

# Self-Censorship Regulatory Structure: Can We Control Political of Hates, Violence & Sex in Children Computer & Video Games?

Hasmah Zanuddin

Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences,  
University of Malaya 50603, Kuala Lumpur  
Email: hasmahz@um.edu.my

## Abstract

This article examines some of the extreme negative content available to teenagers and young children in the market. Extreme negative values such as political of hates, violence and sex in some of the children computer and video games were made possible due to several factors such as lacking in regulatory structure, weak policy implementation, rampant of illegal and uncensored materials. Computer and video games have been the subject of frequent controversy and censorship, due to the depiction of graphic violence, sexual themes, racism, advertising, eavesdropping, consumption of illegal drugs, consumption of alcohol or tobacco, propaganda or profanity in some games. Among others, critics of video games sometimes include parents' groups, politicians, organized religion groups, and other special interest groups. Young children who see violent acts in movies, shows, and games may not be able to tell the difference between "make-believe" and real life. They may not understand that real violence hurts and kills people. When the "good guys" or heroes use violence, children may learn that it is okay to use force to solve problems. Younger children may even become more afraid of the world around them. Can self-censorship and ratings system help?

**Keywords:** Self-Censorship, Regulatory Structure, Control, War, Political of Hates, Violence, Sex, Children, Computer, Video Games

## Introduction

Not so long ago, video games were considered to be a harmless distraction for young people. However, current situation tells that computer and video games have been the subject of frequent controversy and censorship, due to the depiction of graphic violence, sexual themes, racism, advertising, eavesdropping, consumption of illegal drugs, consumption of alcohol or tobacco, propaganda or profanity in some games. Among others, critics of video games sometimes include parents' groups, politicians, organized religion groups, and other special interest groups. In recent years, controversy has skyrocketed with the discovery of a downloadable modification that unlocked a sex driven mini-game in the highly popular *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* on Internet or PS2.

Young children who see violent acts in movies, shows, and games may not be able to tell the difference between "make-believe" and real life. They may not understand that *real*

violence hurts and kills people. When the "good guys" or heroes use violence, children may learn that it is okay to use force to solve problems. Younger children may even become more afraid of the world around them.

Can self-censorship and ratings system help? There are various types of censorship and ratings available but are they useful to protect our children? Voluntary rating systems has been adopted by the industry, such as the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system in the United States and the Pan European Games Information (PEGI) rating system in Europe, that are aimed at educating parents about the types of games their children are playing, or wish to play. The ESRB applies ratings to games based on their content, similar to the motion picture rating systems used in many countries. Their aim is to aid consumers in determining a game's content and suitability.

of Malaysia must be considered as the result of a dynamic relation of power, formed along several axes: first, the relation between syncretic popular culture and elitist high culture; second, between the different 'masyarakat' (community) 'cultures' of various peoples and ethnic groups, religions, and languages; and third, between the indigenous culture as a whole and the influences that stem from other cultural environments. Even apparently 'authentic' movements like present-day fundamentalism or nationalism do not invalidate this model. Despite the parameters of '*Bahasa Melayu*' (Malay language) and Islam having, since national independence, been pushed increasingly into the foreground to serve, as a starting-point for cultural purification and preservation, the idea of a '*Melayu Tulen*' (pure Malay), or '*Melayu Muslim*' (Malay-Muslim) or '*Malaysia-Malaysian*' (Malaysia-Malaysian) culture is a myth. Nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and racial traditionalism, which may be considered as movements of purification, are rather the product of '*budaya moden massa*' (modern mass culture) and are shaped by mass movements and ideologies.

In the frame of this newly appearing cultural structure, whose development has been decisively supported by the mass media, the cultural model of traditional society has become increasingly invalid, as has the differentiation between high-elitist and popular culture. Malaysia culture is penetrated now by a new dynamic, which has invalidated inherited dialectics and exchange processes. Daily life and living conditions in Malaysia have become increasingly dominated ('en masse') by mass production and mass consumption. Traditional ways of communication and former arts, like '*Penglipur Lara*' (oral narration), '*Wayang Kulit*' (shadow plays), and '*Bangsawan*' (traditional opera), die out and substituted by mass media. The products of culture industry are far removed both from elitist arts, produced, and consumed by only a few, and from syncretic and heterogeneous popular arts. Unlike '*seni popular*' (popular arts) the mass media are characterized by

one-way communication that transforms the human being into a passive recipient who only consumes culture.

