *Entertainment Computing*, Volume 50 (2024).

¹¹ B. Klimova and J. Kacet., "Efficiency of Computer Games on Language Learning", *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology* 6, No. 4 (2017).

¹² Koko Komaruddin, "Fairness in the Distribution of Land Ownership in Indonesia Based on Islamic Law Perspective", *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 20, No. 2 (2020), p. 211-234.

games and esports is essential to ensure that players involved receive equal rights and opportunities to win certain games, especially with the involvement of huge number of rewards or prizes. Since games with prizes are considered contractual in sharia, there are terms and conditions which are expected to be fulfilled to be sharia compliant. Online games and esports normally provide pay-to-win and loot box features in their *modus operandi*. The ability to purchase loot boxes and other digital items related to online games depends greatly on the amount of money that players have in their possession at the time of playing games. If there is no restriction in terms of money spending in purchasing digital items, no guarantee that fairness is observed in a particular online game. Consequently, the game is susceptible to non-sharia compliance element since the subject of fairness is questionable that might affect contractual element according to sharia.

Therefore, this study aims to examine sharia ruling on fairness in online games and esports. This qualitative study applies content analysis that relates to normative Islamic legal analysis. Terms of reference have been set up as guidance, extracted from main opinion of three *madhhab* (Islamic law school of thoughts), namely al-Shafi'iyyah, al-Malikiyyah and al-Hanabilah according to their primary references. The *modus operandi* of online game and esports are identified and focused on microtransactions, gacha system and loot boxes. Interviews with sharia experts provide information on the ruling of these three items. Ultimately, Islamic legal analysis confirms rulings on these items related to fairness according to opinion of the aforementioned *madhhab* with their terms of reference.

Fairness in Online Gaming in Southeast Asia

Sharia issues in online games and esports are being re-examined and explored in the academic world, especially in Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. According to Liu, the video game industry has seen significant growth in recent years, largely due to the adoption of the loot box microtransaction model, which has attracted a growing consumer base willing to spend more on gaming. However, this model has sparked widespread debate over its implications, particularly regarding its potential to exploit vulnerable youth who may exhibit gambling-like behaviors. As discussions about loot boxes continue to evolve alongside technological advancements, the United States faces the challenge of balancing free market principles with the need for protective regulations, following the lead of other countries. To effectively address the concerns surrounding loot boxes, it is likely that no single reform will suffice. A combination of changes may be necessary to ensure that young gamers can enjoy video games while allowing the industry to thrive. The responsibility now lies with industry leaders, parents, and lawmakers to collaborate and establish

appropriate measures aimed at safeguarding vulnerable youth.¹³ However, no linkage between loot box and fairness in his study.

Febriandika, Majid and Kumar have reviewed Islamic law on microtransaction contracts in the gacha system. It is a type of microtransaction where players randomly select items within a game. To participate in gacha transactions, players typically use real money or in-game currency. The rarity of items obtained through gacha can vary significantly; as items become rarer, the cost to obtain them tends to increase. Additionally, gacha transactions may involve elements of *maysir* (gambling), *taghrir* (deception), and *tadlis* (fraud). The speculative nature and uncertainty (*gharar*) make them forbidden under Islamic law.¹⁴ Engaging with the gacha system without spending real money does not incorporate these elements. In contrast, players who make microtransactions to directly purchase in-game items, bypassing the gacha mechanism, are participating in an *ijarah* agreement. Furthermore, players can earn rewards, such as specific items, because of grinding or playing the game consistently, often provided as gifts from the game developers.¹⁵ However, this study does not touch on the issue of fairness that materialises from the issue of gacha system.

In the opinion of Mutmainna Putri et. al., there is currently no specific regulation in Indonesia that addresses microtransaction of gacha systems. This is primarily because Indonesian laws do not classify these microtransactions as gambling, meaning they cannot be criminally prosecuted under the principle of legality. However, from the perspective of Islamic criminal law, microtransaction gacha is viewed as *maysir*, which is a form of gambling, thus categorising it as *jarimah ta'zir* (punishable crime). This creates a notable gap in Indonesia's existing criminal law framework. Consequently, establishing a legal framework to regulate gacha systems is essential to mitigate the potential negative impacts associated with microtransaction through gacha.¹⁶ Nonetheless, this study has no connection with fairness in online game.

Ibrahim Nur, et. al., explain that online gambling in Indonesia contributes to poverty among the community by making individuals involved financially unstable. Online gambling in Indonesia's cyberspace implies that digital sovereignty is very fragile and vulnerable to domination by cyber actors who violate Indonesian law. The Indonesian legal framework gives the government

¹³Kevin Liu, "A Global Analysis into Loot Boxes: Is It "Virtually" Gambling?", *Washington International Law Journal* 28, no. 3 (2019).

¹⁴Asep Syarifuddin Hidayat, "Sharia and State's Intervention: Uncertainty Cryptocurrency in Indonesia", *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, No. 1 (2023), p. 213-234.

¹⁵Majid Febriandika and Kumar, "Review of Islamic Law on Microtransaction Contracts in the Gacha System," *Borobudur Law Review* 4, No. 2 (2022), p. 86-98.

¹⁶Mutmainna Putri, et.al., "Critical Review of the Legal Regulation of Microtransaction Gacha: A Comparative Study of Islamic Criminal Law and National Criminal Law", *Al Risalah: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah dan Hukum* 23, No. 2 (2023).

clear authority to eradicate online gambling. The legal framework supporting the eradication of online gambling in Indonesia is rooted in various laws and regulations that prohibit gambling and impose restrictions on online activities. Content moderation instruments that have been generally regulated in Indonesian law need to be strengthened to eradicate online gambling from the upstream. Moderation can also be carried out using various techniques, ranging from blocking, reducing visibility, removing content from lists, and ranking content. This is done to ensure the eradication of online gambling specifically and cybersecurity in general.¹⁷

As stated by Abdullah et. al., who have studied income generation through esports activities according to Islamic law perspective, esports activities represent a contemporary reality that has gained popularity among today's society. Its development has progressed through a long timeline, rapidly evolving to become a significant source of income in the digital era. A career as an esports player is categorised under *al-mal al-mustafad*, which refers to professional occupations that generate income not through investments or existing assets but through permissible means such as prizes, inheritance, bequests, bonuses, and wages. However, there are essential principles and guidelines that must be adhered to when engaging in the e-sports industry. These include avoiding activities that associate partners with Allah SWT, fulfilling daily obligations as a Muslim, and steering clear of actions that lead to immoral behavior, gambling, irrationality, and violence or oppression. If these guidelines are met, then earning income through e-sports activities is permissible according to Islamic law.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the issue of fairness is not highlighted in this study.

Yusoff and Abd Razak have stated that the characteristics associated with purchasing loot boxes closely resemble those found in gambling games, where chance is the primary factor influencing the purchase. Such transactions yield random outcomes that remain unknown to the buyer. Consequently, this study was conducted to evaluate the necessity of acquiring loot boxes in online gaming. The findings indicate that loot boxes do not adhere to the essential principles and conditions outlined in sales contracts according to sharia law. This non-compliance arises from the fact that the uncertain results of loot box purchases contradict the requirements for subject matter established in Islamic commercial law (*muamalat*). It is mandatory to ensure the absence of *gharar* (uncertainty), *maysir* (gambling), *riba* (interest), *zalim* (injustice), and any other prohibited

¹⁷ Asrul Ibrahim Nur, et.al., "Eradicating Online Gambling in Indonesia: Reinforcing the Role of Digital Sovereignty and Content Moderation in Cyberspace," Conference: Proceeding APHTN-HANAt: Novotel Balikpapan, Indonesia, 6-8 Desember 2024.

¹⁸ Mohd Yusra Abdullah, et.al., "Income Generation through E-Sport Activities According to Islamic Law Perspective", *Al-Qanatir: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, No. 2 (2022).

elements according to Islamic law.¹⁹ Islamic economics generally prohibits business transactions that involve elements of uncertainty.²⁰ It also prohibits unethical practices such as speculation, hoarding, manipulating offers or requests, deception (*tadlis*), selling nonexistent goods (*bai' al-ma'dum*), fraudulent weighing, and the reckless exploitation of resources.²¹ This is to ensure fairness for all parties involved.²² As a result, this study concludes that purchasing loot boxes is impermissible and invalid due to its gambling elements and failure to meet the foundational criteria of a sales contract.