The spread of '*media massa*' (mass media) in Malaysia, necessarily accompanied by the development of '*budaya pengguna*' (consumer culture), is based on a long process. The first Malay-language newspapers and magazines appeared as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. Record players, radios, and tape recorders were introduced from the beginning of nineteenth century. The radio in particular has played an important role in altering traditional ways of organizing leisure time. Not only was it responsible for the spread of a certain genre of music, but it also replaced in many places the traditional *Penglipur Lara* of the '*Panggung*' (stage).

A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities. Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil (Kellner 1995, p.1).

'*Budaya massa*' (mass culture) is characterized by a tendency to force needs into line, its most urgent goal is consumption. Therefore every expression is transformed into advertising. Means of mass communication dominate more and more every part of culture and what matters is that the mass cultural machine devalues any cultural expression which is not circulated through it. The leading industrial A game's rating is displayed on its box, the media, in advertisements and on game web sites. The PEGI age rating system is a new, pan-European age rating system for interactive games. Designed to ensure that minors are not exposed to games that are unsuitable for their particular age group, the system is supported by the major console

manufacturers, including PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo, as well as by publishers and developers of interactive games throughout Europe. The age rating system has been developed by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) and has the enthusiastic support of the European Commission, who considers the new system to be a model of European harmonization in the field of protection of children.

Though Malaysia has a self-censorship Content Code, the nature of the content code can be said as too general and we assumed that it can be meant to govern a lot of thing. It is high time to design a code which is explicitly meant for games and entertainment to protect our children and minor. With lots of computers, games console sole and available at home, we will certainly need specific code to assist parent, consumers and media practitioners.

### **Computer and Video Games: Harmless for Children?**

Computer and video games have been the subject of frequent controversy and censorship, due to the depiction of graphic violence, sexual themes, racism, advertising, eavesdropping, consumption of illegal drugs, consumption of alcohol or tobacco, propaganda or profanity in some games. Among others, critics of video games sometimes include parents' groups, politicians, organized religion groups, and other special interest groups.

Historically, this type of controversy and criticism is not unique to video games. The same situation has been applied to comic books, music (particularly jazz, rock and roll, metal music, and hip hop music), and films. Moreover, it appears to be a question of age. Since these art forms have been around longer, the backlash against them occurred farther in the past, beyond the remembrance of today's youth. In previous cases, the attempts at censorship in the United States were struck down as a violation of First

Amendment rights, and they have gone on to become fully integrated facets of society.

In mid-1960s, Professor George Gerbner, developed a cultivation theory to assess video and video game violence impacts (sometimes referred to as the *Cultivation Hypothesis* or *Cultivation Analysis*). Gerbner began the 'Cultural Indicators' research project in the mid-1960s, to study whether and how watching television may influence viewers' ideas of what the everyday world is like.

Cultivation research is in the 'effects' tradition and cultivation theorists argue that television, and by extension, computer and video games, has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. Lt. Col. David Grossman, a former West Point psychology professor, has written several books that pertain to the subject of violence in the media, including *On Killing* and *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*. During heights of video game controversy he has been interviewed on the content of his books, and has repeatedly used the term "murder simulator" to describe first-person shooter games. He argues that video game publishers unethically train children in the use of weapons and, more importantly, harden them emotionally to the act of murder by simulating the killing of hundreds or thousands of opponents in a single typical video game.

Video game violence critics generally agree that violent video games are at least as bad an influence on children as are television shows with the same level of violence and cruelty, and most seem to believe that video games are more threatening to a child's well-being, because the video game player uses the controller to make an on screen character act out the violence personally. It was widely reported that the killers in the Columbine High School massacre were, like many teenagers, fans of first-person shooter games. They had recorded a videotape before the massacre in which they said they looked forward to using their shotguns just as in the game *Doom*.

Some studies have shown that children who watch violent television shows and play violent video games have a tendency to act more aggressively on the playground, and some people are concerned that this aggression may presage violent behavior when children grow to adulthood.

Controversy of speeding and evading the authority in racing games has surfaced when a title from the *Need for Speed* series was found in one of the suspects' cars in Toronto in January 26, 2006, when two street racers were involved in an accident resulting in a taxi-driver's death. However, the police denied any connection between the game and the incident. Although most people tend to play violent video games, it is unclear whether violent tendencies developed by frequent video game players actually resulted from the game-playing or via other means.

### **Cultivating Violence, Assault and Sex Appeal in Video Games**

In 1976, *Death Race* became one of the first controversial video games; based on the film *Death Race 2000*, it allowed players to drive around in a car, in order to run down "gremlins." However, many players and critics inferred that the game actually simulated vehicular homicide—particularly considering that the game's original title was *Pedestrian*. Its implied violence was immediately decried, and later burned.

Criticism waned in the early 1980s when less representational, more kid-friendly games, such as *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong*, became popular in arcades. However, with the advent of the Atari 2600, more production companies resulted in more controversial material. In particular, a video game company known as "Mystique" began producing sexually explicit games which contained images of exposed genitalia and sexual acts. From a modern point of view, it may seem laughable that the blocky graphics could be construed as being obscene; however, at the time, these games did receive

some media attention for their ribaldry (see "Criticism of sex in video games" below).

As more sophisticated video game consoles were released, some measures were taken to ensure the moral quality of games. Nintendo had a licensing system that required games to pass their various tests of blood, nudity, and religious themes to be licensed. All licensed titles for the Nintendo Entertainment System featured Nintendo's "Seal of Quality" and were produced on cartridges compatible with the 10NES lock-out system, nearly disabling the production of unlicensed titles, though some companies managed to break the code and produce their own unlicensed games. Some of these unlicensed titles were adult or violent titles, including various strip poker or extremely violent titles. This practice was dropped when the rating system was later implemented. As the video gaming industry grew even further with even more advanced graphics, it faced increasing pressure from concerned special interest groups. In 1992 *Mortal Kombat*, an arcade and console fighting game, was controversial for its copious amount of simulated violence and blood; US Senator Joe Lieberman spoke out against the game during a Senate investigation into video game violence. Another game under public scrutiny was *Night Trap*, a game using filmed footage of actors such as Dana Plato, criticized for its sexual themes and often implied violence. *Night Trap* is often considered the catalyst for the establishment of the Entertainment Software Rating Board, which employs an age-based ratings system, not unlike the MPAA system for movies.

The ESRB silenced many critics, or at least reduced the exposure of the controversy in the media for about four years, until games such as *Postal*, *Carmageddon* and *Grand Theft Auto* were suddenly released in 1997, attracting the attention of the general media to the issue again. The commercial success of these titles (especially of *Carmageddon* and *GTA*), combined with the "free advertisement" provided by tabloids and detractors opened the market to violent games in the following years.



Video games received further scrutiny in 1999, following the Columbine High School Massacre, as some commentators accused violent first-person shooter games such as *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D*, of which the shooters were known players, as playing a causative role in that massacre and others, sparking heated debate between proponents and opponents. One group, on behalf of a teacher killed in the massacre, pressed charges against a number of video game companies, including the creators of *Doom*, whom they said were responsible for the shootings, claiming, “absent the combination of extremely violent video games and these boys incredibly deep involvement...these murders and this massacre would not have occurred.” The case was dismissed by a Colorado judge, who defended video games First Amendment rights, writing “setting aside any personal distaste, as I must, it is manifest that there is social utility in expressive and imaginative forms of entertainment, even if they contain violence.”

In October 2001, *Grand Theft Auto III*, a console and PC game, was released, allowing the player to control a criminal whose Mafia-related jobs often required him to steal cars and murder rivals. The game revived ongoing video game controversy in the public eye for its violent and anarchic nature. Furthermore, in August 2003 the Entertainment Software Association reacted against these accusations and began to battle against governmental regulation of video games.

In early 2006, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund petitioned to ban the Eidos game “25 to Life” for glorifying the murder of police officers. Although the NLEOMF’s exact demands are vague, and the game has not been a commercial success, this may represent the first attempt by a police organization to legislate video games.

While the criticisms of video games resembles, in particular, criticisms of television programming or movies, it also differs in important respects. Video games present the player with an increasingly wide range of possible

activities. Unlike a scene in a movie, a scene in a video game may not necessarily be experienced by every player. This element of choice is itself controversial. Proponents see it as making the game experience more real and engaging, while critics see it as allowing players to ‘act out’ antisocial fantasies.



Critics say that games such as *Grand Theft Auto III* advocate real-life crimes, like carjacking.

Video and computer games are periodically criticized in the media by some parents’ groups, psychologists, religious organizations, and politicians for the level of violence, cruelty, and crime that some games allow players to act out, and often glorify. Examples are common, including *Mortal Kombat* and its sequels, a series of fighting games by Midway. Since 1992 the series has rewarded players for beating up an opponent with martial arts moves, and then for executing a graphic “Fatality” move.

A common focus of criticism is that some video games allow players to act out crimes, and reward them for doing so. A frequently-cited example is the extremely popular *Grand Theft Auto III* by Rockstar Games, in which a principal game activity is carjacking. The player may also run over pedestrians, or shoot at and kill rival gang members (or pedestrians) as he completes missions for crime bosses. *Grand Theft Auto III* also became a center of controversy concerning attitudes toward women, because the player is able to pick up a prostitute, have

“sex” with her (however, the “sex” merely involves the character’s car rocking and kissing noises being made without any actual nudity or real sexual content), then kill her to take back the money spent. These activities are not objectives of the game, but they may be carried out by a player who wishes to do so.