Ultimately, these findings aim to serve as a guideline for players in online games and esports who wish to adhere to sharia principles, particularly for Muslims in Southeast Asia. It is advisable to avoid any elements that do not comply with sharia to maintain adherence to these standards.²³ The issue of loot boxes and gacha have the same problem in sharia. Both produce fairness issue since players who executes more transactions and spends more money has more chances to win the game. Recent findings indicate that although awareness of the importance of ethical conduct, rooted in the principles of *al-'adl* (justice) and *al-maslahah* (public welfare), is on the rise, translating these ideals into everyday practice often proves challenging. At the same time, consumers are showing a greater preference for transparency and fairness, demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical values.²⁴ Therefore, the issue needs to be analysed further,

Another study by Abd Razak and Yusoff relates to microtransaction in online games, which have a vast market in trading transactions. This occurs when an item in the game is sold to participants, allowing them to gain benefits from it. These various benefits have classified game items into two types: consumable and unconsumable. Consumable items are known as items that do not have lasting durability, while unconsumable items possess lasting durability. Online gaming transactions not only help players enhance their gaming levels but also fall under the category of microtransactions that generate substantial income for game

¹⁹ Dedisyah Putra, et.al., "Islamic Legal Analysis of Bank Interest Allocation on Social Fund: A Case Study of Small Credit Bank (BPR) NBP 21 Panyabungan City", *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 23, No. 2 (2023), p. 240-257.

²⁰ Desi Norma Siamtina, et.al., "The Legal System of the All-You-Can-Eat Ticket System at Tlogo Argo-Tourism, Indonesia: A Maslahah Al-Mursalah Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Law* 4 (1), (2023) p. 88-103.

²¹ Irena Dwi Fetraningtyas and Yunanto, "Application of the Properties of Naqli and Aqli in Positive Law with Respect to Islamic Contract Law", *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 21, No.1, (2021), p. 59-69.

²² Tifani Rini, et.al., "Maintaining Legal Certainty in Indonesia: The Role of Legal Instruments in Protecting Auction Buyer", *Al-Ahkam* 34, No. 2 (2022), p. 393-418.

²³ Amir Yusoff and Iffah Abd Razak, "Sharia Issues on Loot Boxes in Online Games and Esport," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, No. 1 (2023).

²⁴ Chuzaimah Batubara, et. al., "Realizing Justice and Maṣlaḥah in E-Commerce: Fiqh Muamalah Insights and Challenges in Malaysia and Indonesia", *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, No. 2 (2024), p. 253-267.

developers. These buying and selling transactions yield significant profits, according to statistics reported in previous studies. They also offer various payment methods to facilitate players in accessing and purchasing the items available for sale. Additionally, there are online competitions that lead to an increase in microtransactions. This study focuses on the permissibility of microtransaction laws regarding online gaming items according to Islam. Based on the researcher's analysis, gaming items are categorised as property in Islam because they possess beneficial characteristics, as outlined by earlier scholars in the classification of goods as property. This further strengthens the researcher's opinion that the law regarding the buying and selling of online gaming items is permissible, as they are not only considered property in Islam but also meet the conditions and requirements of a valid sale. Moreover, these transactions have fulfilled all conditions of buying and selling, particularly the condition regarding the items being sold (*ma'qud 'alayh*) as stated by earlier scholars.²⁵ Even though the microtransactions are permissible, the implication of unlimited transactions has not been the focus throughout the study.

As a conclusion, several researchers have covered essential parts of sharia issues in online games and esports concerning gacha system, loot boxes and microtransactions. These are not the only sharia issues occur. This paper will analyse further the issue of fairness that emerges from the issue of gacha, loot boxes and microtransactions.