The game’s immediate sequel, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* came under similar criticism, also for implying allegedly racist hate crimes: The game, taking place in Florida in 1986, involves a gang war between Haitians and Cuban refugees; the names of the gangs, eponymously, are “the Haitians” and “the Cubans”. The game contains phrases such as “kill the Haitian dickheads,” and drew criticism from Haitian and Cuban anti-defamation groups. After the threat of being sued by the Haitian-American Coalition, Rockstar removed the word “Haitians” from this phrase in the game’s subtitles.

A later game in the same series, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, which focuses on urban street gangs instead of organized crime families, goes a step further, with the bloody rivalry between the Grove Street Families (of which the player character is a member) and the Ballas, reflecting the ongoing violence between the Crips and the Bloods. *San Andreas* also includes levels that actively require the gamer to murder police characters before the game will advance. An example is the *Reuniting the Families* mission, in which the player must kill several members of the SWAT team when they respond to the scene of a gang meeting.

## Post September 11 – Politics of Hates in Games

In a thought-provoking *Iup piece* which originally appeared in the September issue of Computer Gaming World magazine, Ed Halter surveys games with radical Islamic political themes. Halter, author of *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* reports on:

- the recent war of game design themes between U.S. firm Kuma Reality and Iran’s Union of Islamic Student Societies
- *The Stone Throwers* (screen shot at left), created by Syrian Mohammad Hamza, in which Palestinian rioters battle with Israeli riot police
- *The Resistance*, a game published by Innovative Minds, a U.K.-based Islamic software firm, in which players assume the role of Hezbollah fighters in South Lebanon.
- another Hezbollah-inspired game, “Special Force,” a 3-D military shooter created by the “Hezbollah Central Internet Bureau” and perhaps modeled after *America’s Army*
- Syrian Afkar Media, publisher of Under Ash and Under Siege, which depict Palestinian youths fighting the Israeli occupation. Of the games, designer Radwan Kasmiya said, “The Arab street is very charged. They believe they can’t do anything to help their brothers in Palestine. Game players feel that they can feel the experience of young Palestinian people living in Jerusalem.”

Halter’s see that the Islamic-themed games are relating to the turbulent political situation in the Middle East is worth a full read (Halter, Fox News).

Lately several inflammatory game being distributed on Islamist forums which allows the player to shoot and kill armed soldiers that look like President Bush. The game is called “Quest for Bush” or “The Night of Bush Capturing.” *Night of Bush Capturing* is a first-person shooter based on the *Quest for Saddam* engine. The game features six levels with names such as “Jihad Beginning”, “America’s Hell” and “Bush Hunted Like a Rat”.

The game was released on Friday 15 September 2006, by the Global Islamic Media Front, described by the Site Institute as “a jihadist mouthpiece” (The Search for International Terrorists Entities (SITE) at <http://siteinstitute.org>). SITE which stand for the Search for International Terrorists Entities insinuated further animosity between the West and Islam by labeling games as tool for jihad. An ad for *Night of Bush Capturing* says that the game is being distributed for “Arab-Muslim children”. (*Hot Air* has links to a download of the game as well as a video trailer at <http://>



[archives/2006/09/15/video-of-bush-capturing/](http://archives/2006/09/15/video-of-bush-capturing/)). This trend to use radical Islamic themes through technology is out of the way to cultivate hatreds among children regardless of where they are in this world. (CNN, 2006) was mod of the 2003 game *Quest for Saddam*. Neither of the games served any credit as both garnered hatreds among young children.

At any rate, the fact that screenshots and trailers appear to constitute something like the games between *Kuma War Games' Assault on Iran* and The Students Islamic Association response. Kuma Reality Games (2006) announced the latest installment of its *KumaWar* series, “Assault on Iran, Pt. 3: Payback in Iraq”, the first *KumaWar* episode.

A captivating 3D video game simulating a realistic conflict between U.S. and Iranian forces over the development of nuclear arms, the newest chapter is a direct response to “Commander Bahman”, a game being

developed by the Union of Islamic Student Societies. “Assault on Iran, Pt. 3: Payback in Iraq” begins where the Iranian game reportedly leaves off, with Iranian forces attacking US troops in Iraq to recover a captured nuclear scientist. By re-imagining the Iranian story from multiple points of view, Kuma hopes to bring to the foreground key issues at stake in the current nuclear standoff and create a game-powered forum for frank dialog on the real-world conflict. (Kuma’s latest episode will enter an open Beta period and be available for free public download at *Kuma War* beginning July 4, 2006.)