Pay-to-win Online Games

In many online games, players are often offered a free loot box at the beginning of the game. This is a strategy used by game developers to encourage players to purchase additional loot boxes as they progress through the game. Loot boxes typically contain random virtual items, such as weapons, characters, or power-ups, which can provide an advantage to the player. When the advantage gained from purchasing loot boxes becomes a dominant factor in a player's ability to progress in the game, it is known as a "pay-to-win" (P2W) mechanic. In P2W games, players who are willing to spend money on loot boxes or other virtual items have a significant advantage over those who rely solely on their skills and gameplay. A game can be considered a P2W type if the advantage gained from purchasing loot boxes or other virtual items is so significant that it outweighs the overall skills required to play the game. In these games, players may feel compelled to make purchases to remain competitive or to advance to higher levels. Nowadays, loot boxes are often associated with the purchase of P2W type games. Players may not need to purchase virtual items directly, but they could acquire these items by purchasing loot boxes. This can create a sense of

²⁵ Iffah Abd Razak and Amir Yusoff, "Micro Transactions of Online Gaming Items According to Sharia", *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Law* 7, No. 2 (2022), p. 19-27.

uncertainty and excitement for players, as they never know what they might receive from a loot box.²⁶

Loot boxes represent one of the most recent and varied forms of microtransactions in online gaming and esports. Numerous types of loot boxes are available in the market, all operating on a similar transactional principle. This principle involves selling items or goods online to buyers who are unaware of the specific item they will receive. While loot boxes provide advantages to players, they also generate significant profits for online gaming companies. There are approximately 3 billion active players engaging with loot boxes worldwide, with the market reaching \$246 billion in 2022.²⁷

Microtransactions are varied and represent a significant market within online gaming. A key factor driving the statistics for microtransaction sales is the revenue generated from loot boxes. Microtransactions, or in-game purchases, refer to transactions made for buying and selling virtual products while playing a game. Loot box trading is particularly popular, with a significant volume of transactions. While purchasing loot boxes is not required for players, doing so can offer several advantages. These benefits include enhancements in aesthetic appeal, improvements to the player's avatar, and increased chances of progressing to the next level in the game. Additionally, players who buy loot boxes may experience reduced waiting times.²⁸

Enticing and diverse loot box offers encourage players to participate in microtransactions. However, loot boxes often introduce an element of surprise for players. Additionally, the presence of loot boxes can impact players' in-game decisions. While the contents of the loot boxes remain unknown to players, they are often tempted to purchase them when offered for free at the start of the game, which helps to entice continued purchases at later stages. Furthermore, a player's attitude can also affect the types of items they receive.²⁹

Every loot box purchase contains several questionable aspects, including randomness, luck, and fate. Several terms are used to describe loot boxes,

²⁶ Cristina Villalba-García, Mark D. Griffiths, Zsolt Demetrovics, Andrea Czakó, "The Relationship Between Loot Box Buying, Gambling, Internet Gaming, and Mental Health: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Impulsivity, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 166, (2025).

²⁷ González-Cabrera J, Caba-Machado V, Díaz-López A, Jiménez-Murcia S, Mestre-Bach & G, Machimbarrena JM, "The Mediating Role of Problematic Use of Loot Boxes Between Internet Gaming Disorder and Online Gambling Disorder: Cross-Sectional Analytical Study," *JMIR Serious Games* (2024).

²⁸ Interview with Abdul Karim Ali, Syed Shahrizan Syed Mohamed and Mohd Shahir Hashim, Sharia Experts, Malaysia, March 20, 2023.

²⁹ Interview with Abdul Karim Ali, Syed Shahrizan Syed Mohamed and Mohd Shahir Hashim, Sharia Experts, Malaysia, March 20, 2023..

including mystery box, gacha, and surprise.³⁰ A loot box is a digital item acquired via microtransactions.³¹ It involves a degree of luck and uncertainty, as players purchasing a loot box in an online game are unaware of what they will receive. These loot boxes, commonly referred to as in-game purchases, typically range in price from \$0.50 to over \$100.³² The first type of loot box provides players with aesthetic and cosmetic enhancements. These items do not directly impact gameplay but rather serve to customise the player's in-game appearance or accessories. They are purely decorative in nature. The second type of loot box contains items that are essential for the player's progression or performance within the game. These items can grant advantages, unlock new abilities, or provide resources necessary for the player to advance. Unlike cosmetic loot boxes, functional loot boxes have a direct impact on the player's overall experience and success in the game.