Last September, Kuma garnered international attention with its release of “Assault on Iran,” simulating a realistic U.S. attack on a key nuclear Iranian installation. In this original episode, US Special Forces destroy the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in Iran with the assistance of a defecting Iranian scientist.

The *Quest for Bush/The Night of Bush Capturing* is definitely an adaptation of *Quest for Saddam*. The level design, interface, and menus are identical, with only a few textures exchanged to reverse the targets of the original from Saddam Hussein caricatures to George W. Bush.

Global Islamic Media Front.

*Quest for Bush - The Night of Bush Capturing*. [PC (Win)] : Global Islamic Media Front, 2006.

Petrilla, Jesse. *Quest for Saddam*. [PC (Win)]  
Auburn, CA: Petrilla Entertainment, 2003.

**Figure 1.** Screenshot from *Quest for Al-Qa'eda*. All bad guys appear to be Bin Ladin, or at least caricatures of him.

Both games really don't provide anything valuable either in terms of ideology or entertainment. For example, *Quest for Bush* (a.k.a. *Night of Bush Capturing*) was said by the American as game developed by Al Qaeda to attract new recruits. The game it's obviously based on, *Quest for Saddam*. First, there is very little "development" evident in the game. It's a straightforward re-skinning of *Quest for Saddam* that simply exchanges references to Saddam with references to George W. Bush. Most important and interesting about both games, however, is the way their programmatic relationship reveals an underlying logical similarity between the anti-Saddam and anti-Bush messages. It's also interesting to consider the idea of "recruitment" as it applies to both games by looking at how each game relates to the ideological context it claims to represent.

*Quest for Saddam* created by Jesse Petrilla. Petrilla created *Quest for Al-Qa'eda: The Hunt for Bin Laden* as "an outlet to express emotions of the September 11 attacks ... It's a way to work out the anger left over from America's most disastrous terrorist attack." *Quest for Al-Qa'eda* is developed on the Build engine (*Duke Nukem*) and takes place mostly in the desert. The simplistic DOS game encourages the player to shoot turban-wearing opponents who may (or may not be) caricatures of Osama bin Laden:

There are attempts at humor spread throughout the game, but they mostly seem to be based on Middle Eastern and Arab stereotypes. Petrilla created *Quest for Saddam* in 2003 as a kind of sequel to *Quest for Al-Qa'eda*, perpetuating the conflation of the Iraq War with the War on Terror and continuing the pattern of attempting to derive humor from stereotypes of Arabs. Since 2003, Petrilla seems to have continued his Islam-related activism by founding the United American Committee (UAC), a political action group focused on "promoting awareness of Islamist extremist threats in America." On September 10th, they hung Osama bin Laden in effigy in front of a mosque in Culver City, CA. I mention this because I think it helps explain the kind of message *Quest for Saddam* is trying to communicate, and while I can agree with them in condemning Islamic extremism, I don't think their approach is helping anything. Some might even call it hate-mongering.

In any case, the ease with which the Global Islamic Media Front transformed *Quest for Saddam* into *Quest for Bush*, a game that seems to portray jihad, should call attention to the problems with the content of the original. And these are problems which aren't intrinsic to violent video games. Creating a game that repeatedly portrays the killing of a specific individual or ideology and then distributing that game in a context that sincerely advocates the killing of that individual or ideology precludes any claims about that game's facetiousness. So whereas a hypothetical DOOM mod that replaced demon



sprites with depictions of Arabs would insert xenophobic content where there previously was none, *Quest for Bush* simply switches the variables on an already political (and probably xenophobic) game's content.

The humor in *Quest for Saddam* continues the themes for *Quest for Al-Qa'eda*. The game is set in Humminumadad, and the Iraqi soldiers shout "Huminumanuma" as they charge at the player. The joke, it seems, is that people from Iraq look different and talk funny. The Sean Connery voiceover comments, upon seeing a map on the wall, "Is that sandpaper or a map of Iraq?"