Despite the low likelihood of obtaining the desired item from a loot box purchase, previous studies indicate that the volume of loot box transactions remains high. In fact, loot boxes generate an impressive annual revenue of \$30 billion.³³ Such impressive statistics indicate that loot box transactions have emerged as a significant source of revenue, in addition to having a dedicated fan base. This is further supported by a study predicting that the loot box market will reach USD 20 billion by 2025.³⁴

Regardless of the type of loot box, they all rely on a random chance mechanic to determine the contents of each box. Players are often enticed to purchase loot boxes while playing the game, with the promise of rare or powerful items that can enhance their experience. However, the randomness of the loot box system means that players may spend money without ever receiving the desired items, leading to a sense of frustration and disappointment. Loot boxes have become a common feature in many video games, offering players the chance to obtain virtual items and advantages. While cosmetic loot boxes can provide a

³⁰ González-Cabrera J, Caba-Machado V, Díaz-López A, Jiménez-Murcia S, Mestre-Bach & G, Machimbarrena JM, "The Mediating Role of Problematic Use of Loot Boxes Between Internet Gaming Disorder and Online Gambling Disorder: Cross-Sectional Analytical Study," *JMIR Serious Games* (2024).

³¹ Cristina Villalba-García, Mark D. Griffiths, Zsolt Demetrovics, Andrea Czakó, "The Relationship Between Loot Box Buying, Gambling, Internet Gaming, and Mental Health: Investigating the Moderating Effect of Impulsivity, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 166, (2025).

³² Marc von Meduna, Fred Steinmetz, Lennart Ante, Jennifer Reynolds, Ingo Fiedler, "Loot Boxes Are Gambling-Like Elements in Video Games with Harmful Potential: Results from A Large-Scale Population Survey", *Technology in Society* 63, (2020).

³³ David Zendle, et.al., "Adolescents and Loot Boxes: Links with Problem Gambling and Motivations for Purchase," *Royal Society Open Science*, 6 No. 6 (2019).

³⁴ Juniper Research: [\(https://www.juniperresearch.com/press/video-game-loot-boxes-to-generate-over-\\$20-billion\)](https://www.juniperresearch.com/press/video-game-loot-boxes-to-generate-over-$20-billion) (2025).

sense of customization and self-expression, competitive loot boxes can significantly impact the balance and fairness of the game. Ultimately, the random chance mechanic of loot boxes can lead to a sense of frustration and disappointment, particularly for players who spend money without receiving the desired items.³⁵

Some players are offered a free loot box for the first time, which serves as an enticing incentive to encourage them to purchase additional loot boxes in the future. This initial boost is a strategy designed to maintain player interest in acquiring more loot boxes. In certain games, players have the opportunity to redeem their winnings for loot boxes based on the value of their accumulated rewards. This redemption system motivates players to keep playing and progress to the next level. Players can redeem rewards either during gameplay or after a session by visiting the game's dedicated website. This feature is advantageous, as it allows players to utilize their loot boxes in future game sessions, since they can be stored in the player's game account. Furthermore, acquiring a loot box is largely a matter of chance, as buyers often end up with items they do not want. Players frequently receive items that do not provide the benefits they need. For instance, when a player seeks specific items, purchasing a loot box may result in obtaining less useful items instead, ultimately leading to the desired item being unattainable. This creates a disadvantage for the player, as the entire premise of buying a loot box hinges on the player's luck.³⁶

In addition to acquiring loot boxes directly from the game provider, players can also trade them among themselves. This variety in trading methods leads to multiple payment options. Players purchasing loot boxes can choose to pay with virtual currency, depending on the game, or with real money. The preferred payment method often varies based on the specific game being played. Furthermore, payments can also be made using credit or debit cards, as well as through digital payment platforms like PayPal.³⁷

Relation of Pay-to-Win Games with Fairness

The purchase of loot boxes involves a degree of randomness. Players who buy loot boxes are likely to receive a diverse array of items chosen at random. The game developers do not offer a predetermined selection of items for players to obtain. This randomness introduces aspects of uncertainty (*gharar*) and incorporates elements of gambling, which are prohibited in Islam. The

³⁵ Wilson, C., Butler, N., Quigg, Z. *et al.*, "Associations between Loot Box Purchasing and Gambling Behaviours, Financial Problems, and Low Mental Wellbeing in A Household Sample From A British Island, A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Public Health (Berl.)* (2024).

³⁶ Interview with Abdul Karim Ali, Syed Shahrizan Syed Mohamed and Mohd Shahir Hashim, sharia experts, Malaysia, March 20, 2023.

³⁷ Interview with Abdul Karim Ali, Syed Shahrizan Syed Mohamed and Mohd Shahir Hashim, sharia experts, Malaysia, March 20, 2023.

unpredictability of the items acquired makes loot boxes inherently ambiguous. With involvement of gambling-like element, players do not have equal chance to play. A sharia compliant activity should not contain elements of uncertainty and gambling.³⁸ Such uncertainties may cause disputes between the two parties. Islam stresses the importance of clarity in *mu'amalat* (interpersonal dealings), particularly in transactions involving property.³⁹

Zendle and Cairn highlight that gambling involves a concept of chance, where a game is classified as gambling if it presents uncertain opportunities to players. This notion applies to loot boxes, which similarly provide players with unpredictable chances to purchase additional loot boxes. Players are often led to believe they can influence the luck and outcomes of each loot box they buy. The mechanics of loot boxes resemble gambling, as both hinge on the uncertain opportunities presented. Furthermore, acquiring loot boxes can impact a player's game experience negatively, as the items received may not align with their expectations, potentially hindering their success in the game and even causing personal detriment.⁴⁰ A player who has more money tends to buy more loot boxes and may affect fairness of the game.

It is observed that purchasing a loot box shares similarities with gambling activities, such as playing the Lotto. This resemblance is evident in how both systems operate, as they both yield uncertain outcomes based on chance. Additionally, loot boxes can encourage gambling behaviour, particularly since games that incorporate gambling mechanics often require an initial payment before participation. To progress to higher levels in a game, players must buy loot boxes to unlock certain advantages. Players should possess a solid understanding of loot boxes to effectively choose the types they want to buy, ensuring that their purchases are advantageous.⁴¹ This resembles gambling, as games that involve betting necessitate that players possess a solid understanding of the game being played. However, the results of these games remain unpredictable. Evidently, unlimited loot boxes render online games might be unfair to all the players involved in any game or competition.

While no research has specifically classified the purchase of loot boxes as gambling, and no laws have been established regarding their status in relation to gambling, earlier studies have drawn parallels between loot boxes and traditional

³⁸ Rully Syahrul Mucharom, "Otentisitas Asuransi Syariah: Perspektif Hukum Islam dan UU No. 40 Tahun 2014 Tentang Perasuransian", *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata* 12, No. 1 (2017).

³⁹ Amir Fazlim Yusoff, "Reassessment of Islamic Legal Bases for Matrimonial Property in Malaysia", *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, No. 2. (2024), p. 541-556.

⁴⁰ David Zendle and Paul Cairns, "Video Game Loot Boxes Are Linked to Problem Gambling: Results of A Large-Scale Survey", *PLoS ONE* 13, No. 1 (2018): e0206767.

⁴¹ Jeroen S. Lemmens, "Play or Pay to Win: Loot Boxes and Gaming Disorder in FIFA Ultimate Team," *Telematics and Informatics Reports* 8, (2022).

gambling games. These studies indicate that the characteristics associated with loot box purchases bear similarities to those found in other forms of gambling. This study posits that purchasing a loot box constitutes a form of gambling due to the presence of various elements and features that are reminiscent of gambling games. The parallels in both the components and characteristics of gambling reinforce the study's assertion that buying loot boxes is a type of gambling within the realm of online gaming and denies fairness of the game.