So on to the games themselves. Here's a pair of screenshots that demonstrates the similarities:

If you look through the library of data files the game uses, you can see that whoever modified this game didn't have to do any programming at all. The skins, textures, and images are simply replaced with the new content, leaving the file names intact. This means that names for files which were meant to be insulting in *Quest for Saddam* are still intact in *Quest for Bush*, and the skin for Saddam in *Quest for Saddam* is still called Saddam.png when it's a representation of George Bush:



**Figure 3** From *Quest for Bush*, inside the American Camp.

om *Quest for Saddam*, inside the

**Figure 4** From *Quest for Saddam*, Saddam skin, saddam.png.

**Figure 5** From *Quest for Bush*, Bush skin, saddam.png.

And the file for “Camel Cola”, which has removed the offensive reference by pasting a Pepsi logo over it, is still called camel-cola.png:

**Figure 6** From *Quest for Saddam*, camel-cola.png.

**Figure 7** From *Quest for Bush*, camel-cola.png.

What’s more, the skin for the player-character in *Quest for Saddam* replaces the Iraqi soldier (Saddam) skin. So the enemy players encounter in *Quest for Bush* is exactly like the player in *Quest for Saddam*. And even though it wasn’t obvious to me until I looked at the skin

files, when one plays *Quest for Saddam*, one really is playing as a commando George Bush. The most obvious changes include the signs and billboards scattered throughout the game (images of Saddam and Osama are replaced with images of Bush, other US Officials, Tony Blair, Prime Minister al-Maliki and others); the statue of Saddam is now simply an empty pedestal; and large structure which is a mosque (possibly based on the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem) in the first level of *Quest for Saddam* is now identified as “American Base.”

Some references, however, are not removed. Both games include a barracks which features a tampon dispenser on the wall. I’m not sure I get the joke, but I suppose it’s suggesting that Iraqi soldiers are really women, a joke reinforced by the appearance later of poster of Saddam wearing lingerie.

Both games also feature crates of gas masks labeled “Fabrique in France.” I think this is a dig at France for opposing the Iraq War (remember “Freedom Fries”?), but it’s quite possible that the Global Islamic Media Front’s modifiers simply didn’t get this joke or think it was important enough to switch it around. Beyond this, the level design is identical, except that the Sean Connery / Cheech Marin voiceover is replaced with jihadist music (which is, dare I say, kind of catchy). So with all this in mind, do either of these games accomplish their goals? *Quest for Saddam* is allegedly humorous, and *Quest for Bush* is supposedly a recruitment game, so how are each of these goals served (or not) by the identical level design and game play? My sense is that neither game is really that successful. They aren’t winning any awards for graphics, and their only appeal is really through reference to information and ideas external to the game.

The games presume that you already have an opinion about Iraq or America and that you’ll enjoy venting your frustrations about either by shooting iconic representations of those leaders. In the case of *Quest for Saddam*, I think it conflates supposed emotions about the War on Terror by positing them as a way we should

feel about the War on Iraq. In the sense that *Quest for Bush* is a response to or parody of *Quest for Saddam*, it paints a picture of Iraq as a justification and site for jihad, reflecting the same conclusion recently reported by the National Intelligence Council. In an interesting twist on the story, Jesse Petrilla is now releasing *Quest for Saddam* for free in apparent retaliation for a price US\$14.95 a game. He also claims that *Quest for Bush* is a violation of his intellectual property rights, which it probably is, and he's talking about suing Al Qaeda over the violation. Ian Bogost writes about whether games that share underlying code exhibit anxiety of influence for their predecessors. Here, I think the history of *Quest for Bush* is essential to understanding its message — so much so that it's virtually incoherent without it. In both cases, the messages themselves are problematic, but it's important that the irony and antagonism of their relationship can be exposed by looking at the underlying code.

### Content Policy and Ratings System in US and Europe

*Video game censorship* is defined as use of state or group power to control the playing, distribution, purchase, or sale of video games or computer games. Video game controversy comes in many forms, and censorship is a controversial subject, as well as a popular topic of debate. Proponents and opponents of censorship are often very passionate about their individual views.

However, can censorship and ratings system help? There are various types of censorship and ratings available but are they useful to protect our children? Voluntary rating systems has been adopted by the industry, such as the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). (Appendix A) rating system in the United States and the Pan European Games Information (PEGI) rating system in Europe, that are aimed at educating parents about the types of games their children are playing, or wish to play. The **Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)** is a self-regulatory organization

that applies and enforces ratings, advertising guidelines, and online privacy principles for computer and video games and other entertainment software in the United States and Canada (officially adopted by individual provinces 2004-2005). It was established in 1994 by the Interactive Digital Software Association (now the Entertainment Software Association). By early 2003, it had rated over 8,000 titles submitted by 350 publishers. Many believe that the ESRB may promote media restriction, while others think that it is necessary for software to have content ratings. The decision to found the ESRB was influenced by the graphic "fatality" killing moves of *Mortal Kombat* and other controversial video games depicting violent or sexual situations at the time, and by pressure from the United States government.

Started in the early Spring of 2003, The **Pan European Games Information (PEGI)** replaces existing national age rating systems with a single system that is identical throughout most of Europe. The game rating appears on the front and back cover of interactive games, and retailers provide information on the new system. The age rating system comprises two separate but complementary elements. The first is an age rating, similar to some existing rating systems. The PEGI age bands are 3+, 7+, 12+, 16+, 18+. The second element of the new system is a number of game descriptors. These are icons, displayed on the back of the game box that describe the type of content to be found in the game. Depending on the type of game, there may be up to six such descriptors. The intensity of the content is appropriate to the age rating of the game. The combination of age rating and game descriptors allows parents and those purchasing games for children to ensure that the game they purchase is appropriate to the age of the intended player.

The ESRB applies ratings to games based on their content, similar to the motion picture rating systems used in many countries. Their aim is to aid consumers in determining a game's content and suitability. A game's rating is displayed on its box, the media, in advertisements and on game

web sites. The PEGI age rating system is a new, pan-European age rating system for interactive games. Designed to ensure that minors are not exposed to games that are unsuitable for their particular age group, the system is supported by the major console manufacturers, including PlayStation, Xbox and Nintendo, as well as by publishers and developers of interactive games throughout Europe. The age rating system has been developed by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) and has the enthusiastic support of the European Commission, who considers the new system to be a model of European harmonisation in the field of protection of children.

Games such as the Grand Theft Auto series are rated as “Mature” or “Adults Only” in the US, or given a “Certificate 18” rating in the UK (although it should be noted that the UK “Certificate 18” is issued by the British Board of Film Classification, not PEGI, and is actually legally binding on retailers, while the US AO

(MCMC), Communication & Multimedia Content Forum (CMCF) formulate and implement developed codes of practice for the communications and multimedia industry. The CMCF will uphold these codes, to ensure they serve as a guide for the industry to operate and flourish.

The Content Code (Malaysia Content Code (2004) Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission: Malaysian Content and Multimedia Forum) (Appendix A) sets out guidelines on approved and prohibited content in Malaysia, especially with respect to broadcasting, online, audio-text hosting services, and closed content guidelines. As far as printed materials are concerned, the present guidelines under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 will still be applicable. Several general principles have been spelt out in the Code. These principles are reflective of the present national and policy objectives on our national information infrastructure.

However, the Malaysian Content Code does not have code or ratings system specifically terms for games and entertainment. However in general, Section 2, Guidelines on Content spelt out the needs to govern the public interest from indecent materials, nudity, sex and nudity, explicit sex and pornography, child pornography, violence, indecent language used and several others. With such policy statement, it is clear that whatever policy objectives that we have with respect to traditional forms of mass communication, they are equally applicable to the computer, Internet and video games. To a certain extent, this is reflective of the EU approach that whatever is illegal offline is illegal online – games or not. These principles are:

- There shall be no indecent, obscene, false, menacing or offensive content
- The need to maintain a balance between the desire of viewers, listeners and users to have a wide range of content options and access to information on the one hand, and the necessity to

First-person shooters such as *Quake III Arena* portray seriously violent and brutal behavior.

### **Content Policy and Ratings System in Malaysia**

Designated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission



preserve law, order and morality on the other.

- The need to respect cultural, ethnic and religion, gender, socio-economic status diversity in Malaysia.
- Particular attentions is to be given to content that is created for children and in which children are portrayed.

Under the Code, the term content is defined as “any sound, text, still picture, moving picture or other audio-visual representation, tactile representation or any combination of the preceding which is capable of being created, manipulated, stored, retrieved or communicated electronically (Ida Madieha Azmi, 2003).

## Conclusion

*Quest for Saddam or Quest for Bush and several others are certainly a cultivation of hates and animosity. Either way the games has not been fun, unethical against religious teaching of Islam or Christianity. The games instilled killing, hatred and excessive violence. The original maker of the games – Quest for Bush might want to pursue legal action for digital piracy, but I would suggest for them to sit down and ponder- are they doing justice to the kids? Enforcement of legislation to protect children from exposure to material deemed inappropriate for minors while playing games either video games or Internet games should be stressed in our country. Meer self-censorship is not enough. For example, games discussed above will only cultivate negative attitude among children. Games and entertainment should contain moral fibre and educational.*

The Malaysian authority step up measures to supervise media content recently. Other than Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia (KTAK) and MCMC set up content division specifically to supervise and to protect consumers from irresponsible content. Malaysian Censorship Board (LPF) governed by the Ministry of Home Affairs strictly focused on film content and do

not govern anything on digital games. Though Malaysia has a self-censorship content code, however, the nature of the content code can be said as too general and we assumed that it can be meant to govern a lot of thing. It is high time to design a code which is explicitly meant for games and entertainment to protect our children and minor. With lots of computers, games console sole and available at home, the code will certainly help to assist parent, consumers and media practitioners.