Furthermore, loot boxes are classified as a form of gambling because they pose several risks to players, particularly children and teenagers. This can lead to an addiction to purchasing loot boxes despite the unpredictable outcomes. Young people may find themselves in debt and may even resort to dishonest means to obtain money from their parents. This addiction can result in significant drawbacks, including unsustainable debt and a tendency toward wastefulness.

Impact Online Games According to Islamic Law

Muslim jurists have developed terms and conditions for sharia compliant games. According to al-Nawawi from al-Shafi'iyyah, the validity of a game that provides reward to the winner depends on five conditions:⁴² 1) The game is equally known to the players; it is based on the opinion of al-Shafi'i dan his followers; 2) The players have full control as participants; 3) The objective or aim of the game is known to every player; 4) The objective or aim of the game is achievable; 5) The reward is known to all players. Imam al-Nawawi adds other terms and conditions: 1) The beginning and the ending of a game are known to the players; 2) All players are equal in terms of beginning and ending; 3) The equal chances and capability of every player to win.⁴³

Khalil from al-Malikiyyah also agrees that the beginning and ending of a game should be specific, as well as the animal used in a racing, specific archer (player) and quantity of shootings (arrows).⁴⁴ If the animals involve in a game are unequal, it is impermissible. Same goes to the quantity and quality of shootings.⁴⁵ Ibn Qudamah from al-Hanabilah concurs with the opinion of al-Malikiyyah.⁴⁶ These are terms of reference for this study.

There is no sharia issue when players are offered free loot boxes at the beginning of a game. This is a strategy used by game developers to encourage

⁴² Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawi, *al-Majmu' Sharh al-Muhadhdhab*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2000.

⁴³ Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Minhaj al-Talibin*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005.

⁴⁴ Khalil ibn Ishaq al-Maliki al-Misri, *Mukhtasar Khalil*, al-Qahirah: Dar al-Hadith, 2005.

⁴⁵ Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Maliki al-Kharashi, *Sharh Mukhtasar Khalil*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr li al-Tiba'ah, n.d.

⁴⁶ Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah ibn Ahmad al-Maqdisi Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, al-Qahirah: Maktabah al-Qahirah, 1968.

players to purchase additional loot boxes as they progress through the game. However, when the advantage gained from purchasing loot boxes becomes a dominant factor in a player's ability to progress in the game, it is considered a "pay-to-win" (P2W) game. In P2W games, players who are willing to spend money on loot boxes or other virtual items have a significant advantage over those who rely solely on their skills and gameplay. A game can be considered a P2W type if the advantage gained from purchasing loot boxes or other virtual items is so significant that it outweighs the overall skills required to play the game. In these games, players may feel compelled to make purchases to remain competitive or to advance to higher levels.

Nowadays, loot boxes are often associated with the purchase of P2W type games. Players may not need to purchase virtual items directly, but they could acquire these items by purchasing loot boxes. The second type of loot box contains items that are essential for the player's progression or performance within the game. These items can grant advantages, unlock new abilities, or provide resources necessary for the player to advance. Unlike cosmetic loot boxes, functional loot boxes have a direct impact on the player's overall experience and success in the game. The situation affects the fairness of the game since there is no equal chances for every player to win because of variable of loot boxes content, according to rulings of al-Shafi'iyyah, al-Malikiyyah and al-Hanabilah.

In this context, the online game contains elements that are contrary to Islamic law, namely elements of *maysir* (gambling), *taghrir* (fraud), and *tadlis* (fraud) as well as speculative and uncertain nature (*gharar*). Elements such as these are clearly not in accordance with Islamic law values and can damage the social and economic order of society. Therefore, scholars of the school of thought in the past and contemporary scholars issued a legal status through a fatwa that this type of game is haram because it has the same legal illat as gambling.⁴⁷ Like the Playing Unknown's Battle Grounds (PUBG) game which has been banned in Aceh, Indonesia, based on fatwa of the Aceh Ulema Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh*) No. 3 of 2019, the causal factor is that the game contains elements of violence and brutality and has an impact on changing the behavior of its users to be negative; because it has the potential to cause aggressive behavior and addiction at a high level towards the user community.⁴⁸

According to an academic at a university in Aceh, Indonesia, online gaming can have detrimental effects on players, both psychologically, socially, and even economically. Addiction to this type of gaming has more negative

⁴⁷ Liza Wahyuni, "Perilaku Agresif Remaja Pemain Game Online," *Jurnal Assyifa Ilmu Keperawatan Islami* 9, No. 2 (2024), p. 59-66.