The United States in 2000, adjusted the legislation to protect children from exposure to material deemed inappropriate for minors while accessing the Internet from a school or library receiving federal Universal Service assistance. It requires such schools and libraries to deploy blocking or filtering technology on computers used by minors, and to block general access to obscene material, and child pornography on all computers and requires that schools and libraries block child pornography on all computers. There are approximately 86,000 public schools in the United States. In the first program year of the E-rate, 68,220 public schools participated in the program. The FCC implemented the “Section 254 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 added a new subsidy to the traditional Universal Service program, commonly referred to as the Schools and Libraries Discount, or E-rate. As implemented by the FCC, the E-rate is a \$2.25 billion annual subsidy aimed at connecting schools and libraries to the Internet. This subsidy is funded through higher phone bills to customers (McCain, John, 2000). Thus, there is a growing concern to protect the huge number of children that will be using Internet and on-line games that contain inappropriate and indecent materials.

In 2005, the European Commission launched its Safer Internet Plus Programme, a 4-year programme aimed at making the internet and on-line games safer for European children. The programme builds upon the work the European Union has been undertaking to promote a safer use of the internet and combat illegal and harmful internet content since 1996. It covers new online technologies including mobile and broadband content, online games, and all forms

of real-time communications such as chat rooms and instant messages primarily with the aim of improving the protection of children and minors (InSafe, 2005).

There are moral questions that video game developers should ask themselves when creating a game that contains or facilitates adult content and themes? – Other than political hatred in children games, we must also protect our children from unethical portrayal of obscene sex in the form of narrative themes; nude or semi-nude images and forms (male, female, animal, robot); cyber sex between individuals; sexual violence etc. It is against the Islamic teaching to have the above materials in the society but that does not repel people from producing and distributing. From an ethical standpoint what licensing does is shift and formalize responsibility onto others. A developer creates a game with certain content in it, it is then up to some regulatory framework and the authorities that enforce that framework, or the retailers that apply it or the adults that are supposed to take note of it, to take ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the content is only consumed by those that it is intended for. Does self-censorship alone enough to protect our children and the society?

## Appendix A

### **Malaysia Content Code – Ratings System**

Ratings mechanism used are meant for broadcasting:

#### ***U – Public Viewing***

***PG-14 – Children age 14 and below, view with Parent Guide.***

***PG-18 – Parent discretion needed to advise children below 18.***

***18 – 18 and above***

***U and PG-14 – no restriction on broadcast hours/time***

***PG-18 – broadcast after 7.30pm***

***18 – Broadcast after 10.00pm.***

#### **ESRB Ratings (United States)**

The symbols the **ESRB** uses are stylized depictions of alphabetical letters meant to convey at a glance a game's suitability.

**EC — Early Childhood:** Contains content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate. Games that fall under this rating are specifically intended for young children and are usually educational in nature. However, some educational games with more complex problems (Such as the *Dr. Brain* series) may be rated E. EC is generally said to be the same as the MPAA's "G" rating or a "TV-Y" rating in television.



**E — Everyone:** Contains content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language. It is often likened to the MPAA's "G" or "PG" rating or a "TV-Y7" or "TV-G" rating in television. Examples of games with this rating are *Sonic Advance*, *Super Mario Advance 4*, *Luigi's Mansion*, and *Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire* and most sports and puzzle games.



**E10+ — Everyone 10+:** (Also known as Preteen) Contains content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, minimal and/or infrequent blood and/or minimal suggestive themes. Added to the ESRB ratings icons on March 2, 2005. *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* was the first game to receive this rating. *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, *Digimon Rumble Arena 2*, *Sega Superstars*, *Ratchet & Clank series*, *Gradius V* and *Transformers Armada* could possibly have had this rating if they were released after that date. This rating is often likened to the MPAA's "PG" rating or a "TV-PG" rating in television. Examples of games with this rating are *Shadow the Hedgehog*, *Project Gotham Racing 3*, *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat*, *Kingdom Hearts 2* and *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*.



**T — Teen:** Contains content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language. It is often likened to the MPAA's "PG-13" rating or a "TV-14" rating in television. Examples of games with this rating are *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *Tekken 5*, *Battlefield 1942*, *The Sims 2*, *Metroid Prime*, and *Super Smash Bros. Melee*.



**RP — Rating Pending:** Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating. This symbol appears only in advertising and/or demos prior to a game's release. It is often likened to the unofficial "Not Yet Rated" designation for movies.

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