⁴⁸ Khairuddin Khairuddin, "Hukum Bermain Game Online Player Unknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG) Menurut Fatwa MPU Aceh Nomor 3 Tahun 2019," *Diktum: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum* 18, No. 1 (2020), p. 17-32.

consequences than positive ones. Therefore, from the perspective of Islamic law and Sharia values, this type of gaming is forbidden due to its elements of gambling, fraud, and various other negative consequences.⁴⁹

In line with this, a professor at an educational institution in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is of the opinion that the game is even more dangerous if played by teenagers or students. This type of game can damage a child's future. Teenagers and students should be preparing for education and a brighter future. However, when they are exposed to this type of game, their future can be ruined by online gaming. The impact is similar to that of drugs, which can be psychologically and psychologically addictive. Therefore, all parties must work together to combat this behavior so that the Muslim community can avoid this practice.⁵⁰

The negative impacts caused by online games are that someone will be negligent and lulled by time in vain, economically spending money uselessly, from academically the test scores decrease because they spend more time playing, psychologically someone will find it difficult to control their emotions, socially more comfortable interacting with certain friends, healthwise experiencing neck and back disorders.⁵¹ On the other hand, someone will experience psychological disorders and instability, similarly, then the emergence of aggressive behavior both physically and verbally, anger and hostility. This is often found in teenagers online game players on average show behaviors that change drastically as a result of online game addiction.⁵²

So thus, online gaming in addition to being contrary to Islamic law because it contains elements of gambling, fraud and speculation. In addition, online games can also have a negative impact on the perpetrators such as psychological disorders, health, economic, social and mental, so that the perpetrators can behave abnormally physically and psychologically. Moreover, this is also contrary to the values of Malay culture that uphold strong Islamic teachings in society. So, in the context of many factors, this is what causes online games to be inconsistent with Islamic law.

Conclusion

⁴⁹ Interview with Abidin Nurdin, Academics at Universities in Aceh, Indonesia, March, 2024.

⁵⁰ Interview with Ridhwan, Professor at the State Islamic Institute of Bone, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, April, 2024.

⁵¹ Aditya Fahrul and Nurfarhanah Nurfarhanah, "Dampak Kecanduan Game Online pada Siswa SMP," *Ahkam: Jurnal Hukum Islam dan Humaniora* 4, No. 1 (2025), p. 145-157.

⁵² Maria Agustina Lebho, Perilaku Kecanduan Game Online Ditinjau dari Kesenjangan dan Kebutuhan Berafiliasi pada Remaja, *Journal of Health and Behavioral Science* 2, No. 3 (2020), p. 202-212.

Online games that influence actions that are contrary to sharia have become widespread and disturbing for the Muslim community in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Indonesia. This phenomenon renders online games unfair for players since there are no equal chances among players in terms of money spending on digital items, especially related to loot boxes and no equality in terms of money spending in any competition. These elements contribute to non-sharia compliance. This study suggests that for an online game to be fair according to sharia, all players should be given equal chance and opportunity in having access to microtransactions and there should be an equal limit of money spending for all players. In addition, online games can also have a negative impact on the perpetrators such as psychological disorders, health, economic, social and mental, so that the perpetrators can behave abnormally physically and psychologically. Moreover, this is also contrary to the values of Malay culture that uphold strong Islamic teachings in society. So, in the context of many factors, this is what causes online games to be inconsistent with Islamic law. It is also anticipated that these findings will serve as a valuable resource for players seeking Sharia-compliant online gaming and esports. This study also recommends that the government strictly control and grant permits to institutions that create online games that are more educational and beneficial for people in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Indonesia.

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